FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS, VOICE, AND EMPOWERMENT: WOMEN'S STUDIES IN HAWAI'I

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

POLITICAL SCIENCE

MAY 2003

By
Monique M. Mironesco

Dissertation Committee:
Kathy Ferguson, Chairperson
Jon Goldberg-Hiller
Neal Milner
Deane Neubauer
Joanne Cooper
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most importantly, I would like to thank the participants in this study, without whose valuable time and cooperation none of this project would have been possible. I would also like to thank those Women's Studies teachers who allowed me to come into their classrooms and recruit participants for the interviews. I would also like to thank the Women's Studies program for giving me a home and the Political Science department for giving me financial support, both through my time as a teaching assistant and lecturer, as well as through two Norman Meller Awards. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank Mike, my wonderful partner, for taking Megan and Wyatt on a variety of activities in order to give me a slew of Sundays in order to think about and write this project. Without his love and support, none of this would have been possible.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the impact of Women's Studies classes and programs on women adult learners in the University of Hawai'i system on O'ahu with regards to feminist consciousness, voice, empowerment, and identity. I pay special attention to feminist methodological questions as well as my own location as a white researcher from the university researching and interpreting the narratives of (mostly) women of color in Hawai'i. Feminism, feminist consciousness and voice are examined through a variety of cultural practices and ethnic lenses. The concept of feminist consciousness is most usefully used as a process, including, but also moving beyond a basic awareness of gender discrimination and stereotypes. Voice and feminist languages are identified in a variety of ways beyond participation in class, allowing for classroom community and feminist pedagogy to play significant roles in voice creation and use. Power and empowerment as facilitated by Women's Studies classes are at the forefront of major life changes for the participants in this study. They provide a springboard for self-definition and self-determination, enabling significant intellectual outcomes. I also examine identity and the (re)production of self, in conjunction with feminist consciousness and empowerment, as processes. There are racial and ethnic differences in the understanding of identity, especially in Hawai'i, where colonialism continues to play a role in history and society. The reexamination of their roles as wives/girlfriends, daughters, and mothers is particularly reflective of the sense of agency the participants discussed after having taken a Women's Studies class. Indeed, these, along with many others comprise the specific effects of Women's Studies classes on women adult learners. The conclusion suggests possible methods for further study of the topic. It also offers suggestions as to
how Women’s Studies programs in Hawai‘i could further expand their reach and influence on their students.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................ iii
Abstract............................................................................................................................. iv

**Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................. 1
  - Definition of Key Concepts.................................................................................. 10
  - Feminism.............................................................................................................. 16
  - Identity and/or Consciousness............................................................................ 20
  - Voice....................................................................................................................... 29
  - Power and Empowerment.................................................................................... 37
  - Conclusion............................................................................................................ 39

**Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS** .............................................. 41
  - Methodology......................................................................................................... 41
  - Narratives............................................................................................................. 55
  - Methods................................................................................................................ 58
  - Specifics: Practical Theory.................................................................................. 60
  - Conclusion............................................................................................................ 68

**Chapter 3: FEMINISM, FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AND VOICE** ........ 70
  - Childhood Feminist Views................................................................................. 70
  - Culturally Variant Feminist Views..................................................................... 78
  - Feminists Change................................................................................................. 82
  - Other Feminists................................................................................................. 87
  - Details, Details, Details..................................................................................... 93
  - Women's Studies and (the Other) Academic Subjects.................................... 100
  - Feminist Consciousness..................................................................................... 107
  - Basic Awareness................................................................................................. 113
  - Consciousness of Stereotypes.......................................................................... 117
  - Art and Feminist Consciousness...................................................................... 120
  - Feminist Consciousness and Politics (and lack thereof)................................ 124
  - Voice..................................................................................................................... 128
  - Participation........................................................................................................ 131
  - Feminist Language(s)......................................................................................... 138
  - Voice Negation.................................................................................................... 145
  - Gardenia and Luana: Two Perspectives on Voice and Pedagogy.................. 149
  - Voice and Community....................................................................................... 152
  - Conclusion............................................................................................................ 155

**Chapter 4: POWER AND EMPOWERMENT** .................................................. 160
  - The Teacher's View............................................................................................ 163
  - Foundations, Major Life Changes, and Self Discoveries................................ 165
  - Collaborative Empowerment.............................................................................. 171
  - Self-Determination and Confidence.................................................................. 178
  - Choices and Decision-Making......................................................................... 183
  - An Empowerment Skeptic: A Case of Mistaken Identity............................... 185
  - Education............................................................................................................ 189
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Nothing comes without its world, so trying to know those worlds is crucial."
Donna Haraway, *Modest Witness@Millenium* 1997, 37

Women's Studies classes in Hawai'i and elsewhere offer an interdisciplinary look at the study of women past, present, and future. Women can finally take the opportunity to learn about a part of their history; a history that has traditionally been denied to them through gender-biased education at the elementary and secondary school levels. Often, the more mature women students, those who have spent time working and/or raising children, are particularly attracted to classes that seem to promise an academic context for critical investigation of the circumstances and possibilities of their lives. Interviewing a sample of these women to see if that promise has been met is a particularly interesting way to accomplish the goal of finding out if Women's Studies classes deliver on their potential.

Within the University of Hawai'i system there are several Women's Studies courses offered at various campuses, as well as a Women's Studies program at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa where undergraduates, as well as graduates, may obtain a major and/or a certificate in the discipline. Yet, while these courses have proliferated within the past twenty-five years, we know little about their sociopolitical impact. The spirit of these programs reflects feminist expectations about what our classes offer to our students. However, we have little idea whether these goals are being accomplished. At its most basic level, this project underscores the necessity for understanding whether Women's Studies courses and/or programs improve adult women learners' lives. In a
broader context, this project ambitiously seeks to redress the political silence most adult women learners experience, whether in class, at school, at work, within the context of their families, or even as citizens making decisions which will affect them and their fellow citizens. Thus, this project serves as a platform for those voices to be heard and acknowledged. Its political implications are far-reaching. These range from letting Women's Studies teachers know about some of their students' concerns and experiences inside and outside of class, to university administration officials discovering some of the very real gains women adult learners make within the context of their lives, academic and otherwise, in order to continue to support Women's Studies programs. This study also identifies the marked gains that women make outside of the classroom, considering their families, their jobs, and their communities with regards to added voice and empowerment, among other factors, for an oft-ignored segment of the population.

The Women's Studies program at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa had its inception thirty years ago. When I first started thinking about this project, I spoke to Nancy Lewis, now a Director at the East-West Center at the University of Hawai'i. I learned of the struggle to establish a Women's Studies program that would offer courses in Women's Studies to interested students. While this struggle is by no means unique in the sense that many other women all over the country were attempting to create, engage with, and learn about feminist perspectives during the early 1970's, it was unique in the Hawai'i context because of the added issues of race, ethnicity, and colonialism that cannot be separated from feminism as they might have been on the mainland of the United States. Indeed, this separation has sparked a wide range of debates within feminism. For many years, it has been charged as being too liberal, too middle-class, too
heterosexual, too white, among others.

Women's Studies programs were initially created as a site of resistance into the white, heterosexual male norm of knowledge creation and dissemination. Dr. Lewis explained her position as a lecturer at the University of Hawai‘i, Manoa as one which enabled her to agitate for the creation of a new program geared toward the discussion of feminist knowledge, because she had little to lose. Thus, when the program was allocated funds, she was able to participate in its inception as a teacher. Not only were she and the other faculty feminist teachers, but they recognized that they could, and should, learn from their students as well. This spirit is often, though not always, perpetuated in Women's Studies courses and programs today.

During the creation of the University of Hawai‘i, Manoa, Women's Studies program, there were often charges levied that they were not “serious” enough, that they were glorified consciousness raising groups for credit (Dr. Lewis, 1998 interview). However, with perseverance, Dr. Lewis and her contemporaries were able to surmount those charges by pointing to their students’ satisfaction with the classes they were offering. This satisfaction, while easy to identify when classes are small and relatively few in number, is much more difficult to understand when there are many more students in each class, many more classes, as well as a variety of programs across Hawai‘i. Thus, this project is a step in that direction. Women's Studies has been called the educational arm of the women’s movement. Now that this movement has come under closer scrutiny, it is useful to see what the result have been with regards to student success in relation to a variety of factors.

Toni Morrison explains that she does not “want to alter one hierarchy in order to
institute another” (Morrison 1992, 8). Women’s Studies take a similar educational stance and hopes to educate students in the same manner. Most Women’s Studies classes do not offer to replace the patriarchy with a matriarchy. Instead, many Women’s Studies programs have made great progress in identifying and addressing the negative socialization of males and females. Largely confined to universities and a few women’s centers, these programs have been severely limited in the numbers of women they reach. Just as questions about women’s lives are being asked and answered by women in academia, women outside schools are asking questions and finding answers. Both groups of women need to hear each other’s voices (Feminist Studies 1979, 5).

The community college level may provide a link between university women and not-necessarily-university women to come together and discover a common ground. Some of the questions I chose to ask at the beginning of this project were the following: Does this link provide an empowerment for women who have been outside the university system for an extended period of time? Does an understanding of their history empower female students? Is there such a category as gender identity? Does it help women find or create a voice? Does the class itself provide a space for the expression of their voice? Does it alter their understanding of the space they are “allowed” in our patriarchal society? Does feminist pedagogy (to the extent that it is used in most Women’s Studies classes) have a positive effect on female student’s lives? Does the class help raise students’ feminist consciousness and politicize them even if they do not recognize it as such? Does the class make them look at their lives in a different, more critical manner?

In light of the possibilities Women’s Studies courses and programs may offer to students, I am taking a critical look at Women’s Studies classes within the University of
Hawai‘i system on O‘ahu, investigating their impact on women adult learners.  

By adult learners, or non-traditional students, I mean students returning to school after a hiatus of some years for any number of reasons (Sperling 1991, 201). Simply put, they are not necessarily middle-class, white students, and they are not between the “traditional” college ages of 18 to 24. These students were particularly relevant to this study because often, adult learners most frequently want to use their new knowledge or skills (Cross 1981, 84). It is possible that non-traditional community college and transfer students are more likely to be from working-class backgrounds since they may not have attended college or university at the “traditional” age. These reasons include any number of the following scenarios: the students’ families did not have the money to send them to college at the traditional age; a university education was never an expectation in their family; they didn’t finish high school until a later time; they wanted to/had to work to support themselves or their own family during their “traditional” college years; or they had a family soon after their high school years, preventing their college enrollment.

Other descriptors of these students have been outlined in a variety of articles. Some of the most common of these characteristics are the following: the students “commute to college, most both work and take courses; many are single mothers who hold jobs and study. They come to college primarily because they need degrees to secure better jobs than those of their parents. Because they want their piece of the economic pie, they find it hard to criticize the system they want to join” (Leder et al 1999, 185). These socioeconomic-related factors had important impacts on the type of answers I received to

1 While this sample was limited to O‘ahu, there are other Women’s Studies programs on the neighbor islands that offer Women’s Studies classes. The University of Hawai‘i at Hilo offers a Women’s Studies certificate, and most of the community colleges across the state do offer one introductory Women’s Studies course, if not a program specifically designed for single parents or displaced homemakers, most of whom
my queries into these students’ lives. I examined whether women gained a feminist consciousness, a voice, and/or a sense of empowerment through their Women’s Studies classes. How do Women’s Studies courses or similar programs affect students’ conceptions of their roles as wives, mothers, working women, community members, and citizens? Are these conceptions altered through the curriculum of the classes themselves, their pedagogy, or perhaps some combination of the two?

This research looks to feminist standpoint theory and its surrounding debates for an understanding of the role Women’s Studies classes play in adult women students’ lives. Within contemporary feminist theory, standpoint theory stands in tension with postmodern deconstructions of “gender” and “women.” Understanding these tensions allowed me to work productively within them. I attended to women’s experiences while being aware that the category “experience” is not simple or self-explanatory (Scott 1991, Ferguson 1993). This framework recognized diversity in that race, socioeconomic status, and other factors may also play an important part in women’s conceptions of their own lives. One author argues that, “Women’s Studies’ aim of female empowerment will always run the risk of excluding the working-class student as long as Women’s Studies are located within the academy… Academia is far more likely to be about the negation of working-class identities than validation and acceptance” (Reay 1998, 12). This author was speaking from her location as a British academic from a working-class background.

I found that, on the contrary, structures and perspectives within the university system in Hawai‘i were quite attentive to class differences. Indeed, there are differences in the understanding of feminism, voice, and empowerment along racial and class lines.

Considering the diverse racial and ethnic make-up of the state, those differences

are women over the age of 25.
were manifested in Hawai‘i in a variety of ways. Even though women of color have been central to women’s political organizing in the United States throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, in the prevailing public image, feminism and the women’s movement have traditionally been associated with white, middle-class women. Women of color in Hawai‘i may have encountered this image of a “white only” feminist movement because they do not necessarily associate with a local-style feminism. Likely because of the multitude of other economic and political issues they face, they may not be drawn to an identity they perceive as irrelevant to their own situations. In many instances, they were more concerned with future employment prospects than taking a “women’s lib” approach to life in general. Nevertheless, some of the women I interviewed narrated themselves within feminism, albeit in a variety of ways. This is particularly salient in the local context because as Mitsue Yamada argues “white women often underestimate the risk to women of color in taking a feminist stance” (Fisher 2001, 78). Local working-class women define feminism differently from local middle- and upper-class women. Perhaps it is only a semantic difference that they simply give it a different name other than “feminism.”

There is a link between feminism and empowerment, and many of the women I interviewed felt they had gained a stronger sense of themselves and their agency within the context of their own lives after having participated in a Women’s Studies course or program. If empowerment is regarded as a positive change, then I found that Women’s Studies did engender many different types of empowerment. This research is based on the conviction that education and educators have the potential to facilitate positive social change regardless of whether it is within the necessary circumstance of Women’s Studies
courses or not. More specifically, however, I argue that a Women's Studies class has the potential to raise its students' awareness, not only of specific gender issues, but of themselves, their role, their voice, their space, their power, their identity, and their consciousness.

Feminist standpoint theory facilitated my understanding of students' motivations in Women's Studies classes. According to Sandra Harding, within feminist standpoint theory, knowledge is generated from women's lives, experiences and voices. It enables “thinking from the perspective of women's lives. [It] makes strange what had appeared familiar, which is the beginning of any scientific inquiry” (Harding 1991, 150). The conversations I had with the various women I interviewed were intended to do just that: start from women's lives. My “haoleness” probably affected the answers I was given to certain questions and it might also affect my interpretation of them.² It is important to remember that no matter who is involved in it, the act of interpretation is always problematic. In order to work through this dilemma, one must engage feminist standpoint theory with criticism generated from postmodern feminist theory (Ferguson, 1993) in order to use genealogical practices as a reminder to be self-critical and to be aware of the power that lies in interpretation.

Feminist standpoint theory has been criticized as an epistemological principle because it

entails a subjectivist approach to knowledge that privileges the experience of knowers as the source of knowledge without grappling with complex questions concerning the validity of particular knowledge claims. In relying upon experience as the ground of truth, feminist standpoint theory

² In the Hawaiian language, the word haole literally means “without breath.” Because of the historical connotations of Hawai‘i’s colonization by white people, the word has come to mean white foreigner. However, the term can be used either in a derogatory fashion, as a descriptor, or even in a positive way, as in the phrase “local haole.”
also fails to do justice to the fallibility of human knowers” (Hawkesworth 1999, 135).

Mary Hawkesworth makes a valid argument because she points out that one of the weaknesses of feminist standpoint theory is that it does not take into account the necessarily partial perspective of starting research from women’s lives. However, this criticism fails to concede that starting research from different women’s lives necessarily acknowledges a multiplicity of standpoints as opposed to a monolithic “feminist standpoint.” When critics argue that “if social values incorporated in a theoretical framework structure perceptions of the world, then intersubjective corroboration within that framework simply insulates those values from interrogation” (Hawkesworth 1999, 153) they also fail to acknowledge the researcher’s own interrogation of her relationship with the interviewee. Throughout this study, I never stopped interrogating my own location in the interview process, searching the questions I asked for prejudices, or the answers I received for a web of contexts from which to begin or rethink my interpretations. In addition, this research situates itself within the intellectual and political self-understanding of feminist research methodologies, which pay particular attention to the appeal to reflexivity in feminist research; the constant demand to be attentive to, and to theorize in light of, the researchers’ changing relations to the researched.

It is also important to note that there is diversity within women’s lives. I could not forget that “to ground claims in women’s lives, then, is to ground them in differences ‘within women’ as well as between men and women” (Harding 1991, 180). Feminist standpoint theory can be context attentive and takes women from the margins to the center. Women’s subordinate position enables them to know more about the dominant
position in order to survive (Harding 1991, 130). Fundamentally, “women are aware of
the dominant ideology of patriarchy because it constructs our lives” (Hirschmann and
DiStefano eds. 1996, 66). I am certainly not making the claim that this is the case for all
women everywhere. It is likely, however, that it is an accurate description of the women
I am studying because, by and large, they do not come from the privileged classes or
colors. By investigating the participants’ knowledges generated from their locations, we
can understand the critical interfaces with those locations that Women's Studies classes
and pedagogies can produce. This mode of survival is what I wanted to discover and
interpret. To do this, it was necessary to understand the definitions of some key concepts
from a feminist perspective in order to provide a context for my research.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

The creation of categories is usually problematic, because they serve as
boundaries for our minds and in our haste to make categories, we often forget that the
meaning of the categories comes from our relationship to them. Nevertheless, we often
find that delineating boundaries serves useful purposes because it is one way of ordering
the world in our minds. Creating categories is a way of throwing out a “hermeneutic
anchor” (Shapiro, 1992). We need theory to be fixed, if even for a moment, so that we
may examine relationships between those categories. However, a boat’s anchor can be
pulled up and moved as the boat itself moves from place to place just as the fixity of the
categories used can be contested. While the hermeneutic or interpretive approach tries to
find the norm, seeking a prevalent definition so that it can account for all of its material,
the genealogical approach tries to find the fringe and sees that the category is now troubled. The latter questions not only the center, but also its fringe while asserting that every fringe also has its own fringe. Neither of these approaches is better than the other. By using both, one can seek out the complexity of category creation itself. Naming can be one way of possessing or taking control of something, whether it is a narrative, or some other research instrument. However, naming can also entail giving life, through knowing and paying close attention to that which is being named. It is useful to remember that there are tensions between the categories I am creating and the way that the respondents troubled them. The trick is to use those tensions productively in the narrative analysis.

Some authors argue that, “exclusions, to the extent they are needed, must be acknowledged and argued about” (Hirschmann and DiStefano eds. 1996, 246). Creating categories then, by definition, includes and excludes in order to start and stop the definition at a certain boundary. This is not only necessary with regards to the concepts used in this study, but it is also necessary if one recognizes that any project is finite. This means that there will be a point when there are no more changes to be made, no more fringes to be disturbed, no more anchors to be lifted and moved. All the while I acknowledge this necessary finiteness, I can see that categories are troubled by (Acker, Barry, Esseveld 1991, 144), and sometimes even disregarded, by focusing on the various processes not only by which they are created, but also how they are used in the narrative analysis this project encounters.

Other critics argue that creating categories even reinscribes oppression (Fisher 2001, 67). Still others argue that the investigation of the production of categories
themselves can “make the political move of shifting from a concern with the description of categories, identities, and definitions to a concern with the powers that have a stake in their production and maintenance” (Bartsch, DiPalma, and Sells 2001, 162). Understanding that the creation of categories is both necessary and problematic, I have constantly questioned the validity of the categories themselves as well as their creation throughout this project. The power behind the production of the categories I constructed is both superficial and intimate. At its most basic, I needed some blocks upon which to structure my argument and build a theory. At its deepest root however, I used some of the factors to create categories which influenced me the most throughout my own education and therefore, felt they might also be deemed important by other women embarking on their own academic journeys.

Many of the women I interviewed expressed a strong resistance to labeling themselves within, or confining themselves to, any category, perhaps precisely because they wanted to shy away from the damage categories can do. An analytic category, no matter which one it is, can be “a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found” (Hall in Scott 1991, 92). This constant shift in boundaries informs the problematization of gender, race, class, and/or sexuality as an analytic category, not the analytic category. This problematization must be ongoing in order to be a fruitful tool of analysis. In fact, Joan Scott argues that analytic categories such as gender, race, and class can be useful for discussing any “social process” (Scott 1999, 39). In what follows then, it is necessary to clarify and understand some definitions, and thereby categories, so as to make it clear what the guiding assumptions were for the rest of the project, as well as some examinations of my location as a
researcher vis-a-vis the participants, and also the research itself.

Feminism means different things to different people. However, some concepts within it do cross cultural lines. Among those crossover concepts could be the idea that feminism is a transformative perspective that challenges how gender is socially constructed, or contests unequal gendered (and also raced and classed) power relationships, or values women's experiences, or intercepts the intersectionality of all these arguments. These processes all interact and help to keep each other in motion, and therefore create complex identities. By crossing the borders between race, class, gender, as well as all of the categories examined in this project, the women I interviewed were both insiders and outsiders, which gave them a special point of view, but one must recognize that this can be a difficult space to inhabit and thus the contradictions present in their narratives may arise out of this difficulty.

As I locate myself as a feminist researcher, I bring to research my interpretation of my own life experiences. That means I cannot be objective and do what Donna Haraway calls the "god-trick," when a researcher comes into his or her research purporting no pre-set values, or moral judgments. I am not the only one who cannot manage to do the "god-trick." Others think they might be succeeding at it, or rather, they might not be acknowledging the "god-trick" at all, and thus unreflectively equate their perspective with the "view from nowhere." Rather, I think that aiming for objectivity is a value in itself and I chose to reveal myself, and my location, to the participants in this study in an effort to engage in a mutually respectful and reciprocal sharing of experiences and stories. Bartsch, DiPalma and Sells argue that "the practice of feminist objectivity is about becoming; in this case, becoming 'answerable for what we learn how to see.'"
In this argument, the aforementioned authors are launching an examination of Donna Haraway’s work as it relates to feminist research’s stance toward objectivity and the privilege of partial perspective. This argument is relevant here as I locate myself constantly throughout this project. I was myself a community college student, and I now teach students who bring the complexity of multiple identities and marginalizations to their work. I overlap with, but do not completely coincide with, the people and perspectives I am exploring. We all inhabit our various categories in our own ways, but as the researcher in this project, I must acknowledge a special concern with my own location. As Leslie Bloom notes, critical self-reflection will only be useful, however, if it is constructive and genuine, not self-blaming. To be critically self-reflexive is not mere self-indulgence on the part of the researcher. Rather, our reflections must be acknowledged as analytic data and offered as part of the overall epistemological project of interpreting women’s lives and experiences — particularly when that interpretation emerges, as it does, from an intersubjective relationship between women. Further, as Harding (1991) warns, critical self-reflection must do more than make simple declarations of researcher identity or subject positions. The real task for researchers in self-reflection is to take responsibility for our identities, particularly by learning how we are related in society to others (Bloom 1998, 149).

It simply isn’t enough for me to make declarations about my own identity positions at the outset. While I am a white, middle-class, feminist, heterosexual woman, I must continually reflect on and question those positions in relation to the participants in this project. Like the conversation Kathy Ferguson engages between interpretation and genealogy, my own positions are not necessarily to be played against those of the interviewees. Drawing a parallel between identities, categories, and the aforementioned conversation, one can see how they may not be mutually exclusive. Ferguson’s account of the interpretation/genealogy story seems to rest upon yet another version of that old foe of feminism, the binary opposition. But
distinctions are not always dualistic and are not always and necessarily antifeminist. One can make or find salient distinctions that do not negate one another, and one can contrast two ideas without claiming that they exhaust the possible field of meaning. Through interpretation and genealogy two potent truth/power practices in contemporary feminist theory come into focus; these practices are contrasting pairs within a complex field rather than exclusively binary couples. To the extent that the two are in binary opposition (that is, when one emphasizes the ways in which they disqualify one another rather then their interdependencies), they are not necessarily enemies of feminism; while two are usually not enough, some either/ors persist past patriarchy. On the one hand, dualism becomes deadly when it is accompanied by hierarchy, so that one is declared primary and the other subordinate. Opposotions between unlike equals, on the other hand, provide a fruitful field for building feminisms that give up on transcendence and harmony in favor of partiality and irony (Ferguson 1993, 10).

Thus, while I am white and many of the respondents in this study were women of color, if we are able to cooperate and share in the construction of our conversation/relationship without imposing the hierarchical orders of white/of color, researcher/researched, objectivity/subjectivity, we can engage in productive narrative construction and interpretation within the embrace of feminism. There is always an impulse to resolve tensions within these concepts (Bartsch, DiPalma and Sells 2001, 131). However, one must resist these impulses to resolve the tensions in women’s narratives, because these tensions may prove to be invaluable learning resources for the discovery of the social constructions within them. Uma Narayan suggests using parallels, not identities, as a forum for fostering sensitivity (Narayan 1992, 264). In turn, I suggest that feminist discourse is such a forum. Feminism is a personal as well as political practice. It can also be a vehicle for social change and a redefinition of the agency of women. I think Women’s Studies classes can be a safe space where these transformations and redefinitions can occur.

There is diversity within each classroom, each woman, each student. But I think
that Women's Studies classes can make meaning of that diversity in a positive way for
students through a kind of feminist consciousness. I say a "kind" of feminist
consciousness because as I said before, there are many kinds of feminism, and they mean
different things to different people, but also because what some women might not want to
call feminism, in fact can be construed to be.

**Feminism**

According to Charlotte Bunch, a prominent feminist scholar, feminism is defined as

...the diverse theories and movements that critique male bias and female subordination and are committed to eliminating gender inequity. Feminism is not simply a list of women's issues or synonymous with the constituency of women. Rather, feminism is a transformative perspective on any question that women and men can take by looking specifically at how something affects women and challenging how gender is socially constructed (Bunch in Krieger ed. 1993, 297).

Another definition notes that feminism

challenges the unequal power relationships between women and men that prevent women from achieving their full human potential; provides solutions to the problems of functioning in a sexist society; values women's experiences and selfhood and encourages the development of positive self-concepts and strengths; and recognizes the necessity and power of women working together toward our freedom (Feminist Studies 1979, 3).

Of course, there is no single notion of what feminism is. In critiquing a Western-style feminism, Chandra Mohanty has argued that women of color have been assigned a monolithic identity by Western feminists (Mohanty 1988, 61). However, these definitions, Western or not, may allow us to understand the background behind other
terms examined below, as well as uncovering some deep roots of the perspectives behind this paper. It is important, then, to remember that there is no universal feminism (Alexander and Mohanty eds. 1997, 299), but there are some feminist concepts that reach across many cultures, including local Hawai‘i culture. These concepts are more fundamentally rooted in the following questions: “What does this person’s feminism mean for her? What does her life have to teach us? This is a move from the logic of exclusion through demarcation to a logic of inclusion, enlarging both the community and the meaning of feminism” (Hirschmann and DiStefano eds. 1996, 249). Feminism, especially in the context of narrative work, allows women to define themselves. This capacity is the key to self-determination. It is within this framework that women can validate as well as critique their own experiences (Bloom 1998, 144).

Many researchers believe that objectivity and value-free research are the keys to success in any research project. However, I contend that objectivity is not only practically impossible; it is a value in itself. A researcher is a human being, not a blank slate. She brings personal life experiences and memories to any attempted research. Donna Haraway states that

Feminist technoscience inquiry is a speculum, a surgical instrument, a tool for widening all kinds of orifices to improve observation and intervention in the interest of projects that are simultaneously about freedom, justice, and knowledge. In these terms, feminist inquiry is no more innocent, no more free of the inevitable wounding that all questioning brings than any other knowledge project (Haraway 1997, 191).

This does not only apply to technoscience, but to any feminist knowledge creation. Thus, as feminism is a meaning-making perspective of mine, and most likely that of the professors and lecturers in Women’s Studies programs and classes, it is nonetheless necessary to uncover it as such and move on.
Within feminism exists the premise that "gender is a phenomenon which helps shape our society. Feminists believe that women are located unequally in the social formation, often devalued, exploited, and oppressed.... Feminism then, is a social theory and a social movement, but it is also a personal, political practice" (Luke and Gore 1992, 139). Within this practice, many feminists "...imagine themselves as agents (not victims or dependents) in relation to citizenship. This begs the question of what it would mean for Third World and poor women to envision and demand democratic space where their histories, agency, autonomy, and self-determination would be at the center" (Alexander and Mohanty eds. 1997, xli). The issues women adult learners face here in Hawai‘i may be different than those of Third World women, but poverty, disease, domestic violence, and in some cases substance abuse, as well as questions of citizenship and political involvement were very real issues for some of the participants in this study. Women's Studies courses have the potential to be a vehicle for these redefinitions of agency to occur. Students in Women's Studies courses are afforded the time and space for that feminist imagination to flourish. This is especially valuable in light of the fact that the participants in this study are women who lead very busy lives. This puts them at a disadvantage in comparison to the rest of the population because they are among those who needs political/economic resources the most, and yet are the least likely to spend time asking for them. Women's Studies classes can serve as a spark to the political agency of these women’s lives.

Between the social theory and the personal practice of feminism lies education. It actually plays a dual role within feminism. In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks has called education "the practice of freedom" (1994, subtitle). It can be as
liberating for women as it can be for people of color or lower socioeconomic status. For example, Donna Haraway's citation of medical racism is relevant to education here:

For black women, medical racism often overshadows medical sexism. For poor women of all ethnic groups, the problem of how to get services of any kind often overshadows qualitative concerns... A movement that recognizes our biological similarity but denies the diversity of our priorities cannot be a women's health movement, it can only be some women's health movement (1973:86) (Ehrenreich and English, quoted in Haraway 1997, 196).

This parallel between health and education allows us to see and understand the diversity within each classroom with regards to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, religion, etc. Education is an arena for the creation and perpetuation of feminist consciousness, through Women's Studies courses, for example. Many feminists see Women's Studies as the educational arm of the women's movement. So far, traditional education has largely continued to ignore women's and girls' histories, special needs, and learning styles. However, Women's Studies can be a part of a woman's education that is at the forefront of her life-changing possibilities. Feminism

*start[s] from an insistence on the importance of women and woman's experience, but a woman-centered perspective alone does not constitute feminism. Before a woman-centered perspective becomes a feminist perspective, it has to have been politicized by the experience of women in pursuit of self-determination coming into conflict with a sex-gender system of male dominance (Luke and Gore 1992, 170).*

What better space for some women (and some men) to undergo these transformations than that of a class where other students are going through the same experience? What better place for women to try out their tentative voices for the first time?

Feminism as a label, having been much reviled in the media for so many years, has taken on a distinctively negative image (Faludi, 1992). Many women, although they believe in some of the tenets of feminism, feminist theory, or women's and gender issues,
refuse to accept the label of “feminist” for fear they will be branded as “bra-burning lesbians,” for example, because they immediately associate feminism with what they perceive to be radical feminism. This kind of feminism has been plagued with the least positive media image. Indeed, it has been devalued and disrespected so often, that one of the tasks of Women's Studies is to redress that misconception and move away from language that produces a binary opposite between radical feminism and liberal feminism. Many women are also afraid that “commitment to a belief system defines you, thus narrows you” (Griffin 1992, 145). Following Sandra Harding’s suggestion: “This is a good place to note that the term ‘feminism’ is itself a contested zone not only within feminism but also between feminism and its critics” (Harding 1991, 6). Many people denounce the term itself, yet embrace many of the same political positions as those who endorse the feminist label. bell hooks argues “against feminism as an identity and in favor of feminism as a position that one advocates – ‘a movement to end sexist oppression’” (hooks 1984 quoted in Hirschmann and DiStefano eds. 1996, 248). Whether feminism is a consciousness and/or an identity, women who identified with some of its premises but may have chosen not to label themselves this way, were interpreted as such in my findings.

Identity and/or Consciousness

I have chosen to talk about identity and consciousness together in the definition section of this chapter, even though the two concepts are split into two different subsequent chapters in the dissertation, because much of the relevant literature tends to
conflated them together. If one “has identity,” one must therefore “have consciousness” of that identity. This is highly problematic, because it does not allow for the variety of consciousness processes I discovered in the participants’ narratives. This conflation can also be useful, however, because it does highlight the idea that feminist consciousness, empowerment, and identity are all interrelated processes that often do not exist without one another.

Gender identity, as exemplified through many feminist theoretical works, is a problematic category. Considering that equality is not necessarily the binary opposite of difference (Scott 1988, 37), in a similar vein, consciousness, especially feminist consciousness, and identity do not need to be dichotomized either. In Western thought, it is traditional for binary oppositions not only to exist, but also to impose a certain patriarchal and hierarchical order with the first term being more important (masculine) than the second (feminine). Joan Scott (1988) paraphrases Jacques Derrida’s examples of binary oppositions:

unity/diversity, identity/difference, presence/absence, and universality/specificity. The leading terms are accorded primacy; their partners are represented as weaker or derivative. Yet the first terms depend on and derive their meaning from the second to such an extent that the secondary terms can be seen as generative of the definition of the first terms (Scott 1988, 37).

In this project, the traditional binary opposites were useful as aids in the discovery of their “in-betweens” or what Michelle Fine has called “‘working the hyphen... [which] means creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not ‘happening between,’ the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom and with what consequence’” (Fine in Gatenby and Humphries 2000, 91). That is, voice/no voice,
empowerment/no empowerment, feminist consciousness/no feminist consciousness did not exist.

Furthermore, local Hawai‘i culture is different—more subtle—there are degrees of voice, shades of empowerment. Within that subtlety, however, there are barriers. Toni Morrison states: “I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive ‘othering’ of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work” (Morrison 1992, x). I did struggle with some of the same assumptions as a haole in a community predominantly of color, but where the haole has left his/her indelible mark on society. Through talking story with my interviewees, I tried to uncover and reverse some of those hidden signs. During each interview, I strove to ask myself how their identities were related to my own. I understand my own precarious identity position as a white researcher in a predominantly non-white community, and how it affected the answers and stories I elicited from the participants in this study, as well as the questions I asked. My race is not the only location that would prove to be difficult to navigate with regards to the interview process. The fact that I am haole is one thing. But the fact that I am a relatively young haole researcher (at least I was young when I started the interview process), feminist graduate student at the university from middle class background might have been difficult to swallow for some of the interviewees. For some, my obvious feminism (the word feminism figured prominently in the materials I had given potential interviewees before we set up our appointments) was probably exasperating enough in light of the fact that they were so reluctant to narrate themselves within it. And here I was (and still am),
trying to benefit from the transitions in their lives, trying to interpret their identities through their narratives, but mediated through my own, yet again reproducing the power relations evident in Hawai'i's ethnic and socioeconomic class history.

Hawai'i has a unique colonial past, with a history of importation of plantation laborers from various places in Asia. This has resulted in a complex mix of racial and class differences. Still the questions remain, however: How are identity categories embedded in this project? How are the interviewees related to my own identity throughout our interactions? Are the categories and boundaries we use to define ourselves fundamentally flawed because they do not allow fluidity and multiplicity? Continuing with this argument, Bloom notes that “in a project that seeks to understand how women talk about themselves and their experiences in their narratives, the strategic benefit of mobilizing a theory of nonunitary subjectivity is that it resists essentializing individuals by naming a particular immobile identity” (Bloom 1998, 6). This resistance to essentialism is maintained by the fact that narratives do not force participants to name an immobile identity.

As identities are constantly changing and the primacy of gender over race, or race over class, or class over gender and so on are fluid, so are the narratives that evoke them. These shifting components of being are always in progress. The transcribed interviews are snapshots of the interviewees' lives, but the interpretive frame of those snapshots allows for movement. Bloom highlights a problem of any literary criticism of interviews. It may be used to fix respondents' lives into the text of analysis. She states that: "this would constitute an injustice against the respondent, denying the complexity [and reality] of her lived experiences, which may be offensive and perhaps even detrimental to their
well-being and sense of self” (Bloom 1998, 95). This is a valid point. However, short of interviewing the respondents again and again until the end of their lives (talk about a longitudinal study) or my own, one has to end one’s research at a certain point. That point may be arbitrary, or it may have some meaning, but it has to be fixed at a certain point in time and space. Thus, while this study has a boundary (one cannot study everything), the boundary only serves to name the frame, it doesn’t call for ceasing to interpret it.

Sandra Harding suggests that it is “important to distinguish regressive from progressive tendencies in people’s actions and beliefs” (Harding 1991, 7). Using gender identity as a category in and of itself “may be too conservative, too dangerous, or just irrelevant from the perspective of other [or some] women’s lives” (Harding 1991, 7). Another author, Denise Riley, asserts that “the business of being a woman is only a part-time occupation; despite the tendency to consider the subject as always entirely caught up in gender” (Riley paraphrased in Jagose 1994, 14). The diversity of perspectives I hope to include in this project is the key to refuting essentialist categorizations of women as women, or women as feminists, or women as non-feminists, or women of color as women of color, etc.

Thinking about gender identity requires at least two things: 1) it necessitates looking at what other feminist theorists have written about it, since it is always important to remember that feminists now (such as myself) should be thankful that we are able to stand on the shoulders of those feminists who came before us, and 2) remembering that gender as an analytic category is always in motion, always a process, and always in relation to a host of other analytic categories. Some feminist theorists suggest that gender
"is fundamentally a relation, not a thing.... Furthermore, as Judith Butler argues, gender is not an 'interior state' but a performance that each of us acts and reenacts daily” (Harding 1991, 13). Self-identity in general, then, is a constant construction and deconstruction of a web of "circumstances and grows out of our interactions with others” (Griffiths paraphrased in McLaren 1999, 122). Haraway also notes that gender is always a relationship, not a preformed category of beings or a possession that one can have... Race and gender are about entwined barely analytically separable highly protean, relational categories. Racial, class, sexual, and gender formations (not essences) were, from the start, dangerous and rickety machines for guarding the chief fictions and powers of European civil manhood. To be unmanly is to be uncivil, to be dark is to be unruly: Those metaphors have mattered enormously in the constitution of what may count as knowledge (Haraway 1997, 28).

Identity, however, is not necessarily “whatever we declare it to be. Instead, identity is bound up with our own specific individual histories, as well as the complex web of cultural practices that we share with those whom we most closely identify” (Hirschmann and DiStefano eds. 1996, 85). Identity's many sites then, are constantly changing inside of us. I like to think of identity as political shirts. These could be antique lace shirts; transparent and very delicate, and sometimes quite difficult to take on and off. These are shirts that people wear to suit different situations. If wearing the gender shirt is what a situation calls for, it might be most politically astute for a person to wear that shirt. If the situation changes, one can not only change shirts, but one can also add or take off shirts, such as the race shirt, the religion shirt, the age shirt, the sexuality shirt, etc. on to the body, thus keeping with the notion that identity contains a multiplicity of locations. The more difficult the situation that requires more and more shirts could be construed as the coldest and that would be the reason why so many shirts are needed. Identity then, could be a resource and a constraint at the same time. Thus, the different shirts might be useful
if the weather is cold, but they might also become a liability if the weather changes suddenly and the temperature climbs to a balmy 80 degrees. Unfortunately, the identity shirt metaphor does imply that there is a “truth” when the naked body is exposed. That this reveals the “true” self: that a researcher could discover this self buried deep within the respondents. There are, of course, problems with any kind of metaphor, but their strength is also one of their limitations. In fact, we expect metaphors to solve problems, but what they really do is help us visualize the problems, and by doing that they point us to the holes in our line of inquiry: to things we still need to think about, to things we still need to investigate. This is useful because it can point out future areas of research. Thus, identity cannot be seen as “self-presencing, a place of non-contradiction. This in turn [would] assume that the self is a unity; that it need not be accounted for. The consequences of such an assumption are a failure to inquire into the technologies of self that have gone to construct that self, its desires and aims, self-understandings and explanations of conflict in terms of personal failures” (Hirschmann and DiStefano eds. 1996, 238). Does this mean that gender cannot connote an identity then? Or does it mean that it is made up of parts, including our acting and reenacting? Can consciousness, as it relates to identity, be considered a part of the act of gender identity? It may constitute an aspect of the self, whether that self is identified with gender, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship, etc.

Using experience as evidence, Joan Scott argues, “leads us to take the existence of individuals for granted (experience is something people have) rather than to ask how conceptions of selves (of subjects and their identities) are produced” (Scott 1991, 85). Thus, following this line of inquiry, the narratives of consciousness found in the
respondents’ interviews should be questioned as mirrors of the social constructions of
their experience, not simple realities or truths. Identities are complex constructions of
difference, of individual realities of experience, and merit serious interpretive scrutiny.
Similarly, there is difficulty in finding universality in the term and the use of the term
“gender.” Joan Scott argues that gender is the social organization of sexual difference,
but it doesn’t necessarily represent fixed biological categories/sexual differences. She
goes on to argue that gender may be losing its agency as an analytic category, however, it
still needs to be looked at in terms of context. Thus, placing women at the center and
deconstructing that center (Scott, 1999) can serve a useful purpose for this study because
it disallows the homogeneization of women’s differences regardless of race and class.

Some authors argue that: “although the fixing of identity is a form of oppression,
it is crucial that we examine the particular identities provided or imposed on us”
(Hirschmann and DiStefano eds. 1996, 245). Can there be a distinction between
consciousness of race, or ethnicity, or gender, or culture? Was it fair to ask the
participants to make that distinction? A central question taken from Ruth Frankenberg
asks: “how is identity founded? ...Identity is hereditary regardless of social context... but
must also be socially produced, by friends, community, and teachers” (Frankenberg
1993, 130). Local identity scripts are also particularly difficult to pin down. They may
include “a person’s gestures, language, attitudes, concept of personal space, gut reactions
to certain phenomena, and body awareness” (Bailey 1998, 33). Louise Kubo, writes that
“one of the ideals of local culture... is the ability to accommodate multiple identities and
to negotiate those identities in changing circumstances” (Kubo 1997, 7). These
negotiations are related to the framing of voice and empowerment through the
construction (and deconstruction) of feminist consciousness of women adult learners in Women’s Studies classes.

As I was reticent to use identity as a basis for part of this project, I nonetheless recognized its necessity, not only as a category, but as part of a boundary fragmentation within each of us that is worthy of attention. Identity then, is made up of many pieces; gender identity plays a certain role within the sum of parts that constitutes the self. It is fundamental to understand, however, that gender is a contested concept and may constitute only one aspect of the self. Also, the degree to which gender identity plays a part in each of our lives is different for each of us. Bartsch, DiPalma, and Sells argue that

the category ‘woman’ is really nothing more than a coalition, a ‘queer confederacy,’ a categorical fiction whose members depend on the confederacy’s facticity for their very survival. Woman as coalition, and not category illustrates… [that] coalition politics is more tenable than identity politics; collective political action, rather than essences becomes a means to redefined community; and situated knowledges, which is the production of knowledge and its attendant relational ethical and moral imperatives, sustains such communities (2001, 136).

There is an inherent risk of recognizing categories as coalitions, however, and Donna Haraway enables us to recognize that coalitions, like identity categories themselves, are “temporary, fragile, delicate, and highly political. They must be maintained and lived carefully rather than comfortably” (Bartsch, DiPalma, and Sells 2001, 163). Feminist consciousness, then, also plays a role in certain conceptions of gender identity, as well as the way some women understand and interpret their individual lives and live their experiences. Students of local culture in Hawai‘i have argued that one of local culture’s ideals is to have the ability to be chameleon-like, with regards to one’s identity, (Hara and Keller, eds. 1998). That would mean the participants’ identities would be particularly difficult to pin down. However, pinning down identities into neatly defined categories
was not my goal. Listening, discovering, and understanding how women construct their varieties of simultaneous and relational (Bartsch, DiPalma, and Sells 2001, 145) identities is the goal, not appropriating them for myself. These constructions and their articulation lead us to voice, and how easy and empowering, or difficult and painful it is for women to find and/or create their voices.

**Voice**

A voice can be many things: a beautiful, musical sound in a church choir, the shriek of a child, a lover’s whisper. As far as women are concerned however, many of their voices are mute. That is not to say that they don’t have the ability to speak and carry on normal conversations. Nevertheless, for any number of reasons, they may not be able to speak their minds about their experiences, or they may not be heard. Local women experience a double silencing. Hawai’i women, until recently, were rarely part of the burgeoning local literature. Local literature is embedded in talking story; they are inseparable (Kubo 1997, 76). As talking story is part of that literature, it is also a part of many women’s self-discovery process. By talking story, women can construct their own narratives and realities, as well as produce a site of resistance to “haole” culture. Talking story with the participants proved to be the most beneficial way to structure the interviews. It allowed them to feel comfortable in a format they were used to, since talking story is a cultural practice that is very much embedded in Hawai’i culture. Whatever expectations I may have had about leading the interviews, all the while realizing that this would reproduce power relations between the interviewees and myself,
were quickly thrown out the window when I understood that they would set the rhythm of the interviews, not I. This necessitated much patience and silence on my part, and true to my haole background, this was a very difficult thing to do. While I am certainly well versed in talking story with my neighbor over the fence, it seemed much harder to do when I felt that there was so much at stake. Indeed, I often felt as if the entire validity of the dissertation project hung on my professionalism during the interviews. Of course, this was the completely wrong attitude to have, but thankfully the first few respondents were lenient and gentle with a neophyte interviewer and graciously let me fumble along.

Another point worthy of mention is that throughout the interview process and the subsequent narrative interpretation process, it is easy to fall back into the ready-made language of my fellow feminist theorists. Unfortunately, however, this language is not necessarily attentive to the local, talk story context. While there is certainly a tradition of feminist attention to Hawai’i issues, it is very easy to for those of us who were not raised here, when confronted with language we are unfamiliar with to fall back on “academic-ese.” Throughout this project I try to use language that both the respondents and I find useful, and in a larger context, that might prove useful to the general Women's Studies audience I hope to reach. Thus, while the focus is on the participants’ voice creation and use, among other factors, it is certain they are mediated by my own voice and language.

I use this digression here to highlight the vast schism between what one perceives to be useful interview and narrative interpretation strategies, which are rooted in the relevant literature, and the stark reality of the analysis and the interviews themselves.

This leads me to another point about the end result of talking story for an hour in comparison to the “in-depth interviews” I had set out to do. Through talking story, yet
still having an agenda to follow, I elicited a variety of responses from the participants. They were sometimes long, sometimes short, sometimes directly to the point (my point, of course) and sometimes they meandered all over the place. Ewick and Silbey, among others, argue that narratives have to have a well-defined beginning, middle, and an end (1995). I argue that talking story does not necessarily produce these neat stories, but that they can be just as productive and epistemologically rich as the narrowly defined stories discussed in the aforementioned study. Indeed, this warrants their definition as narratives. Simply because talking story does not necessarily fit into a Western-style sense of the word narrative, does not mean that it should not be used as such in the Hawai‘i context. Talking story is so prevalent in local culture, and the respondents had so much to share, that it would be doing them a disservice by characterizing their stories as “less than narratives” since they were obtained in such an informal fashion. Through talking story, arriving at the shifting identity boundaries within the interviewees’ lives has turned out to be one of the most significant processes of all. As Louise Kubo notes, “language and expression, not surprisingly, are the sites where American and local, power and resistance, are most flagrantly played out” (Kubo 1997, 78). If this is the case, talking story, language, and voice are inseparable.

Within feminism, voice is probably one of the most central concepts a woman can embrace. Within it are possibilities for her freedom. Gail Griffin, a professor at Kalamazoo College in Michigan, has posted on her door a sticker: “Feminism Spoken Here.” A tale of her experiences follows.

I remember quite clearly the day I stuck it there, along about my fourth or fifth year at K. I deliberated nervously for a long time before doing it. The “F-word” frightened me as much as it probably frightens many of you. What would it do to my reputation to advertise myself as One of
Those? Believe me, I found out. Yet something in me knew that the sticker had to go there, to let people know that if they want to venture into the forbidden tongue, I will speak it with them; that if they are coming to realizations for which there is no other language, my office is a place where they can try to describe them.... Yes, indeed, that is precisely what feminism is to me: a language. A way of speaking about experience. Like most languages, when you enter into it, you see things differently; a new reality emerges, full of possibilities (Griffin 1992, 245).

This language is foreign to most women, because many times, the only other option they have been offered, or felt comfortable taking, is silence. Voice, however, is not only about speaking out; it is also about being heard (Griffin 1992, 174). For example, “the outcry against the public female voice in the last century was the reaction of an audience that had not empowered such a voice. The female voice...arrogated significance, inspiration, the right to be” (Griffin 1992, 174). This tradition has continued long into the 20th century. Indeed, into the next one. It has succeeded in making sure that “to speak as a woman is, for most young women (and perhaps for most not-so-young women), unnatural, frightening, or just confusing, every bit as much as it may also be liberating, exciting and fun” (Griffin 1992, 177). Thus, to overcome the fear of our voices and to outgrow the comfort of silence, women must take refuge in a place that allows them to do so with safety.

Feminism and Women’s Studies courses are a space where those confusing transformations can occur safely. They can be a space where women can learn the language of feminism, and learn to express it through their own words and their own voices. First, women can learn to feel comfortable with collaborative voice(s). Then, they can venture out into the confusing-yet-thrilling world of the individual speaker or writer. Finally, as a researcher, I am one of the many possible pathways for local women’s voices to be heard through my writing. However, different kinds of voices may
be heard louder than others. For example, my own voice might overshadow those of the interviewees’ who participated in the study. Is the voice that comes through “the voice of oppression, the voice of imitation, the authentic unsilenced self, or multiple voices?” (Reinharz 1992, 139). In this research, I hope that it is the latter that comes through my writing as I provide a context for women’s narratives. As Shulamitz Reinharz has stated:

By dealing in voices, we are affecting power relations. To listen to people is to empower them. But if you want to hear it, you have to go hear it, in their space, or in a safe space. Before you can expect to hear anything worth hearing, you have to examine the power dynamics of the space and the social actors. Second, you have to be the person someone else can talk to, and you have to be able to create a context where the person can speak and you can listen. That means we have to study who we are and who we are in relation to those we study. Third, you have to be willing to hear what someone is saying, even when it violates your expectations or threatens your interests. In other words, if you want someone to tell it like it is, you have to hear it like it is (1988, 156, emphasis added in Fine 1992, 215).

Thus, my role as a researcher gave me an opportunity not only to create those safe spaces, which may be scarce among my interviewees, as well as an opportunity to listen to women talking story about their lives and experiences. As Donna Haraway explains, “any sustained account of the world is dense with storytelling. ‘Reality’ is not compromised by the pervasiveness of narrative; one gives up nothing except the illusion of epistemological transcendence, by attending closely to stories. I am consumed with interest in the stories that inhabit us and that we inhabit” (Haraway 1997, 64). Just as Haraway’s interest consumes her, my interest in local women’s stories and experiences with and through Women’s Studies is intense. When I was an undergraduate student, I took a Women's Studies class and it literally changed my life. It so radically altered my perspective that I never wrote or thought the same way again. While I was not an adult learner at the time, I can certainly count myself as one now. Thus, the journey of how I
became a feminist, first through one Introduction to Women's Studies class, and then many others, was what I was hoping to discover, and encourage, among the respondents in this study. Indeed, I hope to continue to facilitate a conversation between Women’s Studies students and Women’s Studies programs/courses. This project then, makes a contribution to Women’s Studies by taking a step in that direction.

Haraway notes that “stories and facts do not naturally keep a respectable distance; indeed, they promiscuously cohabit the same very material places” (Haraway 1997, 68). Therefore, it would be difficult to create knowledge starting from local women’s lives without listening to their stories. The “facts” of their lives are inextricably intertwined within those stories and would not exist or surface without them. Those “problematic selfhood boundaries might turn out to be the best stories of all” (Haraway 1997, 71).

Listening to those boundaries come out through women’s voices and understanding and interpreting their stories were central to this project. If Women’s Studies is necessary to women’s voice-creation, the importance of that voice carries over into women’s everyday lives and self-awareness. Through the forum of a Women’s Studies class, in many cases the benefits of gaining voice did impact women’s conceptions of their roles as wives, lovers, mothers, daughters, workers, community members, and citizens, to name but a few.

In Sister Outsider, Audre Lorde asserts that:

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives (Lorde 1984, 37).

34
As for Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” (Lorde 1984, 36), for many women, the spoken or written voice shouldn’t be a luxury either. As women find and create different ways of expressing themselves, such as (but not limited to) poetry, art, music, or simply by speaking out, Women’s Studies can nurture that growth.

Creating one’s voice is neither an easy nor painless process. As Audre Lorde points out, “the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems to be fraught with danger” (Lorde 1984, 42). This transformation is perhaps the most dangerous for women of color and also those of low socioeconomic status. In both cases, gender-role stereotypes typically seem to be very strong and embedded in the cultural values of the family. In Hawai‘i, for example, many Asian cultural stereotypes assert that women are traditionally expected to be submissive. This may pose an added barrier to local “mature, returning students” (anonymous author, 2) attempting to find their voices in a Women’s Studies class. As stated above, a voice is not simply a sound, it translates into newfound power for women. As Gail Griffin writes: “A collaborative voice speaks where individually there was silence and isolation, two of the primary components of powerlessness” (Griffin 1992, 215). If powerlessness comprises silence and isolation, power must include voice and togetherness, or at least affiliation. A Women’s Studies class offers that space to any student, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, age, or even gender.

As Audre Lorde illustrated the dangers of claiming one’s voice, there are other problems associated with women’s voices that need to be examined. For example...

...as feminist educators have explored the uses of feeling and emotion as a source of knowledge, several difficulties have become clear. First of all, there is a danger that the expression of strong emotion can simply be cathartic and can deflect the need for action to address the underlying
causes of that emotion.... At a more theoretical level, there are contradictions involved in claiming that the emotions are a source for knowledge and at the same time arguing that they are manipulated and shaped by dominant discourses (Holland and Blair 1995, 35).

Thus, finding their voice(s) may be an enormous feat for many women, however, that voice may be fraught with problems and contradictions. It is up to the women themselves to make the truth behind their voices and themselves all the while knowing that “truth is not one thing or even a system. It is an increasing complexity” (Maher and Tetreault 1997, 126).

Some of the findings that my interviews produced indicate that for some women with whom I spoke finding and/or creating a voice was the most central issue confronting them throughout the Women's Studies class. I did find that education in general also contributed greatly to this goal. Other women found that establishing and sustaining a community with their newly found/created voices was of primary importance. Still other women came from the “knowledge is power” school of thought and learned to see themselves, their families, and their ancestors in a different, brighter light. The obscurity of women’s history was, for them, no longer a problem. Several women made some major life choices and changes during the course of their respective Women’s Studies classes. One woman left her abusive husband, two others left lives of drug use/abuse and prostitution behind. Several women moved out on their own, away from oppressive families and family members. Many women spoke of a constantly evolving self, pushed forward by education with Women's Studies as a driving force.
Power and Empowerment

In Political Science, power can mean a great many things. Usually, it is “defined as the ability to get what is wanted, or to produce a desired change” (Boulding, in Krieger ed. 1993, 739). In feminist theory, however, power is important because “it directs us to the politics of sex. It requires that we reimagine the relationship between the personal and the political realms of life” (Eisenstein, in Krieger ed. 1993, 299), as well as power within gender relations. Questions of power remain at the forefront of feminist theory today. For example, Kathy Ferguson asks: “How can we distinguish between kinds of power or goals of power without reinstituting the kind of dualistic thinking that has enabled patriarchy to oppress women in the first place?” (Ferguson 1996, 2). Feminist thinking has attempted to situate power in another context, that of empowerment.

Ferguson states that

Feminist power is often envisioned as empowerment, as tapping potentialities, marshaling collective resources, enabling people to do more together than they could be apart. This kind of power values practices that are holistic, integrated, responsive to others, patient, open, attentive to process. We have found historical and contemporary models for this kind of power in a variety of places: women’s experiences as mothers (Ruddick 1989); women’s political philosophy (Hartsock 1983); women’s connections to their racial or ethnic communities (Lorde 1984); women’s artistic expressions (Griffin 1992); women’s spiritual practices (Wheeler and Chinn 1991) and women’s relations to one another and to men (Chodorow 1978). Feminist power is linked more to community than to the state; more to creativity than to coercion; more to relationships than to objects; more to nature than accumulation (Ferguson 1996, 3).

The illustration of power and empowerment in a feminist context is necessarily linked to the concepts of voice and feminist consciousness. The latter virtually cannot exist without the former and the reverse is unlikely. Some critics believe that the
empowerment found in Women’s Studies classes may actually be detrimental to women because students may “conceive of power as property, something the teacher has and can give to students. To *em*-power suggests that power can be given, provided, controlled, held, conferred, taken away” (Luke and Gore 1992, 57). Other critics envision empowerment as “treat[ing] the symptoms but leav[ing] the disease unnamed and untouched” (Luke and Gore 1992, 98). Just as it is necessary to understand that a voice can only come from one’s own self and cannot (and should not) be bestowed by outside circumstances or people/teachers, it is also crucial to realize that empowerment cannot be simply given to students in Women’s Studies classes. Rather, the teacher must facilitate the students’ own discovery of the power within themselves.

This leads to another dimension of power within the feminist context: group power. As Griffin states: “Collective power informs individual power” (Griffin 1992, 175). Thus, women as a group may be more powerful than individual women. Ferguson asserts:

Feminist empowerment seeks a power that is *with* others, a cooperative, mutually enabling power. This is a power that says “yes,” that enables women to make positive changes in their lives. It operates by linking women with resources, with opportunities, with one another. Connective power says “yes” to psychological and collective transformations in the lives of women, children, men, the planet (author’s emphasis, Ferguson 1996, 6).

Women’s Studies classes are excellent starting points for these connections because by “focusing on empowerment, feminist pedagogy embodies a concept of power as energy, capacity, and potential rather than as domination” (Luke and Gore 1992, 59). They are also safe spaces within which to explore the processes of feminist consciousness’ relation to empowerment, identity, voice, and community creation. If empowerment is
conceptualized as energy and potential, it can lead to those life transformations so many non-traditional students are seeking by returning to education in the first place.

Hawai‘i is home to a uniquely diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial population. This diversity produces intersections of gender, racial, and class relations in Hawai‘i which offer a new perspective on the lives of female non-traditional students within the University of Hawai‘i system on O‘ahu. Women’s history, feminist consciousness, voice, and empowerment are all crucial concepts that have found a place in Women’s Studies classes. But in fact, they are not only concepts. Women’s Studies is not just a place to “have” experiences, it is a space that makes other experiences possible. Therefore, the courses have the potential to affect people’s lives in a way never before experienced. These life experiences were vital to discovering the impact of Women’s Studies classes through my research.

CONCLUSION

One of the most important discoveries I made concerning feminist research is that one question invariably leads to more questions. In the introduction I asked how Women’s Studies classes affect adult female learners with respect to their feminist consciousness or identity, their voice, and/or their sense of empowerment. I then found myself also asking; what causes Women’s Studies classes to impact these students? Is it the subject matter, such as the oft-ignored history of women? Is it the feminist pedagogy found in most Women’s Studies classrooms? Or is it the teacher herself? Is it the connections students are able to make with others in the same or similar situations?
These questions continued to fuel my research, as I undertook this research project for the benefit of Women's Studies programs in Hawai‘i as well as the women of our local community, myself included. I was positively affected when I took my first Women's Studies course and I started this research to find out if others had had the same experience. I found results that will not only help generate positive changes in non-traditional women students' lives, but my own as well. Catherine Belsey asks:

And questions. Do they all need answers? The conventions require us to resolve the enigmas we expose, and so, perhaps, in most cases we should. But does not a residual riddle offer to puzzle the reader into renewed thought? If questions are important, the ultimate enemy of dialogue is surely closure. To have the last word is a pressing object of desire, for academics as much as for others, and perhaps more. But it pulls against the feminist project I am putting forward here of enlisting the reader in continuing debate, since by definition it ends, at least for the moment, all discussion (Belsey 2000, 1159).

Resolution causes a sort of violence because it necessarily leaves things out. Thus, I ask my readers to join me in a continuing, fluid conversation between the participants in this study and myself. For as the interpretative framework I have outlined in this chapter continues to shift, so too does our conversation.
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

"The construction of knowledge with people is for the express purpose of building power with/by those people" (Gatenby and Humphries 2000, 89)

METHODOLOGY

Research methods are a small part of the larger methodology picture. Methods can be identified as “particular procedures used in the course of research (e.g. interviews), ‘methodology’ as a theory of how research is carried out or the broad principles about how to conduct research and how theory is applied” (Holland and Blair 1995, 223). Thus, feminist methodology has its own perspectives on how research should be conducted, all the while not necessarily advocating specific methods (Holland and Blair 1995, 223). The methods favored by feminist researchers have primarily been qualitative. Some of the reasons behind this are based on the “claim that quantitative research techniques-involving the translation of individuals’ experiences into categories predefined by researchers-distort women’s experiences and result in a silencing of women’s own voices. Advocates of qualitative methods have argued that individual women’s understandings, emotions, and actions in the world must be explored in those women’s own terms” (Holland and Blair 1995, 217). This preference for qualitative methods has been the subject of much controversy in the social sciences; mainly “because it is thought to be ‘unscientific’ or politically motivated, and therefore overtly biased…” (Holland and Blair 1995, 221).

This leads to one of the most important tensions between social science and feminist research: objectivity vs. subjectivity. Kathleen Weiler eloquently expresses the basis of feminist methodology:
First, feminist researchers begin their investigation of the social world from a grounded position in their own subjective oppression. This leads them to a sensitivity to power that comes from being subordinate. Feminist research, like critical Marxist theory, thus rejects the desirability of even the possibility of value-free research. Instead, feminist research begins with the unique vision of women in a male-defined society and intellectual tradition. Secondly, feminist research is characterized by an emphasis on lived experience and the significance of everyday life. This is expressed in several different ways: by an assertion that the personal is political; by a rejection of positivism and an interest in phenomenological or social interactionist approaches; by a new definition of the relationship between woman researcher and woman subject. Thirdly, feminist research is politically committed. In rejecting the possibility of value-free research, feminists instead assert their commitment to changing the position of women and therefore to changing society. This overt commitment to women’s rights, which is shared by women of widely ranging political views, reflects women’s own personal experiences of subjugation within a male-dominated society (Weiler 1988, 58-9).

In essence, Weiler’s passage is urging commitment to subjective research as well as starting research from women’s lives. If standpoint theory (Harding, 1991) is centered around this premise, I can safely say that by definition, I started this research from my own life experiences as well. The interviewees were not the only ones for whom this research was conducted. I was also a participant in this process and I cannot ignore my role and my location as the researcher in this project. This research has had a profound impact on me, but I am also hopeful that it will have an impact on Women’s Studies education and the students involved in it. In her article, “Talking and Listening from Women’s Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis,” Mar jorie DeVault writes about her understanding of women’s standpoint. She explains that the “approach does not imply that all women share a single position or perspective, but rather insists on the importance of following out the implications of women’s (and others’) various locations in socially organized activities (DeVault 1990, 97). I share the same
understanding and value the different perspectives I gained from the women I interviewed.

Other authors also agree that thus far in research history, the much-touted objectivity hasn’t failed to be sexist, and is therefore not necessarily objective by its own standards (Holland and Blair 1995, 227). It is very possible that Women’s Studies courses are likely to be subjective in that they will empathize with women. This does not necessarily imply that there is a dualism between objectivity and subjectivity. Rather, that this version of objectivity is sacrificed in the initial research space: Women’s Studies classes. But this subjective space does not summarily dismiss objective knowledge creation as invalid. Rather, this tension between subjectivity and objectivity is fraught with possibilities of new meaning-making perspectives. The interviewees (women adult learners) are also likely to defy objectivity since “one of the major goals of feminist research is for both women as researchers and women as the objects of research to come to understand and explore their own consciousness and material conditions of existence through dialogue” (Weiler 1988, 63). In my research, this dialogue took the form of interviews, or talking story, to encourage students to narrativize how their lives have or haven’t changed as a result of a Women’s Studies class. Thus, the respondents were actively involved in the construction of the data about their lives (Reinharz 1992, 20). Thus, they were agents in the creation of their representation through their stories.

The process of interviewing is just as rich as any quantitative experiment because it is a valuable reflection of the interviewees’ interpretation of their realities. Beth Roy, in her examination of women and radical protest, speaks to the idea that “storytelling is a political act. How we portray the past, ourselves, and our fellows can defend or contest
social arrangements... How memory is shaped by emotion is full of meaning, because individual emotion is linked to social life. What we think and feel, how we interpret our lived experiences, is deeply informed by who we are as social creatures at a moment in time” (Roy in Blee, ed. 98-9). Thus, when a participant tells a story, or answers a question, they have already interpreted it once. Perhaps they have re-interpreted it many times. It is up to me, as the researcher, to decipher and understand the meanings behind that interpretation. This reinforces the implication that my own, as well as the interviewees' identities, are not fixed but fluid; that in the process of conducting this research and (re)interpreting the narratives, my own perspectives may have changed, just as the participants’ responses and viewpoints might be different if the interviews were to take place today. This feminist framework acknowledges the layers of interpretation heaped onto narratives as well as the power to name and rename them. In a local context, Eloise Buker explains, “‘talk story’ calls not only for storytelling but also careful listening, the better to understand the ideas and feelings the storytellers present” (Buker 1987, xiii). Talking story is the most familiar type of discourse in local culture. Thus, talking story enables the researcher to create a safe space for local women to talk about their lives and experiences.

There are some valid concerns with this type of research. One possible barrier to the successful completion of this research could be the diversity of material and type of delivery found in Women’s Studies classes because of the lack of communication and cohesion within the University of Hawai‘i system found on O‘ahu. However, curricular and pedagogical diversity may have been an obstacle, but it was not insurmountable. It was employed in a positive context, so as to enable me to learn more about what was and
wasn’t effective in a Women’s Studies class, through the study of different impressions expressed by the students. Certainly, there are bound to be limitations in any kind of qualitative research (Fonow and Cook, 1991). However, learning from these limitations is instrumental in creating a stronger overall project.

A different kind of research problem concerns the fact that

Any kind of qualitative research in public schools entails issues of confidentiality and protection of the subjects of research. Schools are highly political institutions, both in terms of their place in the community and in terms of power relationships among teachers and administrators in the schools themselves. Issues or conflicts that may seem only of academic interest to outsiders may raise deep antagonisms within the school community (Weiler 1988, 66).

This issue had a definite place in the context of this research. Since students were to be interviewed, and schools and classrooms were to be the research venue, every effort was made to ensure privacy, not only for the students, but for the teachers as well. I issued a statement of confidentiality to all prospective participants, as well as to the teachers who were gracious enough to allow me into their classrooms. For some teachers, however, this assurance of confidentiality was not enough and they chose to deny me access to their classrooms. One teacher told me that she wanted her classroom to remain a “safe space for women.” It was never my intention to create anything other than a safe space for Women’s Studies students. Nevertheless, I did not visit her classroom.

A last methodological problem concerned a question I asked in the introduction. That is, how did my whiteness affect the answers I received, the questions I asked, and the analyses and conclusions I drew? In asking myself these questions, I tried to understand that it is “necessary to decenter white, middle-class, heterosexual, Western women in Western feminist thought and yet still generate feminist analyses from the
perspective of women’s lives” (Harding 1991, 13). In locating haoleness, Judy Rohrer ascertains: “You have to know who you are and why you are here” (Rohrer in Chinen ed. 1997, 141). I tried to figure out the answers to those same questions with regards to the assumptions I brought to this research, and how at least their understanding, if not their deconstruction, benefited this project.

Maher and Tetreault explain that “whiteness, like maleness, becomes the norm for ‘human’; it is the often silent and invisible basis against which other racial and cultural identities are named as ‘other’, and are measured and marginalized” (Maher and Tetreault 1997, 324). White, or haole, privilege definitely exists in Hawai‘i, as seen through the disproportionate number of positions of power haoles occupy, especially at the academic level. However, culturally, we may command little or no respect from local people. This cultural difference from their position on the mainland is a constant reminder of the marginalization of people of color in places other than Hawai‘i. As Elvi Whittaker has noted in her work on ethnicity and the haole, “one’s sense of self is never completely one’s own property, but is always contingent on the tacit approval of others, their complicity in reacting appropriately” (Whittaker 1984, 151). Thus, the participants’ selves were reflected off of their perception of me during our interviews, as my own self refracted off of them. Ethnicity though, Whittaker continues, is a “language, a sense-making agenda, and a way of viewing the world. It is an encounter that takes existing ideas, ideas with history and durability. It challenges and questions them, uses them in the troublesome matters of translating the imponderables, and leaves them changed.” (Whittaker 1984, 192). This language I learned then, became more of a reflective discourse throughout the interviewing and interpretive processes. After the interviews, I
felt changed by my contact with each individual woman because from each participant I gained new perspectives on Women's Studies courses and their distinct reactions to them. They were "translating a discourse I was struggling to master" (Ginsburg in Reinharz 1992, 130).

This is a unique process through which I learned about myself and my assumptions of haoleness. Ruth Frankenberg asserts that "whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenberg 1993, 1).

Whiteness in Hawai'i has a name: haole. The word in itself is not derogatory. Literally, it means "without breath." Over time, it has come to mean foreigner in the Hawaiian language. The ancient Hawaiians used to greet each other by touching noses and breathing each other's air. When the haole newcomers were reticent to engage in this practice, the Hawaiians assumed it was because they did not have breath to share. Therefore, the name for white Westerners remained as part of the local lexicon. Its connotations are often anything but nice, however, and it must be recognized that whiteness, or haoleness "refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced, and moreover are intrinsically linked to enfolding relations of domination" (Frankenberg 1993, 2). This is especially true in Hawai'i, where cultural and physical violence against indigenous peoples are still experienced daily. The link with my research is based on the premise that "the oppressed can see with the greatest clarity not only their own position, but also that of the oppressor/privileged, and indeed the shape of social systems as a whole" (Frankenberg 1993, 8). That is, the
oppressed need that clarity in order to understand their oppressors because it is necessary to their survival. Women adult learners in Women’s Studies classes are likely to be or have been in this position. This is what makes their stories so important.

My location, as well as those of the interviewees, is not and should not be a “listing of adjectives or assigning labels such as race, sex, and class... Location is the always partial, always finite, always fraught play of foreground and background, text and context, that constitutes critical inquiry. Above all, location is not self-evident or transparent” (Haraway 1997, 37). These tensions are what make for exciting and stimulating research. Like Adrienne Rich, I “experience[d] the meaning of my whiteness [and other privileges] as a point of location for which I need[ed] to take responsibility” (Rich 1986, 219). My experience of identity is a “narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found” (Scott 1993, 409). Thus, using the terms “white,” “feminist,” “heterosexual,” “woman,” among others, is in a sense problematic because the “expectation of self-determination that self-naming arouses is paradoxically contested by the historicity of the name itself: by the history of the usages which one has never controlled” (Butler 1997, 14). Being able to name one’s self is a source of empowerment, as it can be a constraint. One’s identity cannot exist outside of its context and history, nor can it exist outside of the forces that shaped the names themselves.

Like myself, the interviewees also examined the boundaries within themselves and in relation to me. Eloise Buker writes that “philosophical hermeneutics argues that authentic truth requires an awareness of one’s own historical and cultural context, which turns out to mean that the acquisition of knowledge about another culture changes the
person who undertakes it” (Bunker 1987, 44). This may have been true for some of the interviewees, and it is definitely true of myself as well. There is a legacy in Hawai’i of feminist writing that wrestles with local colonialism and immigrations stories to create useful knowledge. As with this dissertation, these writings, continually interrogate themselves as to what counts as “useful” and how that changes over time. These examples range from Eloise Bunker’s dissertation, that of a haole woman from the mainland who came to graduate school in Hawai’i and chose to focus on the political implications of storytelling in the Wai’anae community, to Elvi Whittaker’s Mainland Haole, to Judy Rohrer’s article about being a “local haole” yet still understanding white privilege. My own position as a haole woman, living in a relatively rural area on O’ahu, yet one where a proportionately higher number of haoles live than in other communities on this island puts me at somewhat of an in-between state. I have lived in three very distinct places throughout my life. For the first ten years, I lived in France, then in California for ten years, and now I am past my ten years here. Where do I belong? Where do I claim localness? Is the fact that I take off my shoes before I walk into a house, often eat with chopsticks at home, talk story with my neighbor over the fence, do not honk at drivers who really deserve it make me local? Conversely, I was not born here, nor did I go to high school here. Is being local in Hawai’i something for me to claim, or is it something that is conferred upon me by others? Throughout the research and writing process I have been wrestling with these questions, and I have yet to come up with satisfactory answers. There is a positive side to this, however. The fact that I do not have answers means that I will continue to ask myself these questions, and in the process, I will (re)examine my own position as a haole feminist researcher and writer in Hawai’i.
The type of knowledge created through this type of research situation shows “how to move from including other's lives and thoughts in research and scholarly projects to starting from their lives to ask research questions, develop theoretical concepts, design research, collect data, and interpret findings” (Harding 1991, 269). As a researcher however, one must keep in mind that the process of “including,” and “starting from” are decisions made solely by the researcher, which invariably puts her in a position of power in relation to her interviewees. Those decisions, that location, are “always potentially open to critical scrutiny from disparate perspectives, [this means] adopt[ing] the worldly stance of situated knowledges. Such knowledges are worth living for” (Haraway 1997, 137). I hope so.

The problematic issue of power embedded in the researcher’s own agenda remains significant, however. This “suggests that having the authority to collect data, interpret it, and produce text is inherently an act of exploitation or even violence done by the researcher to the almost victimized respondent” (emphasis in original, Bloom 1998, 36). For example, simply by having a set of questions present at each interview, whether I used them or not, gave me the power to dictate the direction of the interview. I did not strictly adhere to my written questions and if a respondent felt that a question deserved some meandering, I did not stop her. Some of most important moments in the interviews were culled from those meanderings. As Jonathan Kozol has quoted in Amazing Grace, “the dirt of doubt and ambiguity is where the ore is hidden” (Kozol 1995, 242). However, we invariably (eventually) got back to the subject at hand, my research. I understand however, that whether an interview was short and “to the point” or long and convoluted, these interviews are but extractions of snatches of participants’ lives, and not
their whole lives. Jonathan Kozol explains his problematic relationships to his interviewees in the following way:

One of the things that’s often worried me about the interviews I’ve had with children and adults in the course of writing books over the years is that they do not tend to reflect the shifting mood and changing points of view of the people I have talked with. They end up, inevitably, as “one-time snapshots.” Most journalistic interviews are like that. I have often thought there was a certain arrogance about the act of “freezing” people in this manner. “I came on a Tuesday. This is what she said, so this must be what she believes.” I often find on Friday, she does not believe exactly what I thought I heard on Tuesday; people also simply change their minds… (Kozol 1995, 246)

This passage reminds me of the intrinsic limitations of my interview research. However, I do feel that its possible significance for the Women's Studies community in Hawai‘i and elsewhere is worth the risk of seeming arrogant.

Another way power is problematic because of the researcher’s power of interpretation. This problem can be alleviated by providing the participants with drafts of the transcribed interviews and inviting them to make comments on either their own citations, or the research as a whole in order to provide accurate insight into their answers. I attempted to do this, but due to the transitory nature of their lives, as well as the oppressive conditions many of the interviewees lived in, I was no longer able to get in touch with many of them. I thought it would not be fair for those participants I was still able to reach to make comments on their interviews and not others, so I opted to find other ways of dealing with the power dynamics between us.

One of the other ways I used to remedy this situation was to acknowledge that this text is offering back to the interviewees an interpretation of the complexity of the worlds they inhabit. Establishing equal power dynamics between the researcher and researched can be done by interpreting the complexity of the interviewees’ voices as precisely that,
complex. If there is a narrative that doesn’t fit seamlessly with the others, it can be a
vehicle for creating a more complex pattern. It may not necessarily be an aberration.
Rather, it may be that the narrative that does not fit is the key to a larger pattern of
knowledge creation. Leslie Bloom asserts that since there are a wide
variety of discourses available, people choose which discourse(s) to take
up and how to position themselves in that discourse. This decision is
based on an ‘investment’ of the self in the discourse. An investment quite
simply means positioning oneself according to what one perceives as an
advantage. The decision of how to position oneself in a discourse,
although not always a conscious decision, is reasoned (Bloom 1998, 101).
This language of “choosing one’s discourse” does neglect the ways that discourses
“choose us.” Therefore, Bloom’s analysis, although useful with respect to the language
that the participants may have chosen for their narratives, overlooks the language
structures that we use to relate/relate to our experiences with intelligibility. Indeed, as
Judith Butler, Joan Scott, and Donna Haraway suggest, experiences are not transparent.
Thus, as the interviewees use the various discourses available to them (those of race,
class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc), I also use various discourses
available to me in relation to them. This knowledge/narrative creation is as relational as
our identities are. Berenice Fisher argues that “whether the theories are male centered or
feminist, women’s everyday lives can generate counterexamples that push us to
reconsider or replace prevailing theoretical frameworks” (Fisher 2001, 64). Thus, the
narratives of the participants’ experiences can illustrate these counterexamples by
allowing us to see how women navigate through their own multiple meaning-making
roles. These roles however, are also problematic in that they are assigned not only by the
patriarchal society that we inhabit, but by the researcher as well. Kathy Ferguson notes
that
Whether the arguments emphasize what women do or what women are, the construction of the category women's experience requires some coherent notion of what sorts of persons and what sorts of experiences count as fundamental. Realizing that the foundation they seek may not apply to all women or exclude all men, expressions of women's voice usually call for respect of difference among/within women (and sometimes among/within men as well), but the logic of the search for a founding experience tends to elide difference nonetheless.... Deconstructive strategies focus on the multiple meanings that could reside within terms or narratives, attending to the many residing within the appearance of the one (Ferguson 1993, 5).

This speaks to the discourse(s) women use to name their experiences. It also addresses the wide variety of experiences that can be discovered among women's narratives as well as within one woman's narrative. Joan Scott argues that the interpretation of those fluid narratives suggests a "constant process of construction, and it offers a systematic way of interpreting conscious and unconscious desire by pointing to a language as the appropriate place for analysis" (Scott 1999, 39).

A final issue with this type of interview research is raised by the fact that the ultimate goal of this research is to enact what I perceive to be social change, by increasing awareness of the benefits of Women's Studies courses to the educational community. Therefore, this research is political in nature. This means in this type of research, there is a "tension... between 'facilitation' and 'subtle preaching,'" because of the underlying aim for social change and self-determination" (Gatenby and Humphries 2000, 98). The political nature of my research, then, whether expressed or silent during the interviews, guided the nature of my questions, of course, but will also indelibly mark the findings I interpret. Feminist methodology should always have a political agenda "of finding ways to better understand women's lives -- our own, those of our participants, and the relationship between the two" (Bloom 1998, 41). There is, of course, an inherent
tension between advocacy and analysis, but it is to be cherished, not repudiated as a seeking of “unbiased” knowledge creation. The word “unbiased” suggests some form of “unlocation,” which, as we have seen thus far and will continue to see throughout this project, is certainly not my intention. Given that I have set aside the conventional notion of objectivity for a more engaged, situated knowledge, my stance toward inquiry continues to be both political and analytical. Within this analysis however, I continue to both embrace my political goals and facilitate a capacity to be surprised by my research. To engage in this practice, I looked for narratives that fit into the categories I had created. However, I also looked for narratives that suggested difference, disagreement and discord. As long as there was a mention of the category, whether in name or in context, and no matter which way the rest of interview was headed, I included it in my analysis.

I would like to say that I had read the relevant literature on data analysis before I engaged in the task, but the reality is that I started on a journey that I would like to call “data analysis dancing in the dark.” I had set out my categories before I started the research so that in a perfect world the narratives would reflect those categories. Of course, that did not happen. There was a certain degree of messiness, not only to the interviews themselves, but to the interpretation process as well. I did not follow a “how-to” guide on narrative interpretation, although I realize that I am standing on the shoulders of feminist qualitative researchers and narrative interpreters before me. Instead, I let the interviews take me where they wanted me to go, pulling out what I thought were epistemologically and politically relevant knowledge claims with regards to the map I had drawn in Chapter One. This process goes against everything I value in my

---

1 I am thinking particularly of a variety of works by Marjorie DeVault, Max Van Maanen, Michelle Fine, and Sharran Merriam here.
own organizationally frenetic mind. However, engaging the material in this way enabled me to see connections that I might otherwise have missed, allowed me to productively disturb myself with my own interpretations.

NARRATIVES

Studying women's narratives is a practice fraught with danger. For some of the reasons mentioned above, potential injustice can be done to the women who have chosen to speak out about their experiences. However, these injustices can be a site for resistance. Leslie Bloom asserts that:

One of the purposes of examining subjectivity in women's personal narratives is to redefine what it means for women to write, tell, discuss, and analyze their life experiences against the backdrop of the prevailing discourses that seek to silence them. To change the master script is to change reality; to change reality is to participate in making a history different from the one the status quo would produce. The belief that this sort of change is possible is grounded in the assumption that individuals have the capacity to overcome limitations imposed upon them by social, economic, racial and historical factors. For women, this means also overcoming limitations placed on them due to their socialization within the patriarchal gender system (Bloom 1998, 64).

Women's narratives then, have the potential to be liberatory. Women can use this space and time to speak out against domination and oppression, in whatever form it takes for them. Women take on multiple roles within their lives, some of which may be inherently contradictory (Fisher 2001, 61). Reading and writing about their experiences can help us understand not only how women manage their roles, but also how they can gain power from them. Having their own narratives enables women to "take [their] place in whatever discourse is essential to action" (Heilbrun in Bloom 1998, 69). That is not to
say that a sample of twenty-nine women's experiences are generalizable to the larger population, nor that any type of large scale policy can be generated from the participants' narratives. That is not the point of this study in the first place. Rather, linking women's narratives of their experiences with Women's Studies courses can be used to show the liberatory potential these courses have for women adult learners. Of course, not every woman I interviewed underwent major life changes as a result of a Women's Studies class. However, the courses did play a major role in providing useful language to name their experiences for many of the women I spoke with.

Other studies have been done to evaluate the efficacy of one particular Women's Studies workshop or course (Shapiro and Reed in Reinharz 1992, 191). However, not only did I choose to focus my research on a different, less often studied population, women adult learners, I also studied a wide range of Women's Studies courses and programs on O'ahu. Similarly to the Shapiro and Reed study, however, I didn't only focus on the results, but also the process of taking a Women's Studies course. This study used the term “illuminate evaluation” (Reinharz 1992, 191) to highlight the process of attending a Women's Studies Summer Institute by looking past the basic content of the institute and asking the women who participated both in the study and the institute about the perceived long term results of their participation. This increased the participants' awareness of the process and helped them to focus on its importance in a different, possibly more meaningful way than simply reciting what they had heard at the different lectures. This project is similar in that I asked the interviewees about their perceptions of the impact that their respective Women's Studies courses may have had on their lives, both within academia and outside of school as well. These narratives then, may have
enabled the participants to make connections with their lives that they may not have been aware of before our encounter. This is not to say that I had some far reaching impact on these women. However, several of the respondents did thank me for “allowing” (their words, not mine) them to go through the process of their respective courses once again. This was especially true of those participants who had not taken Women’s Studies in a while.

Narratology can be emancipatory, but it can also problematic. One must recognize that the experiences voiced by the participants have already been interpreted as experience by them. The participant’s narratives about themselves are the stories of themselves and as such, mediated by their embeddedness in already available discourses and institutions. Other layers of interpretation are added on by the researcher, primarily through the questions asked during the interview, during the researcher’s interpretation of the narratives themselves, and finally through the reader’s interpretation(s) of the interpretations. Joan Scott argues that “experience is at once already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested and always therefore political” (Scott 1993, 96). Thus, we must remember that the interviewees are agents themselves. They are not standing still in time and place. They have their own mysteries. As the researcher, I should allow myself to encounter the accounts I hear, but I should also remember and understand that the interviewees go beyond that encounter and cannot be limited to the text of their narratives. Nor can I make the claim that the story I have elicited is the one “true” story. How the participants negotiate language is central to the
complexity of their truth claims. The different constitutions of their truths allow them to accomplish a greater complexity of their experiences, their meanings, and their selves.

**METHODS**

As I have explained the difference between research methodology and methods above, I believe that qualitative methods were the right course of action for this research. They allowed for the voices of women adult learners to be heard. This recognized “personal experience as a source of knowledge and truth” (Holland and Blair 1995, 35).

I conducted a series of essentially unstructured, open-ended interviews, or talk story, with female, adult students who had taken a Women’s Studies class either at a community college on O’ahu, or at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa. These interviews explored with them the shades of feminist consciousness students experienced, their voice, and their sense of empowerment.

Within the framework of feminist methodology, these interviews involve[d] a conceptualization of knowledge as a comparison of multiple perspectives leading towards a complex and evolving view of reality. Each new contribution reflects the perspective of the person giving it, each has something to offer. This... replaces the search for a single, objective, rationally-derived ‘right answer’ that stands outside the historical source or producer of that answer. Instead, it aims for the construction of knowledge from multiple perspectives through cooperative problem-solving.... Thus, the study of women calls for a research methodology that acknowledges the multiple contexts within which knowledge is produced (Culley and Portuges 1985, 35-6).

Thus, the multiplicity of ways in which knowledge can be produced became a research advantage for this project. As I interviewed students, I was able to interpret how different ways of expressing knowledge might actually come to mean the same thing.
For example, I was able to draw parallels between working women and stay-at-home mothers of different races, ethnicities, or class by seeing how they applied, or did not apply, their newfound voice, consciousness, and/or empowerment either within the context of work, the family, and/or the community. I listened to the silences within the narratives (Devault 1990, Wolcott 1994, Merriam 1998), and I also struggled to understand my own inadequacies regarding the qualitative research process and how they may have affected this undertaking. *Hearing the narratives and the silences* is key to the success of this project.

This project will serve to benefit future Women’s Studies students in similar situations to those interviewed. In this particular case, I am examining how women adult learners narrativize, (de)construct, and make meaning of their lives and experiences after having taken a Women’s Studies class. I am also attempting to understand how those meanings can help shape future Women’s Studies courses and programs. As Sharan Merriam states: “qualitative researchers *are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world*” (emphasis in original, Merriam 1998, 6). I am using the interviews I gathered as text from which to build a practical theory from the ground up in order to refine the reciprocity between Women’s Studies programs and their students. Therein lies my interest.

The stories people tell constitute and interpret their lives. These stories describe the world of the storyteller. Maria Lugones describes those worlds as small parts of a society, such as a neighborhood, a bar, a Women’s Studies class, or a retirement community (Lugones in Bailey 1998, 41). Thus the participants in this project came to
describe to me their worlds as they understood them in that moment. As we have seen, these worlds may be constantly shifting, but therein lies their transformative potential. To examine lived experiences outside of narratives distorts them through decontextualization (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 199). Relying on qualitative methods of research assumes that narratives provide a lens or window through which we can best study social life. If one of Lugones’ “worlds” can encompass a Women's Studies classroom, then the narratives found within it deserve careful contextual examination. How the stories are told, their contexts, shape their meanings, their telling and their effects (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 206).

SPECIFICS: PRACTICAL THEORY

The interviewees were chosen through a general call for participants who met the following research criteria: returning adult (over the age of 25) women students having taken a Women's Studies class at any community college on O'ahu, or at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, who were interested in participating in this project.

Initially, I was interested in collecting data only from students at the community college level because it is more accessible to women of working-class backgrounds than the university. However, because of the barriers I encountered at the community colleges, I was obliged to expand the scope of the research design to also include the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Some of those barriers included reticent teachers, who may have thought I wanted to evaluate their curricular choices or pedagogical skills. Another barrier might have been my apparent position of power as a white graduate
student/researcher from the university. Still another obstacle might have been the extremely small size of the community of Women's Studies teachers at the community colleges. Since I contacted them all and, as mentioned above, one did not want to participate, they may have spoken to each other and decided to collectively bar my entry into their classrooms. Thus, I expanded my research criteria to include women who had attended community colleges in the past and had transferred to the University of Hawai`i. I felt that this kept the integrity of the idea that these women might have been from working class backgrounds since they did attend community colleges prior to attending the university. However, the Women's Studies classes experiences they spoke to me about were not limited to the community college level. In fact, many of the respondents had taken their Women's Studies courses at the University of Hawai`i.

Another idea which I soon discovered was not practical was that when I designed the project, I wanted to interview women three times; once at the beginning of the semester when they were taking a Women's Studies course, once at the end, and once after another semester had elapsed. For the same reasons I could not reach the respondents to have them make comments on their transcribed interviews, I was not able to reach them after a semester had elapsed. Additionally, since the time I asked of the respondents was so precious to begin with, I did not feel comfortable asking them for more of it. Thus, the idea of multiple interviews, while it may have been useful if I were to conduct an experiment with a control group of women who weren’t taking a Women's Studies course was simply not feasible.

I interviewed twenty-nine women adult learners between September 1998 and May 2000 who had taken Women's Studies courses. Some of the women were enrolled
in the Women's Studies courses at the time of the interviews. Others had taken the
Women's Studies courses a few years earlier. All of the women were over the age of
twenty-five, with the oldest being 66. They were of diverse racial, ethnic, regional and
religious backgrounds. Two were lesbians and fifteen were mothers. All the
respondents, except for one, worked outside the home in one capacity or another. I
interviewed women only from the University of Hawai`i system on O`ahu which includes
four community colleges and two universities. The interviews took place according to
the respondents' convenience. Most of the interviews were conducted at their respective
schools, although four of them took place at restaurants and/or bookstores, one at a park,
one on a North Shore beach, and two at the respondents' homes.

To find respondents, I asked Women's Studies faculty and instructors throughout
the different schools if I could make a short presentation in their classes about my project
and pass out some literature. If any women fitting my criteria expressed interest, I called
them to set up an interview time and date. Each of the twenty-nine women signed a
consent form to be interviewed after reading over my promise to keep her name
confidential. They reflected a wide ethnic, racial, class, and sexual orientation cross-
section of the university and community college population. I used pseudonyms
throughout the project to protect the interviewees' identities. In order to make them feel
more involved in the final research product, I asked the participants to pick their own
pseudonyms. Some of them did it with relish, while others had trouble coming up with
an alternate name for themselves. I suggested that they use their mothers' or sisters'
names as a way to honor the women in their families, and many participants accepted the
idea with enthusiasm. Two of the respondents insisted I use their real names, perhaps so that they could feel a sense of ownership of their stories.

The interviews themselves ranged between twenty-five minutes at the shortest, and one and a half hours at the longest, with most interviews lasting about forty-five minutes. Intrinsic in open-ended interviews is the wide variety of time respondents spend answering questions. For some respondents the subject matter was exciting and they were eager to share their experiences with Women's Studies courses and reflect on their own constructions of meaning since taking the course. Other participants were doing the interviews out of self-interest. That is, some of the teachers had generously offered their students extra credit for participating in my research. Whether the women who chose to participate felt they needed the extra credit to better their grade, or whether they participated out of the goodness of their hearts, I will never know. One man from a Women's Studies course even came up to me begging me to change my research design in order to include men so that he could participate because he “really needed the brownie points” in the course.

The interviews were taped with a mini cassette tape recorder. I chose this type of recording device because I felt it was less obtrusive than a large microphone placed on the table in front of the respondent. I believe this choice had both positive and negative effects at the same time. The positive aspect was that the cassette recorder was small and that after a while the respondents seemed to forget it was there. The respondents’ initial reaction to the recording device was, in most cases, a sense of discomfort. As the interview progressed, however, the respondents seemed to forget about its presence. One woman even took the cassette recorder from my hand and held it in front of her mouth so
that her responses were clear. The negative aspect was that the quality of the recording was not very good, and it may have sacrificed some accuracy in the transcription process.

After the interviews were over, I recorded my own initial observations of the interviews (see Appendix C). Soon thereafter, I transcribed the interviews from spoken narratives to textual narratives. This way, if the recording was not crystal clear, I was able to remember what the respondent had said and write it down. The transcription process was long and arduous, but I believe it served as a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the interviews themselves, as well as gain greater insight into their future interpretations.

Two of the women I interviewed were friends of mine who happened to fit into the respondent criteria I had chosen. Incidentally, they were friends with each other as well. All of the others were strangers with whom I had had no previous contact. Out of all the women I interviewed, I have continued a relationship with three of the respondents. Two of them were my initial friends whom I see socially on occasion, and a third I have also come to identify as a friend and I believe she feels the same way about me. This may have been due in part to our geographic location on the island. All four of us know each other, and we all live within a few miles of each other.

While three out of twenty-nine women may not sound like much, I have come to realize that, with the rest of the participants, I engaged in what Leslie Bloom calls the “stranger-'friendly stranger’ continuum because the ‘friendly stranger... relationship exists for the purpose of the research and is terminated when the interviews are complete’” (Cotterill in Bloom 1998, 152). I engaged in wonderful interactions and conversations with most of the women I interviewed, but as far as becoming their friend,
I can safely say that this did not happen. At best, I became their advocate, offering solicited advice on how to navigate through the maze of requirements and pitfalls they may experience or have experienced within the educational system. At worst, I was a strange researcher taking up their precious time for one day, one hour, in their lives. Regardless of how they perceived me, I can only hope that we each walked away having learned something from one another.

One of the women who was referred to me through the Single Parent Displaced Homemaker program at Kapi‘olani Community College agreed to participate and stood me up at the appointed time on three separate occasions. The first time I waited for her for an hour at the Kapi‘olani Community College library where she did not show up. The last two times, she invited me to her house, but was not there either time I went. I was frustrated, but resolved not to take it personally. While she may have been playing a cruel joke on me, I felt it best to try to meet with her three times and then forget about including her in the study. The population of women I was interviewing is probably one of the groups most hard pressed for time. They have demands on their time from family, work, and educational commitments, among many others. It is a small miracle that only one of the twenty-nine women did not keep her interview appointment with me.

I usually contacted the respondents by phone in order to arrange our interviews, after having asked if they felt comfortable with me calling their homes. In most cases, this was convenient for them and for me, as we could spend a little time making suitable arrangements for our appointments. In some cases, however, we decided on a time and place as soon as they had decided to participate in the research. As I stated above, a few of the respondents were referred to me through specific women’s programs at different
community colleges. In those cases, the respondents and I had not seen each other prior to our appointments. It was particularly interesting to hear them describe themselves, as well as listening to my own voice describing myself over the phone, so that we could recognize each other in a crowded place. One woman told me, “you can’t miss me, I’ll be the only loud mouth, older Portagée with a nose ring.” She was right. She was hard to miss. Another woman told me that she was “short, Asian, with muscular legs.” Finally, another woman used her tattoos as identifiers. (Please see appendix C for further descriptions). When I described myself, I used descriptors such as: “haole, with long brown hair, and a brown leather backpack.” Invariably, they were able to spot me right away. Only one time was there a communication breakdown. This could have been due to a pronounced language barrier, as the interviewee was non-native English speaker relatively recently arrived from Japan. She and I stood next to each other for about fifteen minutes in the lobby of the University of Hawai‘i Hamilton library before I asked her if she was the woman I was supposed to meet.

In the beginning of the project I arrogantly wrote the following statement: “I am fully aware of the difficulties presented by the logistics of this project, but I believe I can learn tremendously through this experience.” While the second part of the statement is true, the first part is a gross understatement. I had no idea some of the barriers and difficulties I would encounter. Anette Lareau suggests that she has discovered, “using qualitative methods means learning to live with uncertainty, ambiguity, and confusion, sometimes for weeks at a time” (Lareau 1987, 314). Before beginning this research, I claimed I was looking forward to that uncertainty, with regards to the nuances and the richness it may have provided Women’s Studies, as well as this project. It turns out that
those subtleties were sometimes not so subtle. When I encountered reticent teachers, or counselors, unwilling to help me gain access to their classes or programs, I became discouraged. But just when I thought I had exhausted all possibilities, I would get a return phone call from a teacher, a counselor, or a previous interviewee who had been able to find one or a few more willing participants. I received some invaluable help from the Single Parent Displaced Homemaker program at Kapi‘olani Community College, where a counselor there felt that this completed project would be an added value to their program in this age of shrinking budgets and drastic reductions in asset allocation.

My research has been a maze of complexity (what feminist research isn’t?) but I have learned of a tremendous amount of difference in the ways women conceptualize and narrate their lives. The women I interviewed all gave me different gifts of their selves, their lives, and their views. Feminism was, for many, a non-issue precisely for the reasons many people see social movements as removed from themselves; the excitement is simply not (or no longer) there. However, many of the interviewees identified with some of feminism’s views without actually labeling themselves as feminists. This was true for many different reasons for each of the respondents. For some it may have been because of a fear of categorization. For others, it may have been simply out of ignorance of what constitutes feminism (if there is such a concrete thing). However, many of the empowering concepts found in Women’s Studies classes and programs were at the forefront of these women’s minds during our exchanges.

Through the analysis of these interview narratives, the voices of the students involved in the process of Women’s Studies classes, I have been able to discern some of the possible pedagogical and practical applications of this study. My interest lies in
understanding the meanings women have constructed and how they make sense of their worlds and experiences as well as how those meanings can help shape future Women's Studies courses and programs.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation project has been ongoing for five years. During this time, I have been exposed to many different ideas and perspectives about research, feminism, and the study of narratives. However, while I did not change my research methods (I conducted loosely structured open-ended interviews for all twenty-nine women), these new perspectives “added richness and depth” (Epstein in Reinharz 1992, 204) to my work. The long duration of this project has also enabled me to think about “research as lived rather than as done” (Melamed in Reinharz 1992, 218). Within this context then, the journey has been instructive, to say the least. I have inhabited my own world(s) of course, but I have also been privileged enough to inhabit the worlds of the participants in this project, even if for a very short while. Shulamit Reinharz describes this journey as “a process of discovery.... As projects proceed, new experiences are interwoven and new voices heard. The work process of the research becomes an integral component of the issues studied. The process becomes part of the product. This approach is humble since ‘findings’ are housed in the project’s specific features, rather than claimed as disembodied truth” (Reinharz 1992, 212). This process or journey was possible because I did not hide my location from the participants, nor am I hiding it from my readers. I am inviting you to share in this disclosure process, so that we can together watch this project
take shape. When doing research, it is as if one is unraveling a tangled rope. Others, whether they are respondents or readers, may help unravel that rope little by little.

Sometimes, one may encounter a knot that is difficult to untie at that moment, creating a barrier to the completion of the project. However, it is important not to lose sight of the untangled rope as a goal, so that it can be used to weave together women’s complex lives and experiences.
CHAPTER THREE: FEMINISM, FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS, AND VOICE

Feminism has been and remains a site of controversy in the United States. Not only is it rather notorious within America's mainstream, but it is also the topic of many debates among feminists themselves. This chapter focuses on the space of feminism as seen by the participants in this study. It examines how the interviewees view feminism as a movement itself, how feminism may or may not have affected their lives in the past, whether the feminism they encountered in their respective Women's Studies classes may have led them to embrace or refute feminism as a way of life altogether. An existing or nascent feminist consciousness is considered, as well as consciousness' influence on women's voices within the reality of their daily lives.

Childhood Feminist Views

As mentioned earlier, there is no single definition of feminism. Thus, it is difficult to ask participants to label themselves as feminists if each definition they encounter is different from the next. I will begin by focusing on childhood experiences with feminism. Some of the participants were no strangers to feminism. In the process of the interviews, I was intent on gathering the respondents' views on feminism before they had taken a Women's Studies course, in order to see whether the course itself had changed their views on feminism in any way. Keeping in mind the mainstream media's longstanding animosity towards feminism, it should come as no surprise that many of the answers I received about preexisting notions of feminism would have been quite amusing, had they not been so dangerous. Using the word dangerous may seem extreme,
but in the context of my work as a teacher of college students, I often find that the perception of feminism as a movement to end the patriarchal oppression of women takes on the characteristics of an ill-timed and offensive joke. Indeed, many students, female or male, see feminism as an outdated concept that doesn’t apply to them at all. In a society where heterocentrism and homophobia are the norm, if the students are not homosexual, they immediately fear being branded as such if they embrace the label of feminist. Unfortunately, these attitudes were also prevalent with the more mature women whom I interviewed. They didn’t view feminism as a possible site of resistance, a process by which women can locate themselves within a larger framework of thinking about gender as an analytic category, and its resulting possibilities for the elimination of oppression. Many women vacillated between refuting either feminism itself or its label, or trying to talk a narrow line between embracing feminism’s goals for my sake (most likely after they had read the dissertation prospectus I had given them in which the word “feminism” features prominently) all the while keeping themselves free and clear of any association with other feminists. The resistance to labels many of the participants exhibited may actually have been a resistance to my production of categories. Thus, their refusal to self-label themselves as feminists or any of the other analytic categories I might have found useful in my interpretation of their narratives may well be a site of resistance in itself. With regards to feminism in particular, in many cases, it was not so much feminism itself which seemed distasteful, but rather the picture of a large group of feminists, many of them unattractive, raising their fists in the air, demanding more than just equality, but rather demanding, loudly, a separatist stance. As far as most of the respondents were concerned, liberal feminism had achieved its goals of legal equality for
women. All the women I interviewed, except for two, felt that discrimination against women was virtually non-existent.

Even as adult learners, many of the women I interviewed would have been in their childhood years when second wave feminists were fighting for women’s equality during the 1970’s. Some of their responses to my questions about feminism are spoken through the lenses of their family upbringing. Elizabeth described the following progression from her childhood version of feminism to her current perspective.

EC: Well, when I was growing up, I heard that a lot, but I didn’t really talk anything about it. All I knew is that they were burning the bras, you know and that’s one of the things that I get in my mind is that when they did that, they were like you know, no more controlling me, no more you know, trying to push me around. That’s what I got from it when I was young. Now it seems to me, they focus on really, really important issues that we’re not taught, you know when we’re in school you know, about that. So I think it’s just beginning, we’re just gathering together and making a voice that counts. So it wasn’t really emphasized when I was growing up, but you know I learned a lot from this class. (Elizabeth, 7)

One of the most important things Elizabeth touched on is the fact that her childhood education reinforced her earlier beliefs that feminists were aggressive women who were outspoken about having had enough of the inequality of women. They were not women she would have wanted to associate herself with at the time, nor did her teachers let her know about feminism’s potential for women. This should come as no surprise, since to this day, teachers either ignore feminism and the women’s movement completely during their history or social studies lessons, or in many cases, vilify the proponents of feminism themselves.

For many of the respondents in this study, there existed an unfortunate dyad of “feminist,” or “not feminist.” There was no space in between to navigate some of the nuances within feminism itself. With regards to this issue, most of these women
remained embedded in the positivist world-view that it was either/or. One is a feminist, or one isn’t. Nothing can exist in between. Searching for this space proved to be rather difficult because I had unwittingly hoped to find a Hawai‘i style of feminism, itself embedded in local culture. There was no hypothesis to be proven or disproven when I undertook this research. That would have been anathema to my goal of creating a theory from the narrative interpretations of the text of these interviews. Rather, because of my own view of feminism as a practice for everyday life, I had assumed, incorrectly as it turned out, that other women would at least find some kind of connection with feminism after having taken a Women’s Studies class. Whether it was positive or negative, I had of course, hoped that it would be the former, but I was sure that either one, or a little bit of both, could have been a possibility. In fact, Nelia experienced exactly the opposite awakening that I had thought I would find. When I asked her about whether she thought of herself as a feminist, she reported the following:

NA: Cause I’ve always... I guess I always saw myself as a feminist. I find myself offended; you know... like for example if my husband introduces me and says, “That’s my wife” I would just be offended at something like that. I have a name. I thought I was a feminist, but now I’m in this class and I feel like maybe I’m not a feminist.

I: How come?

NA: I just totally... It seems to me that I’m so totally not... It seems like everybody there is either a lesbian or a die-hard feminist and I mean... I don’t have an idea you know... I don’t know, it’s hard to explain. I just feel lost in the class.

I: You do?

NA: Kind of, yeah... Like I thought I was a feminist, but lately I find (silence) I’m in between, you know. I like being married, I liked being feminine and what society you know expects... you know what women are and I like that. But yet I don’t like being subordinated, but you know it seems like these feminists, like the whole class are feminists... do you
have to go against the whole... the whole... what society likes? You know, I’m not like that. So I feel caught in between. Do you know what I’m saying? (Nelia, 3)

Here, Nelia mentions that in between space, in what would seem to be a nuance of feminism, however, she feels caught in between, rather than freely able to move within the realm of what feminism could offer her. She has embraced the dyadic construction of feminism and feels that after having been exposed to feminist theory in her course, she is unable to come to terms with what it can mean for her. On the one hand, she feels trapped by the notion that if one is a feminist, one has to be what she terms “die-hard.”

On the other hand, if one chooses to embrace femininity, one is automatically disqualified from being a feminist, as if being a feminist was one fixed thing, and needed bona-fide qualifications. Another significant aspect of Nelia’s narrative is her sense that feminism may very well encompass “the whole” of society. Her hesitance in this regard may be a manifestation of her reluctance to engage feminism in such an encompassing way.

Conversely, Annie did see the shades of feminism. She made a distinction between her views on feminism before having taken her Psychology of Women course and after.

AS: OK. Before it was negative. Just like I don’t know, it was a negative deal and after I just think that there’s a lot... I’ve realized that there’s varying degrees of feminism and that I can identify with some of them and others are just way out there.

I: OK, um, do you think of yourself as a feminist now?

AS: (silence) Defined in that class, I think that I’ve always been a feminist in some aspects, but not the um... not the hardcore. (Annie, 4-5)
Again, a distinction is made between what seems to be best called a "mild" form of feminism and a "hard-core" feminism. Most women, including Annie, felt free to associate themselves with the mild feminists, but felt it necessary to distance themselves from strident feminist voices. An issue-oriented feminism spoke to Annie most eloquently. Rather than associating with feminism as a movement or with feminists themselves, Annie felt more comfortable appropriating a selection of some of the feminist issues she discovered during her class as worthy of attention and concern. The ones she associated with the "hard-core" feminists were best left untouched and unexamined.

As mentioned above, many of the women I interviewed expressly dissociated themselves from "radical feminists" by telling me that they were not "man-haters." Again, in our largely homophobic society, the heterosexual women I interviewed were quick to point out their stake in allying themselves with men against homosexual incursions into their perceived power. For example, Gardenia stated:

GL: Feminism... When I think of feminism I think of a lot of different viewpoints. Um, it's an incredibly wide spectrum of um, of feminists. Some are really radical, men-haters, and the ones that I identify with most are the ones that want women to um, have all the power that is theirs already working cooperatively with the rest of society, men included (Gardenia, 8).

This woman was cognizant of the various hues of feminism but felt the movement was almost passé. It had accomplished its goals and now an egalitarian society was just around the corner, if men and women could just work together. She did not see the interest men have in maintaining this illusion of equality, nor did she see her own role as problematic in that interest. Thus, Gardenia did identify with feminism, but did not see it as a social movement that would help her in any way. This is ironic because she had
recently been laid off from her job, and while her family was wealthy and she did not need to work, she resented her father, who was quite ill at the time, for insisting she, rather than her brother, take care of him. In fact, the brother was not asked for any contributions of his time or money to the care of their ailing father. As many feminists argue, women shoulder a disproportionate burden of caring for family members, whether during their children’s early years, or the later years of their ailing parents’ lives.

Gardenia was incensed at this unfairness but did not see feminism as offering her any recourse for the understanding of that injustice. Even though she discussed the “wide spectrum” of feminists, it still makes for a binary construction of feminism, with the radicals at one end and the liberals at the other. While this may be the case, she made sure to distance herself from the radicals and associate herself with those who have a stake in the production of current structures of gender inequality.

For different reasons altogether, Pat felt that she couldn’t identify with feminism because her teacher was one of those “hard-core” feminists. She couched her narrative about the subject within the terms of her childhood.

PF: Oh, I was surprised at the um, like how strongly feminist the teacher was, you know like um, I grew up um, probably pretty different than most people so… my parents are artists (giggle) you know what I mean, they weren’t really like, um gender biased, dressing me in pink and this and that. You know...

I: OK, and so how do you think that affected you?

PF: I think I’m more open, like my parents have, my dad was an art teacher at Rutgers University and we had live nude models at our house a lot for classes and so, like every… all of those things left a… left me to be more open I think and expecting of some things. (Pat, 4)

When Pat mentioned what she saw as strident feminism in her Women’s Studies teacher, she was disappointed. For her, this took away from the value of the class. Even as she
mentioned that she was open-minded about many things, she felt that the teacher claiming her feminism hindered the transfer of information from teacher to student. While claiming her openness, Pat very much had a stake in maintaining her vision of a teacher dispensing objective knowledge to her students as in the oppressive banking model of education discussed by Paolo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. While not particularly old, Pat was the oldest student in the class at 34. Her entire education had taken the form of the banking model and she was not ready to question its validity and by extension the worth of her own role in her previous education. *In my own, albeit brief* observation of this particular Introduction to Women’s Studies course, the teacher was not particularly feminist or strident, nor did she use feminist pedagogical techniques, engaging students in a discussion about the subject matter. *I came in about halfway* through the course, as she was lecturing on women’s health. Not a single student spoke during the time I was in the class, or after, with the teacher, or with each other. Pat didn’t feel a connection to her fellow students, or to the teacher. *It is possible that one of the reasons* she gave herself for disliking the feminist overtones of the teacher, was because she simply did not like the class very much and had to justify it to herself one way or another.

Another significant issue in Pat’s narrative was her mention of live nude models being present in her home when she was a child. As Pat lives in a neighboring community to mine, *I have come to notice that she is obsessive about exercise*. Perhaps she is striving for the perfect body that she saw in her parents’ house as those nude models posed in her presence. For someone with parents who were relatively open about the human body, Pat has many issues about her own, which she briefly mentioned in our
conversation together. Interestingly enough, however, in an area of the world where 
bathing suits are quite prominent as everyday wear, she is considered to have one of the 
most appealing physiques of anyone. Only she does not see herself that way. The lecture 
I did hear about women’s health in her Introduction to Women’s Studies class did 
mention eating disorders and distorted body image as one of the unfortunate realities of 
women’s existence in our society. Of course, there is a connection between feminism 
and an attempt to educate women and young girls about the objectification of their bodies 
by the mass media, consumer culture, and advertising. However, she may not have been 
ready to make that connection, because of the amount of work she puts into maintaining 
her physical shape, her body image, and by extension, her self.

Culturally Variant Feminist Views

The aforementioned perceived qualifications for being a feminist may also vary widely 
according to the respondents’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This is not to say that 
culture can be identified separately from other contexts. Rather, I am using culture to 
talk about a layered life context. Several of the women I interviewed had gone to 
community college here, but were originally from other countries. One woman from 
Japan responded to my question about feminism’s personal impact on her by telling me 
about the conflict between her cultural and family heritage. When we were speaking 
concerning her earlier response about what feminism meant to her personally, the 
following exchange took place:
I: OK, what does feminism mean to you personally? Like when you said... you said it’s good because guys... I mean girls can be equal to guys. What does it mean to you personally?

AT: Yeah, in Japan, you cannot have different culture, different hair, different clothes. Like my parents, they say “you cannot do, because you are girl,” but I don’t think so, girls can do too. (Aiko, 7)

Not only did her family impose certain standards on her because she was a girl, but it seems likely that the Japanese culture, which Aiko described as valuing homogeneity, influenced the production of those rigid standards for women as well. Aiko was a fashion design major, and was enrolled in a Culture, Gender, and Appearance course at the University of Hawai‘i, Manoa. This course led her to value diversity in individual preference, something which she had found lacking in her family life in Japan.

Lia, from American Samoa, had also felt that her culture was restrictive with regards to gender roles. She was recently engaged to a military man, and peppered the interview with anecdotes about their changing relationship throughout her time in her Women’s Studies course. She stated:

LT: You know, the Samoan tradition and then the religious thing, and now I’m thinking more that it should be more equal. It should be shared housework (laughter)... (Lia, 10)

When they had first gotten engaged, she thought she would replicate her parents’ marriage in her own, by following accepted guidelines in Samoan culture about gender roles and the division of labor in and outside the home. Her father was a high level administrator in a religious school in Samoa and her mother a stay-at-home mom. She mentioned that she had confronted her parents about their traditional marriage while taking her Psychology of Women class as well as her fiancé about his expectations of her role within their future life together. All three of them were suspicious about her change
in attitude. Luckily, however, her fiancé proved to be the most understanding of the three. After clarifying her position about her marriage role expectations to her fiancé, there was some initial tension between them, but he came to accept her request and they were recently married.

Keeping with the theme of cultural differences in the understanding of feminism, Rita, from Taiwan, expressed a completely different viewpoint than what she thought her fellow countrywomen would espouse. We were speaking about the role of feminism in different countries and contexts. She responded in the following manner:

RL: Yeah, probably higher than American, or higher than Japan. Yeah, but like women in Taiwan actually, we don’t think that way because... women there, like usually, they want to get more power, you know, and get equal... equality and like that with men, but I mean for me I think, it’s impossible to get like an equality between two genders.

I: It is? OK, how come?

RL: Because, there’s just different between for two different kind of genders and um, [cell phone rings, and she answers, and it’s Aiko. She tells her she’s in the interview and says goodbye]. It’s Aiko (laughter on both our parts). Um, I mean in physical, or in mentality, we are different. I mean it... OK, for example, like a lot of people think females cannot be fire workers [sic] because they don’t have like the physical um, as strong as men. But I was thinking, actually they could be... they just need to share the work, probably some females are like... they do more and know some details, like some males, like they don’t know, so they could just share the work and do a better job. Um, instead of like try to act all “oh, you couldn’t be a firework... fire worker [sic],” or something like that. (Rita, 6)

Rita felt that Taiwanese women were more likely to be feminists than women in Japan or the United States. She started by explaining the reasons why there cannot be equality between men and women. Then, she fell into the “difference” side of the equality vs. difference debate within feminism. She used the structure of the dichotomy to justify her
view that women are essentially different from men. Rita thought women are more attentive to detail, physically weaker, and more likely to be cooperative than men. Interestingly, she picked the firefighting profession as an example of women’s incapacity to perform a public safety service. It is no secret that many people assert that women should not be allowed to serve their communities when public safety is an issue. This is evidenced by the fact that there are only five women firefighters currently working on O‘ahu and that there is widespread discrimination in the hiring practices and within the ranks of many public safety professions. Rita, herself a fashion design major, a mostly female profession, but one in which the relatively few number of men get most of the accolades, did not see the link between the plight of female firefighters and her own situation. Her characterization of the essence of women, however problematic within feminist theory, did reflect her own experiences in this country. She lived surrounded by women friends she had made at the University of Hawai‘i as well as some who were carried over from her community college days. She had a boyfriend, whom she described as being “very macho” and who couldn’t (or wouldn’t) understand the material she was trying to discuss with him from her Women’s Studies course. Her recourse to this impasse was to discuss her newfound knowledge with her women friends, some of who were also in the class with her. The fact that such conversations occurred is a testament not only to the motivating subject matter of the course, but also to the community it created even outside its boundaries. These communities were apparent in several of the respondents’ lives, and are discussed in the voice section of this chapter.
Feminist(s) Change

Some of the women I interviewed were not new to feminism. Some of them even suggested it had changed their lives, albeit in very different ways. Many of these women were on the older side of the age range of the participants. One woman spoke of her relationship with her son, another of her relationship with her boyfriend, a few others spoke of their overall views of feminism and what it meant either to them, or within the wider societal scope.

For example, Marcia had not felt comfortable speaking out in her Women's Studies class that day, so she told me how she felt instead, about some of the subject matter the class had discussed. Returning to the exact topic of the conversation a little later, I would first like to examine her discomfort in the class. Marcia was a white woman from the mainland, a mother of two, and an art major. She was to finish her Bachelor's of Fine Arts degree at the end of the semester when we spoke. I asked why she didn't want to mention her thoughts in class. She mentioned that the teacher was very supportive, and even though it was relatively early in the semester, she felt sure that her thoughts would be respected, if not agreed with by everyone. However, she felt uncomfortable speaking because she was older than most of the students, and because she felt at a distinct disadvantage being haole in a class mostly made up of local students. She thought she had already spoken too much that day, and wanted to make sure she didn't offend anyone by speaking "out of turn." Here, then, even with a supportive teacher who used feminist pedagogy, thereby ensuring the safety of the classroom space for discussion, Marcia self-censored her voice, in order not to disrupt local sensibilities. It
is possible that Marcia was conscious of the local cultural landscape and that her respect for it stemmed from her feminist point of view. Of the few other haole women I spoke with, only two others recognized this act as culturally driven and had made the same conscious choice as Marcia to remain silent in class. Does the entire class lose out as a result of this self-censorship? Had Marcia explained her point, would the entire class have benefited from hearing yet another point of view? Or is it possible that by not speaking out, Marcia gave another, possibly local student a chance to speak? Not only was Marcia’s act one of self-censorship, but it could also be interpreted as one of self-production in that she may have been remaking herself in to a better listener. Gail Griffin talks about this at length from a feminist teacher’s perspective, one who is trying to understand the relationship between speech and silence, students and teachers, feminist and otherwise (Griffin, 1991). Griffin discusses her own position as a feminist teacher and examines the power relations between herself and her students in classroom contexts. By making the link between her position of power and her ability to speak and silence other voices, Griffin’s point is applicable to Marcia’s situation. Because of Marcia’s white ethnicity, she could have engaged in the “loudmouth haole” stereotype to make her views known and the rest of the students would have just presumed that this was the status quo. However, she consciously chose not to. Why did she make this particular choice? With regards to Marcia, these questions are unanswerable, but they do highlight the delicate and unique balance Hawai‘i students and teachers must attain in order to maintain a safe and positive classroom environment in which everyone feels comfortable expressing their views. As we shall see below, Marcia’s comments were not of a
particularly inflammatory nature, but it is possible she simply felt she had reached her quota of comments for that day's class.

Because of Marcia's role as a mother of a pre-teenage boy and teenage girl, her feminist views took her thought processes in a different direction than many of the women mentioned above. Her application of the feminism she was learning about in her Women's Studies course, in combination with the feminism she had learned about as a young woman on the mainland, was reflected in her thoughts about the effects of a patriarchal society on the lives of men. She stated:

M: I think I'll probably be a little more... I've always that feminists are the people who are out there that are radical, and I left class the other day thinking that, ... I never really got to say this, we talk about how we raise our daughters, and I looked at that and I thought well, what about the boys? Because I think that it is not only about the girls, but I think that we need to look at how we're raising our sons. But I think that's kind of what my thought processes are... There are other ways than just getting out and protesting and you know being radical. And I think it's there, I just haven't really looked for it. (Marcia, 11)

Marcia saw her role as a mother as the most effective way for her to use her feminism to change society. Raising her son in what she called an "enlightened way" was more important to her than picketing in the streets. There is again that notion that feminists are radical protesters, out to overthrow a male dominated society. Marcia negotiated this view of feminism by rejecting the radical portion of feminism (as most of the other women did, as we have seen above) and finding her own agency within feminism in her role as a mother of a son. She told me that if she raised her son, and presumably her daughter, in an egalitarian home so different from her own working class home as a child, he would go out into the world and treat women with respect. This, she argued, was the way to "change the world."
For Jennifer, the relationship with her boyfriend had been the site of her tentative attention to feminism. She was using feminism as a lens through which to examine her role as a girlfriend within the home. She framed her narrative as an example:

JD: Being able to do whatever I want to do and not putting myself in a category. I don’t do the laundry everyday, and I’m not expected to and my boyfriend will say you know, “this is my job, this is my job, I buy everything, and I support you, this is my job” and I say it’s not your job, just like it’s not my job to do the dishes. You do your thing, I do my thing. I don’t mind cooking because I like to cook, but only because I like to cook. I like to do it, but not because I have to. If at any time, I feel I’m doing something because it’s expected of me, I won’t do it. Like if he came home and said “where’s my clean socks?” I’d say “what clean socks?” (laughter) (Jennifer, 8)

She was quick to point out that she didn’t cook because it was required of her; she did it because she liked it. But she did feel uncomfortable with his characterization of his supportive role in their relationship. Because she was a full time student and he a full time mason, he did support her financially. She had been going to school for a long time, although halfheartedly, and now that she had taken a Women’s Studies class, she assured me that she was more interested in school than ever. She even told me that she was planning on taking other Women’s Studies courses. Jennifer was not intent on finishing her education, she was more focused on the process and gaining as much knowledge as she possibly could. Her way of doing this was taking classes that struck her fancy. It turned out that Women’s Studies was such a category of classes, and I know from seeing her around school that she did end up enrolling in the Women’s Studies certificate program thus further extending her time at the university and the necessity for her boyfriend’s financial support. However, she insisted on her refusal to categorize herself, not necessarily within feminism, but rather along traditional gender role divisions of labor. She saw her feminism as giving her a space and a validation for saying “no” to her
boyfriend’s expectations of her duties in their shared home. For Jennifer, the small step of saying no to laundry was quite significant in her understanding of the opportunities feminism could offer her. While it is certainly feasible that Jennifer’s boyfriend expected her to do more of the domestic chores around the home since he was supporting her attendance at school financially, she did assert that she had a part time job and that combined with school, she was working more than full time. Thus, while her boyfriend may have had societal support for believing that Jennifer should still be doing all of the housework, she felt that feminism was a wonderful reason to assert otherwise.

Lesley used feminism in a much different way. A local single mother of two, with a long history of drug abuse, Lesley had come clean and relished the thought of giving back to her community in the form of help for Native Hawaiian patients living with AIDS. To her feminism was very clear-cut. It gave her an opportunity for strength and “the ability to be open, to stand on your own two feet and believe what you believe” (Lesley, 8). Anything but shy, Lesley saw that she needed a form of validation for her educational and community undertakings. She saw feminism as a path towards that validation. At least, it was a path that valued the ethic of care she was intent on giving the patients she was volunteering to help. Within the context of her work in an AIDS hospice, the subject matter she was encountering in her Women’s Studies course helped her to realize the value of her relationships with her patients. Similarly, Toni was no-nonsense in her description of feminism as “freedom, respect, culture, assertiveness” (Toni, 9). Through these terms, Toni told me she felt her worth as a woman. Having led a rather different life than most of the other respondents, as a showgirl in Reno and Las Vegas, she relished the opportunity for education, at 64. She had spent years performing,
having a family, then divorcing two husbands, and moving to Hawai’i; she had not had
time to herself in many years. For her, feminism meant the freedom to take care of
herself, without needing anyone else’s approval. She relished the language feminism
gave her and told me that she spent hours on the beach talking to her friends about it. She
joked that they were sick of listening to her already, but that she didn’t care, she would
still share her experiences anyway. Both Lesley and Toni used feminism in their current
lives as a transformative practice. Each was undergoing changes in her life, but and felt
feminism provided recourse for understanding those changes and finding a way to talk
about them meaningfully. Their widely different locations and life experiences still led
them to share an understanding of the personal practice of feminism and the multiplicity
of ways it can be used to decipher and analyze the new experiences they were on their
way to encountering.

Other Feminists

As we have seen above, the fear of association with radical feminists wove
through many respondents’ narratives. Unlike the women in the first section of this
chapter, the following women had no fear of narrating themselves within feminism, but
were reticent still to associate with other feminists they perceived as radical. When I
asked them what they had learned about feminism in their respective classes, they were
comfortable speaking about the subject matter. One woman recognized feminism as a
personal practice embedded in her everyday life. Others did not frame being a feminist
as a dichotomy (either one is or one isn’t). Rather, they saw that feminism may have had
something to offer them, and they felt comfortable taking what they needed from it and discarding the rest.

Nelia’s experience of shying away from feminism after being confronted with other feminists in her class, discussed above, articulates the need for reassurance (shared by some other respondents) had that being a feminist was not a stigma to be feared.

When I asked what she had hoped to get out of the course, she responded with a succinct “just to learn.” When I asked to expand on her answer, she revealed the following:

NA: Um, (silence) To become stronger as woman. And to learn more about myself [unintelligible]...

I: And what?

NA: To learn more about myself as a woman. How I stand in society... I mean I look the teaching in English, all the thought... I’ve never really taken anything in feminist theory, so I like learning about it. You’re a feminist? (Nelia, 4)

Nelia needed an assurance that my own feminism was clearly voiced throughout our interview. This obviated the need for her to hide behind the mask she had initially presented, that of a reticent feminist who was uncomfortable with what she perceived were the more radical feminist agendas of the other students in her class.

Another variant on the reticent feminist is the story of Pat, whose narrative is also discussed above. When I asked her to describe a feminist she started by telling me what a feminist is not.

PF: Oh, well, definitely, you don’t have to be lesbian to be a feminist, so... um, and (silence) um, I still think though it’s somebody who’s really, you know, everyone has their own niche in life and I just think feminism is where some women put their efforts and ...

I: Do you consider yourself a feminist or no?

PF: Um, can I go partial on that? (laughter)
I: Sure.

PF: I don't think I'm like, I'm gonna be picketing in the streets any time soon, but you know, I definitely support women's rights, and that kind of thing. (Pat, 10)

Pat narrated herself within the liberal feminist view that feminism is limited to gaining equal rights for women within the existing system. While these efforts have certainly included a lot of picketing in the streets, she wanted to be sure that I understood that she wanted to steer clear of any form of public protest activities that might have had to do with feminism. However, she did understand that this was only a portion of feminism, and she chose to identify herself with only that portion of feminism she found useful to her own life experiences. This is especially significant when she revealed later in the interview that her husband had abused her, had left him, and gotten her divorce through the Domestic Violence Legal Aid Network. For someone who had benefited so directly from earlier efforts of feminists to secure resources for women who are abused by their partners, she was remarkably able to distance herself from the women's movement and its resulting changes for the victims of domestic violence. It is possible that she was not satisfied with the terms of the divorce settlement, because as she revealed to me, her ex-husband had two aliases and was able to hide behind them to evade paying child support for their three sons. Her lawyer had not been able to secure any child support at all, so that Pat was going into large amounts of debt paying not only for her schooling, but life in general. Thus, she may have been resentful of her lawyer, who had worked on a pro-bono basis, and may not have been willing to recognize the link between a free lawyer provided by the Domestic Violence Legal Aid Network and the feminist organizing that produced and sustains that organization. Her unwillingness to “picket” is a reflection of
this situation, but she did recognize the importance of “women’s rights” as a goal to
strive for. She simply thought other women should do the protesting and dismantling of
the patriarchal system for her.

Conversely, Shu was one of the most enthusiastic feminists of the entire
participant pool. She was a white, middle-class woman in her mid-forties, with a job she
really enjoyed, and in which she told me she excelled. She had decided to go back to
school, because she had missed her calling as an artist and was getting her Bachelor of
Fine Arts degree. In fact, she was referred to me by Marcia, who was also in the same
program, as well as in a similar position in life. Shu was wonderfully evocative about her
Women’s Studies courses as well as her experiences in them. She had taken four
Women's Studies courses and wanted to complete her certificate by taking another two
courses. However, since she was extremely busy preparing her sculptures for her BFA
defense, she had postponed her Women's Studies coursework indefinitely. When we
spoke about the various Women's Studies classes she had taken, she recounted the
following:

SR: The classes were like “Yes!” You know, I know this stuff and you
know, nobody out there will talk about it, feminism, you know. I was in
high school when in the 70's, I graduated in '72, and that was there. And
so that consciousness was there but then you know it declined slowly and
so it was just part of my whole change. (Shu, 5)

She spoke of her earlier experiences with feminism, and characterized them as having
been dormant all these years, until she had taken her first Women's Studies class. She
was very straightforward in her definition of feminism, much like Toni had been. She
rattled off several words in rapid succession: “I think of Gloria Steinem, I think of
empowerment, I think of solidarity, I think of choices” (Shu, 6). Shu was comfortable
rattling off those words so quickly because it was her own self she was describing. Interestingly, she mentioned Gloria Steinem, the media darling of feminism's second wave, when speaking about feminism. Shu was also very attractive and had probably felt a connection between herself and Gloria Steinem. This is possible even though the latter has been controversial in her leadership of the women's movement of the 1970's. Many feminists within the movement felt she had been anointed a leader by the media solely because of her looks, and not because of her trenchant criticism of marriage as a patriarchal institution, among other issues she has been outspoken about.

In Shu's educational world of art and Women's Studies, she had found two communities which she very much cherished and found empowering, and which offered her many choices. Because of her marital status as a divorced woman with no children, she told me that she needed her communities to feel good about herself. The fact that they were both related educationally was a bonus for her. In fact, after taking Women's Studies courses, she explained that her artwork had changed dramatically to include more works about women and women's issues. After her divorce, she designed a piece in which figure two wedding dresses, one brand new and clean, and the other dirty and sullied after years of marriage. She spoke of the societal impetus for childbearing and the incomprehension couples (especially women) face when they choose not to have children. That is one of the reasons she and her husband divorced. There were other factors involved, especially the fact that he was a local man, and she a haole woman. She had been in Hawai'i for over twenty years, but she expressed a sadness that she and her ex-husband had not been able to move past their cultural differences with respect to not having children by choice. She found great strength in feminism for this decision. She
explained that this was the feminism that had guided her through many decisions. When we spoke about her earlier visions of feminism, we had the following exchange:

   I: What did feminism mean to you then?

   SR: Um, (silence) political, it was political, very much. That was a really political time, the end of Vietnam, Watergate, feminism. I think it was probably political, but also it was distant, cause I lived in a really small, very conservative town, and I also um, think that (silence) probably yeah, distant, political and um yeah.

   I: OK, what do you think it means to you now?

   SR: Now, of course, it's very personal. I think it's, it's um, (silence) it means an awareness, and a vigilance to me, it means assertion, and being assertive and (silence) still political. (Shu, 9)

While speaking about feminism in this discussion, Shu was much more hesitant than in her earlier naming of feminism, as evidenced by the relatively high number of silences in her narrative. In the context of this discussion, I prompted her to examine feminism's connection to her life and experiences. She iterated the “personal is political” narrative that so many Women's Studies courses cover, but she also spoke about awareness and vigilance, ostensibly about larger women’s issues which are important to her, as well as awareness and vigilance in her own life, through her art for example. She was focused on understanding the connection of feminism to her life, naming some watershed events of the 1970’s, feminism among them, as important markers in her life. However, due to her geographical location while she was growing up in a middle class small town in Washington, she had only had a limited access to feminism. Discovering it for herself in Women's Studies classes had enabled her to reflect on some of her life experiences in different, more enlightening ways. Because Shu was in her mid-forties, she had had many life experiences on which to reflect. This made her story even more compelling.
She was conscious of the changes feminism had aroused in her and the way she lived her life. Thus, since it seems to have benefited Shu, if solely by virtue of having more life experiences to reflect on since one has simply lived a longer number of years, it would seem that taking Women's Studies courses would also benefit older women in general in similar ways. The reason Shu's narrative was so fascinating was that the changes she incurred epitomized what I had hoped to find in all the respondents in this study. Of course, this was not to be, but I would have been lying to myself had I not recognized that this hope was there throughout the research. Still keeping with the idea that there was no hypothesis to prove or disprove during the interpretation of these narratives has allowed me to look for the spaces within which women narrate themselves. Whether it is with regard to feminism, or their families, or their work, or their education, or anything that they deemed important in their lives, the narratives proved to be rich in a variety of ways. In this vein, we now turn to some of the more detailed effects of Women's Studies courses on some of the interviewees' lives.

**Details, details, details**

When I asked about changes Women's Studies courses had brought to their lives, some of the respondents replied with general observations about their lives, or feminism in general. However, other women, with minimal prompting from me, articulated some very detailed changes the Women's Studies course had made in their ways of living their lives. Elizabeth, who was the first respondent we met, was extremely willing to share details of her life. Many others were not so forthcoming. The result is that Elizabeth's
interview was the second longest of all the interviews I conducted, and richly colored by her depictions of her life. She was from a poor family in a rural area in Texas and had overcome many obstacles to be at the University of Hawai‘i, taking Women’s Studies classes, not the least of which had been her husband physically abusing her and her two children, and then driving away the trailer that had been their home, leaving them in the middle of nowhere with no food, shelter, or money. She came to Hawai‘i to get herself and her children away from this abusive relationship and with the help of her church had been able to establish a steady home near the university so that she could attend classes and still have time to volunteer at her son’s school. Elizabeth was very practical and saw solutions where there hadn’t been any, albeit sometimes in quite unorthodox ways.

When facing a reading tutor shortage at her son’s school, the church officials were baffled as to what course of action to take in order to alleviate the problem. Elizabeth decided that since her son needed help learning to read, other children probably did too. She went to one of her education classes and asked her fellow students for help in tutoring her son and his classmates. Many of them did, and the children were able to get the help they needed. Problem solved. Needless to say, the church officials were thrilled, if a little taken aback by the initiative shown by a relatively new member of their congregation.

When asked about her Women’s Studies course experiences, she explained how she was living her life differently in the following manner:

EC: Well, I’m already doing it right now. I mean I dress differently, I think differently, you know from the feminist movement, what the real concerns and issues are and it wasn’t like this dominating thing where they wanted to dominate men, but I can see now the real issues that they really wanted to focus on. I think men have distorted those issues, you know because they were threatened, like I said and they were offended by
women steppin’ out. But I can see what the real point was... of that was. To protect and nurture families and bring better lives out there, to not be inferior and living in so-called income bracket[s] where they never get ahead, you know. And they never get to use the talents and gifts that they have for the, you know, the opportunities that we have in the United States. (Elizabeth, 12)

She was taking a Third World Feminism course, so her answer was reflective of the subject matter, but she was like a sponge, absorbing it all and applying it as much as possible to her own situations. Even though Elizabeth had had to struggle against many obstacles, she was a firm believer in the American Dream and spent a portion of the interview trying to convince me to do the same. She explained her steps towards a better life at length, with and without her husband. She named the exact sums of money each had put into their respective cars and mobile home and the extreme loss and betrayal she felt when he literally stole her home away from her. She faced new obstacles trying to keep her children fed and clothed, and turned to the state in Texas for welfare assistance. She was disheartened to have fallen to what she perceived was such a low status, after having owned her own home, and jumped at the chance to come to Hawai’i when her sister offered her a safe place to live with her children. Her sister ended up moving away from here soon after Elizabeth’s arrival, but she had already situated herself and her children and decided to stay. Her ex-husband did try to come and work it out with her, but she was quick to point out that once he had taken their joint property away, he had forfeited all rights to his family. It was that property infraction rather than the physical abuse that incensed her to the point of filing for divorce and sending the man back to Texas. Elizabeth’s notion of the American Dream, with equal opportunity for all, was not as prevalent throughout the other interviews as I had originally thought. Many of the respondents were aware of class differences and made connections between race,
ethnicity, gender, and class to illustrate the lack of actual equal opportunity in the United States. Elizabeth, however, was convinced that if she worked hard enough, she would be able to become independent of the church’s help, while still being active with her work in the church community.

Kathy X., on the other hand, explained to me that she had completely withdrawn from society and was extremely cynical about her prospects after graduation, work and otherwise. She was a filmmaker, the only woman working for a small, local production company. She found herself extremely resistant to her colleagues’ ideas about production decisions, and felt she might be better off on her own. She didn’t think she was going to get rich being an independent filmmaker, rather she thought she might be happier working alone. She was already working on a film with a feminist subject matter (more on that later). She described her withdrawal from society in the following way:

KX: Hmmm (affirmative). I was really anti-society, and I was very anti-feminist movement, anti (silence) anti-woman basically. I wouldn’t say I hated… insofar as I didn’t have women friends, but I was definitely friends with more guys, so therefore I always grew up with like this feeling that you know, women are weaker. Because my father… Yeah, that stuck with me throughout… Even though looking back I was very feminist in my actions but not in words. I was totally… would not associate with the term feminist as a whole. So I came up with my own individual identity, so… and then I learned through time that I was totally screwed up (laughter) and… that was a long time ago. (Kathy X., 8)

Kathy X. was loath to label herself as either a woman, or a feminist, or anything of the sort. Conversely, she was comfortable immediately labeling herself as “anti-woman,” “anti-feminist,” or “anti-society” in negative terms. Kathy X.’s narrative was filled with contradictions, but as she revealed to me later while explaining what she meant by “screwed up,” her coming out as a lesbian led her to defy any accepted norms of identity. Rebelling against her family, as well as dropping out of a small, expensive private college
on the East Coast manifested this defiance. When she came home to Hawai‘i, she struggled to find her way in the world of work, and realizing her lack of fulfillment at not having finished her education, she came back to the University of Hawai‘i to finish her degree. She didn’t stumble upon feminism or Women’s Studies courses, she took them to broaden her education on feminism. These were tenets she felt she had always lived by, but she had always taken pains never to associate herself with the label. Ironically, the film she was working on independently of her colleagues at the production company was rooted in feminism. She was taking her Feminist Theory course to gain a deeper understanding of theory so that her protagonist, a woman doing her thesis research by interviewing people, would have a stronger basis for starting her research. She later admitted that she was also taking this class to be able to converse on an even par with her mother, whom she called “an extreme... hard core feminist.” She wanted to understand what her mother was talking about when they were discussing feminism or women’s issues in general. When I asked her which of the two was the most important reason for taking this class, she asserted that it was “all of the above.” In fact, she embraced the theory aspect of the course. She assumed that

most people get grossed out by this stuff and don’t even want to listen. I wanted to really concentrate on this theory stuff, and also what I find interesting the differences created by homosexuality and people of certain class. It’s different from any other women. So it’s totally, it totally just blows my mind. (Kathy X., 4)

Kathy X. had found a home in the theoretical analysis of her lesbian existence. When she had begun the class, she had not yet found her roots in the literature of sexuality so prevalent in many feminist theory courses. For her, this awakening had been prescient on two fronts. Not only was she able to name her experiences while speaking to her mother,
she was also able to incorporate the feminist theory she was learning into her work as a filmmaker. Her protagonist, she later told me, was much like myself, finding her way among other women different yet with similar experiences to herself. She even went so far as to invite me to her premiere by email, a few months later. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend, but I was glad to hear that her project had come to fruition. With regards to her conversations with her mother, she explained that the latter was disappointed in her when she dropped out of school on the East Coast, but Kathy X. explained that the class differences between her and the other students were some of the most frustrating obstacles to her quest for a community in that far off place. Her identity as a lesbian precluded her from finding other students with whom she might have shared a bond, but she asserted that class differences were even greater to overcome in that respect. Not only was the school itself expensive, but the background of many of the students was so different to her own; she was unable to move past it in order to find friends. This is when she withdrew not only from school, but also from society. She chose instead to “hang out” in New York without telling her parents she had dropped out. Kathy X. was the only participant in this study for whom class was such a determinant in life choices. She used her Feminist Theory course to further her understanding of the intersection between gender, sexuality, and class while race, at least within her narrative, was a complete non-factor. She never mentioned race or ethnicity once in the interview, nor did she associate the fact that many of the privileged students at her former college were most probably white and she of Chinese descent and middle class socioeconomic status from Hawai‘i. It is possible that she may have felt uncomfortable pointing out the whiteness of the students she was criticizing, when I am obviously of the same color. There is no way to
know this, but with regards to my own internalized ethnocentric views, I did not notice this until much later, when I started interpreting the interviews. Had I noticed it during the interview, I would hope that I would have probed Kathy X. further, by asking her whether the other students' whiteness, combined with their higher socioeconomic status, was as bothersome as just their socioeconomic status.

With regards to the details of everyday life, some of the respondents in this study did acknowledge debts to feminism for guiding them through life choices, whether big (coming out as a lesbian) or small (deciding what to wear). These debts were recognized after having gained a stronger background in feminism through the venue of a Women's Studies course. That is, either during or after a Women's Studies course, some of the respondents mentioned above were proficient in naming their experiences using feminism as a lens through which to narrativize their lives. These narratives then, were peppered either with general references to feminism, or very specific references to portions of the Women's Studies class they had taken. The longer lapse of time between the course and the interview, the more general the references seemed to be. Shu's references to her life, work, and art's relationship to feminism were more encompassing than Elizabeth's, who was using feminism as a reference for what to wear, for example. Thus, the more current the course, the more specific the references were. Many of the interviewees, when asked if they felt they would apply their Women's Studies knowledge to other classes, or their future work or studies, were quite enthusiastic. It is to further education we now turn, as we follow some of the participants' paths in other classes.
Women's Studies and (the Other) Academic Subjects

As noted in the first chapter, women and feminism are not exactly a premium topic of conversation in mainstream classes at the University of Hawai'i, or many other universities for that matter. One of the most important changes undergone by some of the respondents was that they applied what they had learned in their respective Women's Studies classes to their other educational endeavors. In this section, I will highlight some of those specific changes with regards to a variety of academic subjects. These are the illustration of the beginning of a nascent feminist consciousness in the participants, as they used their new knowledge to push for change in the curriculum of their other classes.

Kathy C. was enrolled in a Feminism and Philosophy course at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa. When I asked what feminism meant to her, she described an awakening of sorts, about the relationship between women and feminism. She fell into the now familiar pattern of describing feminists in derogatory terms. But when I pressed her further, and more specifically about what she was learning in her class, she gave very specific examples about the reasons why women had not, and should have been, included in the curriculum. Philosophy is not known for being a woman-friendly field, thus taking, and teaching, a course called Feminism and Philosophy is quite a subversive task. In many ways, the approach of this course was what has been called “add-women-and-stir” (Maher and Tetreault, 1997). The teacher was engaged in helping the students recognize that there had been women philosophers, but that they had been excluded from major works and anthologies of prominent philosophers, simply because they were women. Many of the philosophers had been forgotten, until some enterprising feminist
researchers had set about reclaiming the knowledge the latter had created so many years ago. Thus, this course was not about changing the system of thought by which philosophers are deemed worthy of entry into anthologies, or what counts as knowledge in a philosophy class in general. Rather, it was about adding women to the curriculum and making sure they were not forgotten once again. The teacher frequently used small group discussions to push the process of the course along and Kathy C. was not comfortable with this pedagogical arrangement. Much like Pat, whose experiences in another Women's Studies course have been discussed above, Kathy C. had spent so much educational time with the banking model of education, she was familiar with it, and regretted its disappearance in this course. She told me she would have preferred that the teacher lecture them about feminist philosophers than "waste" her time discussing them with the other students. She wanted the teacher to impart knowledge to her and her fellow classmates, rather than have to work with them to gain the knowledge through their discussion. However, within her narrative did emerge some concrete examples of a feminist philosopher who may have single handedly changed her perception of feminists. She stated:

I: Let's go on... OK, let's do a couple of word associations and most people don't like these, but let's see how they go. Um, and it's not just one word that you have to answer with, whatever comes to mind OK? When I say the word feminism, what do you think of?

KC: Oh, God, to be honest, I think I think of real butchy ladies that have an attitude (laughter) kind of bitter toward life yeah (laughter) I guess it's a real negative connotation for me.

I: Is the class helping you think about that in a different way at all?

KC: Absolutely.
I: Like how?

KC: Um, I can see that, you know feminists do have a valid reason to be upset like Anne Conway, the lady that we’re talking about now, wasn’t until recently put into the encyclopedia of philosophers, you know cause it really was a male oriented, that it is still pretty... you know more so in the past I guess it was a male oriented sort of area you know, whatever. So that is changing my perspective. (Kathy C., 6)

Kathy C.’s educational experiences were deeply embedded in her longstanding animosity towards feminism. However, even relatively early in the semester, she was able to recognize the importance of including women in the curriculum, even a traditionally male-dominated curriculum. Because of Kathy C.’s dissatisfaction with the course’s pedagogical format, she had taken it upon herself to read further along than the syllabus’ schedule. Thus, she was full of questions that may have been addressed by the teacher and her classmates later in the semester. This increased her dissatisfaction even more, yet raised many important points for her with regards to feminism and its role in her own life and further work. Please bear with me during another lengthy quote; the following exchange illustrates this point as well as creating a connection with the above quote:

I: This is kind of a big one, I mean kind of a long question, but do you feel that you’ll apply what you’ve learned in this class to your work, or your further education, or your life outside of school?

KC: Oh sure, I think so. I’ll probably always see the world a little bit differently because of this feminist perspective, you know, um. So it’ll certainly affect the way that I read anything that has to do [intelligible], yeah whether it’s on a personal level or in school, you know. Um, I don’t think it’ll make me turn into a feminist or anything, per say. Oh I think I am a feminist though. I mean I work in a male dominated industry, yeah, with horses, and but... yeah, it has, I mean it definitely has changed my perspective.

I: Interesting.
KC: Yeah, I mean just looking at Descartes from a feminist perspective... I'm reading this book kind of on my own, it's one of our assigned books, it's feminist interpretations of Rene Descartes, and I'm reading each essay and stuff and I'm using it for my other class. So boy, so I'm sure it's gonna affect everything, isn't it? But it's hard to say before the fact, but I'm sure it will, yeah. (Kathy C., 10)

Kathy C.'s narrative is filled with ambiguities, not only of her relationship to feminism, but also to her education's relationship to the knowledge she was gaining through her Feminism and Philosophy class. It is interesting that Kathy C. had even chosen this course, since she seemed to be so anti-feminism and the title is so obviously feminist. She did assert that she thought it would be “an interesting angle” since most the philosophers she had encountered in her previous classes had been men. However, it is no secret that undergraduates take courses for any number of reasons, some of which may simply be based on the time and place of the course, rather than its content or approach to the subject matter. I did not confront Kathy C. with this assumption, since I did not want to alienate her during the interview. However, I did suggest (at her prompting), that she might take more interest in the small group discussions, since her classmates may have been a wealth of information. She was quite resistant to the idea, but did tell me that she would expand her thinking about the possibilities of this type of learning process. Kathy C. was very receptive to new ideas about the curriculum and seemed enthusiastic about applying this knowledge to her other classes. This is evidenced by her reading ahead of the syllabus and choosing to use some of the same (feminist) texts for a research paper she was doing for another (non-feminist) class. Her strong statements against being a feminist herself, which she just as quickly reversed in the next sentence, masked this openness. Kathy C.'s narrative ambiguities seemed to put her at an impasse with herself
and with the subject matter. However, her strong personality as well as her long history
as an anti-feminist, led her to make statements that she promptly overturned now that she
had been enrolled in a feminist philosophy course. This is especially significant since it
was relatively early in the semester when I interviewed her. It is possible that with
prolonged exposure to feminist subject matter, Kathy C. would become more comfortable
and proficient in expressing her views on feminism in a more benign, if not positive
manner.

Another reference to specific knowledge about a feminist subject matter entailed
Elizabeth’s experience in her Third World Feminism course. As stated above, Elizabeth
was very enthusiastic about much she was learning in her Women’s Studies class. She
practically recited summaries of some of the course lectures back to me. This may have
enabled her to synthesize the subject matter for herself, by spelling it out for me. When I
asked what she thought was the most meaningful portion of the course, she told me the
following:

EC: You know, it’s not just the poor. You don’t think of anything about
Third World countries but that they’re poor. Just being in poverty and that
they’re never gonna get out of it or whatever. But the women that are in
the Third World countries, their feminist movement, some of them are
feminists and so they’re moving into issues and concerns that were… it
benefits them, so they’re stepping out even though they’re in a very
dominant, patriotic [sic] world where it’s done their way or you’re not part
of them. Um, they’re coming to the United States to learn more also.
They’re stepping out, that’s what I’m saying and so they’re changing what
people are seeing, what society sees them as a Third World country now.
(Elizabeth, 9)

Again, Elizabeth may have seen reflections of her own experiences with poverty in a
rural area of Texas as a black, single mother of two children with an abusive ex-husband.
She highlighted the significance of Third World women’s experiences breaking free of
the restrictions imposed on them by a post-colonial patriarchal structure, and saw her own path of breaking free mirrored. She admired their feminist aspirations and saw a validation for her own feminism. She saw the poverty stereotypes imposed by the Western world onto Third World women, and was thrilled to see that they were fighting back through feminism, just as she was. Overthrowing the stigma associated with being a black woman on welfare was very important for Elizabeth, as she wanted to ensure that this association did not also mar her children. There was a tangible connection for Elizabeth, between her experiences and those of Third World women. This connection was most instrumental in bringing her to feminism and prompting her to use feminism as an analytical tool for the examination of her own life experiences.

Lia was not so easily swayed. She had already taken great risks by confronting her parents and fiancé about their gender role expectations within marriage. She was not about to lose her preconceived notions about the joys of fertilization. Lia’s Psychology of Women class was in the process of reassessing the fertilization process through a feminist perspective. Lia was quite unhappy that her assumptions about fertilization were about to be dissected and most likely discarded. The following statement highlights this discomfort:

LT: Well, see that’s another thing about the class, that... I don’t know if it’s disturbing or what... What you just said reminded me of it, she should tie in things that seem normal, like the egg and the sperm thing... Um, in the past I always thought, it’s just fertilization, who cares who’s doing what. The sperm’s being fertilized [sic], but she says this is the female; this is the male and the woman’s being oppressed. I don’t see it as the woman being oppressed, I don’t know... But um, so sometimes, that’s the way the class makes me angry sometimes. (Lia, 9)

This course, with its emphasis on deconstructing the patriarchal, heteronormative way of looking at science was a source of irritation. On the one hand, the feminist perspective of
fertilization anoints the egg with some type of (traveling) agency. On the other hand, the patriarchal norm assumes that the egg is waiting patiently for the lucky sperm to win its race and fertilize it. This was quite problematic for Lia. She was angry with the professor for uprooting her assumptions and her prior education in this way. Lia was one of the only respondents who admitted being angry at the course and essentially taking out her frustrations on the messenger of feminist knowledge. However, she did value some of the detailed changes she felt compelled to make in her other educational pursuits. Not only had she had the courage to face the possible upheaval of her life by sharing her new views on marriage with her parents and fiancé as mentioned above, but like Kathy C. and Elizabeth, she also used some of the knowledge gained from the course in other classes. For example, she was asked to write an essay in her history class, and was conscious of her choice to abstain from using the general “he” and wrote the entire essay using “she” or “she/he.” This was quite significant to her because of the difficulty she faced while writing the essay. Since this change of language did not come naturally to her, it was quite time consuming. However, she asserted that it was worth the effort if she could make small changes in her own curriculum in this way. Thus, Lia’s efforts at a new feminist language seeped into her consciousness outside the limits of her Women’s Studies class. It is noteworthy that she was one of the more self-admittedly resistant participants to feminism, but that she took it upon herself to make changes in her everyday use of language to make it more gender equitable. Lia was conscious of the destructive power of gender inequitable language, so prevalent in everyday life.

This consciousness was present in some of the other interviewees’ narratives, and in many cases, they were only hesitantly able to name it as such. One of the last things
political beliefs and she said: “yes, I think so, because a man can be president, but a woman hasn’t been president and why not?” But then she said, “men know about the outside, but women know about the inside, the family stuff, the inside” (Aiko, 1). She was linking the personal with the political, suggesting that these traits would be valuable for a president, but she didn’t recognize it as such. She was cognizant that the private sphere is not given as much value as the public sphere in our society, but she exclaimed that in her view this is what women are good at. She finished by saying that her class had opened her eyes to that. While this may be following the essentialist view that women are more proficient at dealing with family, or are more emotional than men, she had made the distinction that these were not traits to be devalued. Rather, these would-be traits that, for her, would tend to make a good president. It is this burgeoning consciousness present in many of the participants to which we now turn, as the manifestation of feminism in the participants’ lives.

**Feminist Consciousness**

Awareness seemed to be the catch-all word participants used to describe their own understanding of consciousness in general. Indeed if one looks up “consciousness” in a thesaurus, the first definition is “awareness.” When it came to their own consciousness, especially feminist consciousness, thankfully some of the respondents were more forthcoming. Rosalind Delmar argues that feminist consciousness cannot be ascribed to people who don’t call themselves feminists (Delmar 2001, 9). However, I have disagreed with that assessment above. If feminism does not need to be pinned down with a
particular definition, neither should feminist consciousness suffer the same fate. Feminist scholars should encourage the fluidity of feminism, indeed that is what may make it more accessible to more women. Feminists should be inclusive of a multiplicity of ideas regardless of self-labeling or feminist identity. Thus, when searching through the interviews for narrative veins relevant to the topic of consciousness, I disregarded the self-labeling of the respondents. That is, whether they called themselves feminists or not, I still looked for awakenings of feminist consciousness in their responses.

Trinh Minh-ha refers to Roland Barthes’ “Interstice” when she speaks of feminist consciousness as an “in-between-the-naming space” (Trinh 1988, 112). It is not the accumulation of knowledge one gains in a Women’s Studies course, or anywhere else for that matter, but rather a process of politicization of the personal (Trinh 1988, 113). Thus, for some of the interviewees in this study, the process of taking a Women’s Studies course may have led to feminist consciousness. This process was by no means universal, as many of the respondents distanced themselves from any kind of feminist associations. However, it is significant to note that the experiences of the interviewees, as well as my own throughout this journey, were and have been full of contradictions and uncertainties. Indeed, as Trinh Minh-ha states, “the self is always in the making” (1988, 113). Thus, it would be hypocritical to assume that simply because respondents tell me that they do not call themselves feminists, they are necessarily anti-feminist or vice versa. That would be falling into those haunting traditional binary opposites and would disregard, indeed devalue the complexities the interviewees presented to me. This is also problematic because it implies that if the participants do not use a language that I am familiar with in the worlds that I inhabit, it would mean that I could not decipher it as productive.
narrative worthy of interpretation. This would necessarily close off some portions of the narratives that I might have considered as irrelevant. This process necessarily disturbs the categories I had so painstakingly set out at the beginning of the project. However, it is also possible that the participants might have spoken in a language that I am familiar with. Unfortunately, this would mean reproducing the power relations between myself, (the haole researcher) and the researched because they would be framing their narratives in an academic language that I may have imposed on them. I hope that I am well-versed enough in “local” discourse, whatever it entails, that I may have been able to circumvent these pitfalls. Consciousness and self-perception are so complicated, that they are more valuable if they are interpreted through the context of each narrative.

The ambiguities of consciousness led to the difficulties I encountered in defining it. I worked backwards from this problem by examining the goals of feminist consciousness and arrived at a working definition that way. In the most simplistic sense, I equated consciousness with self-esteem (or self-awareness) and estimated whether the goals of Women's Studies courses and programs was to raise it for individual women. While I did find that Women's Studies courses in academia were not particularly aiming for this goal, although it was not anathema to the ideals behind Women's Studies in general, I also found that Women’s Programs in the community college system on O‘ahu, such as Turning Point at Leeward Community College and the Single Parent-Displaced Homemaker program at Kapio`lani Community College, did explicitly include raising the self-esteem of their participants as one of their goals. Thus, there was a marked difference in the type of material the students encountered in the various courses and programs they were attending. The academic structure of Women's Studies followed
Trinh Minh-Ha's argument that "raising consciousness' in this context does not consist of telling people what they don’t know, but of awakening their reflective and critical ability [or I would argue abilities]" (Trinh 1988, 109). The programs developed at the community colleges served as a transitional ground for women returning to education after a relatively long hiatus. I argue then, that the goal of raising women's self-esteem is a precursor to the possibilities for critical feminist consciousness they would later encounter in Women's Studies courses or other courses at the university. Thus, raising feminist consciousness may have been an articulated goal in only one of the two venues, however it was the end result for some of the participants as they encountered new (to them) feminist materials in their Women's Studies courses.

There have been relatively few other studies that attempted to measure consciousness, but Joan Acker, Kate Barry, and Johanna Esseveld conducted one that does stand out. They performed unstructured, in-depth interviews to assess the "relation between changes in the structural situation of women and changes in consciousness" (Acker, Barry, Esseveld 1991, 137). Their work, while problematic because of the faith they have in the success of their study in assessing the totality of women's lives, is relevant to this project, since I am also attempting to identify a somewhat intangible process; feminist consciousness. However, they focused on women's movement into the paid labor force, after their respondents had primarily been stay-at-home mothers and wives. They did not account for, or even acknowledge the role that education might play in this transition. However, their hypothesis was very much similar to my own hopes about the respondents for this study. That is: do these women "come to see themselves differently as women and would reinterpret their problems, particularly in a social
context that includes a widely-discussed feminist movement?" (Acker, Barry, Esseveld 1991, 137). I have already discussed the essentialist nature of asking what any woman thinks as a woman (see Chapter One) and the same problems with my assumptions also apply here. However, the authors do assert that consciousness raising is one of the major components of the feminist movement (137) and if Women's Studies is the educational arm of the women's movement, then the connection between the two deserves to be highlighted once again. Certainly, examining the consciousness process as one that is beneficial not only to the participants, but also to other women who might come across these studies. It shows that "consciousness is important in a framework that views people as actors who intentionally try to affect their own situations" (Acker, Barry, Esseveld, 1991, 138).

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise conducted a more theoretical study of feminist consciousness, usefully describing consciousness as a continually evolving process (Stanley and Wise 1988, 121). They attempt to make the connection between the women's movement and its attendant consciousness raising groups with feminist consciousness almost twenty years later. They ground their study in their own experiences as feminist researchers during and after the heyday of the women's movement. Similarly to the aforementioned study in the previous paragraph, they do not look at education as a possible site of feminist consciousness raising activity. They do, however, express a similar notion of feminist consciousness as a process, with different stages (Stanley and Wise 1988, 119). These stages are not mutually exclusive, and they reveal a significant progress in thinking about feminist consciousness moving away from the binary opposition that it is something that one either has or doesn't have. Their
representation of feminist consciousness is more complex and allows for different
contents and expressions of feminist consciousness (Stanley and Wise 1988, 131).

As a part of this process, feminist consciousness is an expansion of awareness to
include a sense of agency in the participants' own lives. This process is the link between
consciousness and self-determination. Patricia Hill Collins writes about Black feminist
thought, but I would argue that her statements are applicable to a variety of feminists of
color. She asserts that "defining and valuing one’s consciousness of one's own self-
defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as the objectified
‘other’ is an important way of resisting the dehumanization essential to systems of
domination” (Hill Collins 1991, 39). Thus, consciousness is not only linked to
awareness, self-esteem and other psychological sounding terms, but to self-determination
as well. This last connection is the most important political motivator for many of the
women I interviewed. It will be revisited in Chapter Five, as it is also strongly associated
with identity.

As this chapter delves deeper into the respondents' narratives, I would first like to
start by exploring the basic concepts of the interviewees’ ideas of consciousness, and then
expand the range of narratives to include some specific discussions of issues in feminist
consciousness. Whether feminist consciousness was there to be awakened by Women's
Studies courses is as problematic as assuming that teachers can give empowerment to
their students, as we will see in the next chapter. The same dilemma exists for feminist
consciousness. How some of these women journeyed to their own feminist
consciousness varied widely. However, the end result was that for some of them, a
feminist consciousness was indeed awakened by a combination of the material and the
feminist pedagogy used in many of the Women's Studies classes I visited. For others, feminist consciousness was in its infant stages, even at the end of, or after the course. For others still, there was a consciousness of women’s issues and somewhat of an unclear conception that we live in a patriarchal society. These women were uncomfortable labeling their consciousness feminist in the same manner that they didn’t want to label themselves feminist – a fear of being associated with feminist radicals.

Basic Awareness

At the most fundamental level, consciousness and awareness are the same thing. For example, Luana joked about consciousness meaning “being awake.” When we explored the matter further, she revealed the following:

LN: My conscious level is that I see things how I want to see things. I judge how I want to judge and I know that’s the thing. Like being aware now, I’m a lot less judgmental. It takes off a lot of stress. It’s like a lot of things just slide off of... Like the big picture is bigger now and you know I don’t think about every little thing. (Luana, 8)

Luana’s life was filled with stress. Like Elizabeth and Pat, she had also left an abusive husband and was taking care of her two preteen children as well as her ex-marine father. It had taken her twenty years to break free of the cycle of abuse and she had enrolled in the Turning Point program to turn her life around after having had a series of what she called dead-end jobs. Education had not been highly valued in her family, but she was doing something valuable for herself by coming back to school. The act of defying her family’s expectations, both of the older and younger generations, was a deliberate act of resistance for Luana. Her consciousness during the Turning Point course, while not
necessarily feminist in name, was definitely such in content. It allowed her to recognize and name the cycle of domestic abuse she had been involved in. It has also led her to break it and ask her husband to move out. After he complied, a weight lifted off her shoulders and she felt a lot less stress. I can only imagine that the disappearance of the daily threat of physical abuse at the hands of one’s husband would qualify at the very least as “less stress.” Luana’s strength through this period, some of which was shepherded to emergence by her Turning Point course, was a result of this nascent consciousness about her right to not be a victim of domestic violence. Her “big picture” had expanded beyond her constant fear of being beaten, and she was able to look at the world with fresh eyes. This led to an enthusiastic approach to school, learning, mothering, caring for her elderly father, as well as a host of new activities Luana took on.

Elizabeth extrapolated the consciousness she was gaining from her course work and applied it to her view of the media. For her, being aware meant tuning into the news and paying attention to world events. When I asked her what consciousness meant, she replied:

EC: Um, (silence) aware, you know of what’s around you, what’s going on, and um, you know when I see TV or when I see the news, it’s like to me that’s consciousness. Cause you become aware of what’s really happening. You don’t really want to admit it, or sometimes, you want to avoid it, like just click the channel but you know, for some reason, it just catches you, like you want to be aware of what goin’ on. (Elizabeth, 8)

Elizabeth’s experience in her Third World Women course was a revelation that there were other viewpoints than a U.S.-centric perspective. As she was watching news programming, she was aware of the lack of Third World perspectives in the material depicted as news because of the newfound knowledge from her Women’s Studies class. Not only was she prepared to question the programming about its lack of Third World
perspective, but she also asked: "where are the women?" Her reading of the lack of a multi-layered perspective on the news then took a remarkable turn. Instead of lamenting the U.S.-centric approach to news and knowledge creation, she went further by superimposing her own life situation on top of that of Third World women.

When I pressed her about the implications of a lack of stories about Third World women in the news, her narrative took off in a completely different direction:

EC: Yeah, it is. Cause you know, I can see in Third World countries what really goes on, versus what we're going through, and how much opportunities we have, how much, you know, not only opportunities, how we're protected here, you know by our law, compared to what they do you know, in the other Third World countries and then you know, here in the United States, they say that if you're under $15,000, you're considered poverty. You know, you know, in those Third World countries, they are... they are poverty. You know, and here, I don't know why they base it on that, but I mean, I think we're really well off here. (Elizabeth, 9)

With all she had gone through, she was thankful that her situation was not as bad as that of some of the Third World women she was learning about. There was a lack of stories about Third world women in the news. Her Women's Studies course had made her aware of that. However, her consciousness of their situations led her to the revelation that she was thankful for her own situation. This turn of the conversation took me by surprise and I did not press the matter further. However, reexamining Elizabeth's narrative in its entirety, I can detect some portions of it that might have been reiterations of either sermons, or somewhat repressive church doctrine. Thus, while I was engaging a discussion with what I thought was an emerging feminist consciousness, Elizabeth's ties to her most likely non-feminist church surfaced and dashed my anticipation of pursuing the matter further.
Some of the other interviewees described their consciousness in plainer terms, using terms like “male” and “female” that did not require much in-depth probing. Rita spoke of her consciousness in the following way:

RL: Um, I think more like how gender difference and how I think more differently like about like women and um, you know female and male. How like a male… male culture, and female have their own ways, and how the females feel about it, and how like maybe they are really afraid of females… (Rita, 3)

Because English was Rita’s second language, I wanted to make sure I understood her correctly. Therefore, I asked whether she meant that men were afraid of women by her last statement. She told me she did. To Rita, a Women's Studies course was an awakening in itself. It is possible Rita may have been more ready than some of the other participants to engage with the subject matter in a meaningful way because while she missed her family in Taiwan very much, she was glad to be away from the restrictions her family’s culture placed on women. Rita’s consciousness still kept with the essentialist views she had taken of feminism, that men and women are essentially different, but she was almost proud that men could be afraid of women, as if that were something feminists were either striving for, or should have been striving for. Of course, this may have been Rita’s version of feminist consciousness as she was interested in concerning her own life. With regards to the various goals of feminism, some of the participants applied their new knowledge to their own lives, like Luana. Others used their knowledge to change the lives of others by fighting stereotypes.
Consciousness of Stereotypes

For some, the representation of feminist consciousness took the form of an awareness of stereotypes women face in our society. Thus, fighting those stereotypes for oneself, or pointing them out to others was central to the very definition of feminist consciousness. This is a specific manifestation of the more general awareness some of the respondents expressed above. For example, Annie applied her newfound familiarity with gender stereotypes by talking about them with her daughter. She stated:

AS: Um, I think... with my daughter. It’s just... it’s just amazing some of the research that is being presented in class... You know I’m just like blown away by it and realizations that I never even thought of before like, studies that show about role models for kids, how much better they do when they have a role model that’s of the same gender and just all that kind of stuff, so... wait what was I saying? (laughter) Yeah, I was just saying that I try to read her books, like a lot of male characters I change them to female characters. And um, I don’t know I’m just conscientious of everything else... I don’t know, pointing out girls that are doing things that are non-traditional careers or stuff like that. (Annie, 4)

Annie’s care in showing her daughter that women can be police officers, or firefighters, or that men can be nurses was central to her consciousness that she had grown up in a world where those stereotypes had never been pointed out to her. That is, she was adamant that her daughter could do or become anything she wanted, whether it was a traditionally male dominated field or not. Since I also change the names and genders of characters in my own daughter’s books, we spoke about the importance of female role models for girls that neither of us had had as young girls ourselves. None of the other mothers of daughters I spoke with expressed this type of agency while reading or speaking to our children. Thus, Annie was quite ahead of the rest of the participants in that respect. She took it one step further, by applying her consciousness to another level;
that of her future work endeavors. Another quote a bit further on in her narrative expresses this step:

AS: The class just basically exposes that these stereotypes really affect a lot of things on an unconscious level. You learn about stuff in class, about the education system, where the biases, not even most of the time, the teachers aren’t aware of the biases that it’s more attribute boys’ success to being smart and girls’ success to really trying hard or something like that. Um, that kind of stuff is interesting cause I want to be a teacher, and also what really interested me which I think about a lot is… studies that have shown women doing so much well… so much better with constant feedback, whereas men don’t… the feedback whether positive or negative are not as affected by it, and women [are] affected by feedback positive or negative is affecting greatly. I think that’s really interesting stuff. It translates to a lot of things, you know not just education, but relationships and a lot of other things (Annie, 6).

When I asked which studies she had read about gender biases in education, she mentioned Myra and David Sadker’s Failing at Fairness as well as the AAUW’s How Schools Shortchange Girls. We exchanged a few thoughts on each of the works and their implications for our daughters. When Annie spoke of engaging all her students, her nascent feminist consciousness transcended to a larger scale of impact. She was not just out to change her daughter’s views about stereotypes, she wanted to change her future students’ views as well. She vowed to remember the materials she had read in her Psychology of Women course and apply them to her own classes when she became a teacher. When I asked her about the feedback she was receiving in her own class, she was very enthusiastic. She was learning by pedagogical example. She told me that her professor was quite methodical about giving feedback on either written work or spoken comments. Annie felt she was learning more than just about the subject matter in this way, because the teacher herself was applying some of the concepts they were learning about in class to her own students. Thus, while Annie was not an education major, she
was still cognizant of teaching methods she was comfortable with and stored them away in her memory as tools to be deployed in her own teaching tool kit.

A much more reticent consciousness was emerging in Erin, who was enrolled in the same class as Annie. Since they were learning about the same topics, it is useful to compare the wide variance that exists between the two women's viewpoints. When I asked Erin whether she liked the course, she was hesitant:

EO: Yeah. I like it. It brings up important issues yeah about how women are discriminated against and you know how women are treated and stuff like that. And I guess until this class I didn't really... I wasn't really aware of you know, all that they went through I guess. (Erin, 4)

Erin was uncomfortable asserting herself throughout the whole interview, thus it should come as no great surprise that even if she had not liked the course, she would probably not have revealed it to me. She spoke in general terms about discrimination and stereotypes, but was reticent to use language that would express disagreement with the subject matter. She virtually recited a portion of the syllabus when I asked her what the course was about. The most important part of this quote, however, is not what Erin thought about the content of the course, but rather how she spoke of women in terms of "they." Even though Erin was very obviously a woman, she did not feel as if the topics of discrimination or stereotypes applied to her at all. It was almost as if the course was about "the Other" and that she was not a part of it at all. While Erin may have become conscious of gender stereotypes, they were not applicable to her. Any kinds of feminist ideals she may have learned were also applied to the Other.

Gardenia was similar in her stance on feminist consciousness. When I asked if she considered herself a feminist, she visibly recoiled. She laughed at the realization of her physical impulse and shrugged it off by telling me that I was the first person to ever
ask her that question. Unlike Erin, Gardenia's own reticence however, was rooted in her aversion to labels, not to a disagreement with the tenets of feminism. It wasn't feminist consciousness which was so awful, it was again the unfortunate label and association with militant feminists which had turned her off feminism in general. Gardenia did recognize that feminism could be useful for other women; she was quick to point that out. However, she asserted that she did not need feminism to fight her battles for her. The cult of individuality Gardenia projected may have stemmed from her association with Alcoholics Anonymous. This organization, while encouraging members to find sponsors to help with the fight against urges to consume alcohol, promotes the belief that it is ultimately one's own responsibility to win the battle against alcoholism.

There is a theme weaving through these narratives time and time again. Most of these women despised the label of feminism and wanted to use their narratives to separate themselves from anything to do with feminism, including feminist consciousness. While this is unfortunate, as far as labels are concerned, it is encouraging to note that there were a few women who embraced their feminist consciousness as it helped them discover a new way of thinking critically about the world surrounding them. Some of these realizations occurred in other classes. To these experiences we now turn.

**Art and Feminist Consciousness**

I would like to use one respondent's narrative as a case study within the larger framework of this project, as an example of the awakening to the existing lack of women in the curriculum. Art is an interesting discipline, because it encompasses such a
diversity of practices. Art history, sculpting, painting, jewelry making, photography, as well as many others, all fall under the umbrella of art. Indeed, if one looks at a course catalog, art is one of the disciplines with the most available and varied classes. Marcia had heard positive things about Women's Studies classes and was eager to take one herself so that she could apply what she was learning to her own art-making as well as her art classes. When I asked her what prompted her to take her introductory Women's Studies course, besides recommendations from friends, she explained:

M: I think...I think it just got my interest because, like I said, as an art student, I know that women artists are missing in art history and that kind of made me realize that they were missing in other kinds of history and I've taken history classes since I've been here, and we covered the witch hunting, when that happened, I guess that was the middle ages, and I was just curious, why would that happen? And why would they allow it? And that was kind of why I wanted to get into the women's movement to see what was there and maybe get some answers on feminism. (Marcia, 4)

Marcia's curiosity about feminism may have made her more receptive to opening herself up to a feminist consciousness. Indeed, she is an example of a participant who was ready to learn about women’s issues and feminism. She was at an unstable place in her life, not knowing whether she would stay with her husband or leave him because of some difficulties they were facing in their relationship. She did not elaborate on the nature of the problems, she just stated that the next few months would be critical in determining the fate of her marriage. She was relatively new to Hawai‘i and had brought two children with her to the marriage from a previous relationship. She wanted to question the basic assumptions behind her marriage, and used the material from her Women's Studies course to do so. Her method was quite unorthodox, however. She would spend as much time as possible at school producing pieces of art. One particular piece she mentioned
was reflective of her mood. She was in the process of making clay chandeliers. Here is how she described it:

M: My artwork, I’m dealing with like light type whimsical [sic] work. And then also I tend to do a lot of work like, I’m making a clay you know, and light counterposing each other in the form of... Like right now I’m working on clay chandeliers which you have obscurity of clay and you have the medium of light and you put the two together to illuminate an area and you’re defying the... the whole make up of what clay is really about and then you’ve got this medium of light. And I had to work through the concept behind that I don’t... I think that you’re dealing with two opposing media and you’re trying to make them work together and,... and then I started thinking about my life and how I’m trying to make... I’m in the dark where my relationship is, but I’m trying to continue it, so it’s really interesting. I’ve kind of connected that not being able to see the light, because of the obscurity in my life... (Marcia, 10)

She explained to me that it was in and of itself an unusual undertaking since clay is usually considered to be too heavy a material for a chandelier. However, she asserted that it reflected her current mood. The heavy clay represented her marriage, and the light shining through the clay in various patterns represented her hope that was slowly beginning to emerge. Whether the hope was that her marriage would survive this turbulent period or not was unclear, both to her and to me. However, her Women’s Studies course was helping her use the light that was coming through to make changes within herself. Her relatively emerging feminist consciousness led her to take this course, but its material affirmed her belief in the women’s movement, feminism in general, and in herself.

The knowledge gains she was making also helped Marcia make some connections with some of her other classes. She was troubled that women were excluded from much of the art history curriculum. She structured her narrative in the following way:

M: Right, a friend of mine was taking a more advanced Women’s Studies class, and she was just so enthusiastic about the whole concept of the class
and as an artist, you look at a lot of art work and you realize that a lot of the women’s artwork is missing and I guess you don’t really figure that out as much in your history classes, as much you know that there are artists that are women and they do really good work and they’re missing from the books. So it’s kind of opened my eyes that it is missing in the art books, and it is missing in the history books. So that’s why I wanted to take this class. (Marcia, 4)

These connections were made evident by Marcia’s further exploration of these missing women artists. She took it upon herself to do some research on women artists and was quite enthusiastic about what she had found. This led to an even greater frustration at her art history curriculum and its teachers. On her own time, she had easily found works of art by women, but they were never discussed in her classes. She felt her teachers should have made more of an effort to offer this material to their students in order to present a balanced picture of the art world. When we spoke, she was considering confronting her teachers about this discrepancy and expressed that the reasons behind doing this research on women artists had stemmed directly from her introductory Women’s Studies course. Thus, Marcia’s feminist consciousness had woven itself into her other educational endeavors, much as Annie’s had into her role as a mother, or Luana’s had into her decision to ask her abusive husband to leave. These connections are what make feminist consciousness so important a topic of discussion. It is through these connections that we discover the far reaching impact not only of Women’s Studies courses but of feminism as well. These far reaching implications had an enormous impact on Nikki, the next woman who wanted to use her knowledge to change lives.
Feminist Consciousness and Politics (and lack thereof)

Nikki is the respondent who best illustrated a fundamental change in her own person as a result of her experiences in a Women's Studies program. While she was trying to change her own life situation, she thought it was important to spread the message of what she had learned as widely as possible. Like Marcia, Nikki was trapped in a marriage she felt was on its way to disintegrating. She was a haole woman who had married a local haole man from Waianae. While they were both white, the culture he had grown up with was so different from her New Jersey upbringing that she felt that after five years, there was a gap she was not going to be able to bridge. Nikki was also an artist and had found ways to divert her attention from her problems through her art. She made miniature five-sided boxes with landscape scenery inside, using materials she found on the beach, in the mountains, or wherever the scene was supposed to represent. She put her soul into those boxes and sold them to whomever would buy them. After moving from her comfort zone of Kaimuki, where she had found a community, to her husband's family home in Waianae, Nikki stopped selling her boxes. She continued making them, and continued putting her heart into them, but she no longer sold them. She did not want to divest herself of her soul by selling them any longer. Her move to Waianae was extremely traumatic, and her Women's Studies course helped her make sense of her expected role in her marriage. She stated:

NO: ... But when I moved to Waianae, it was such a ... I pulled myself, without knowing it and it's not Bob's fault or anything, but I pulled myself out of a comfortable thing that I had, thinking “Oh, I could handle anything,” plus women have the idea, “well, if I don’t move where he lives or where he wants, oh I’ll lose him.” Well, I wouldn’t make that mistake again, cause I tried to have that in the back of my mind, “well, I
better go where he lives or he won’t,” you know kind of a thing. And that’s such a... that, that, I mean, that’s such a... I must not have valued myself very much. And then you think, the woman thinks again she can handle it, “I can handle everything. I’ll just fix up the house and I can handle...” And I couldn’t. (Nikki, 20)

The realization that the only reason she was expected to “handle everything” was because she was a woman was shocking to her. She was even reticent to acknowledge her husband’s complicit role in establishing this order in their household. When they married, he simply expected her to uproot herself and move to his home on the other side of the island. Nikki had a very difficult time adjusting, and after five years, was ready to leave her husband, even if on a temporary basis. Indeed, they had bought a house in Hilo and Nikki was considering moving there, since she had no regular work on O‘ahu, and finding the value of her self again through her art. Her Women’s Studies course became a site of resistance to an oppressive relationship. She was able to discuss her situation with other women with similar experiences. Her teacher helped them all make sense of their experiences within the greater context of a patriarchal society. At the beginning, Nikki was reluctant to engage in one particular aspect of this resistance. Since she was haole, and most of her neighbors in Waianae were not, she was mired in racist ideologies about the ways one should take care of one’s property. Coming from a working class background on the mainland, the American Dream of owning one’s own home was at the forefront of her mind. Her husband’s family had owned the property they were living on for some time. She was confident of her embeddedness in the American Dream, by marriage of course, since she herself had not worked to buy the property. However, since she thought her neighbors didn’t take pride in their homes, she immediately assumed that there could be no common ground between her and local people in Hawai‘i in general.
Thus, when confronted with mostly local women in the Turning Point program at Kapio'lan Community College, she was reticent to acknowledge the similarities in their situations. Again, due to her own mainland haole cultural background, Nikki was comfortable talking in class, and saw no value in listening to others, especially women of color. This is a marked contrast to Marcia's efforts at learning to listen that we encountered earlier in this chapter. However, as the semester wore on, Nikki was indeed struck with the similarities of her own experiences with those of her fellow students. Unfortunately, she was not ready to examine any type of racial privilege she may have received throughout her life, but she did speak with a respectful fondness of her classmates. Due to her fiery explanations of her experiences with her neighbors, this was quite a radical shift in thinking.

Feminist consciousness may have played a small part in Nikki’s understanding of her accepted role as a wife in our society, but it also led to a greater comprehension of the fact that if these types of feelings were rising inside her, they might well be doing the same in others. Thus, she felt it was important for other women to become involved in the Turning Point program so that they too could come to put their lives in a larger feminist context. Nikki spoke about this process of this transformation in the following way:

NO: Uh, yeah, I think so. Just about what was inside of me that I, you know is there, but again, until you know is there, but until you get it out and I'm here I'm gettin' it out, you get upset. I didn't get upset where I'm making a scene, but you get... at people that hardly even know it. Like it didn't matter. Stuff's comin' up, stuff's that I felt was so unfair, unjust, you know. About how women are treated in the workplace, and how we're used in advertising to sell you know and that kind of stuff. I'm like when is this crap gonna stop! And our teacher's just like "well it isn't!" kind of thing. I'm just like, you know... Like where I'm from... If I face it head on, I'll get myself into trouble cause I'm not staying in the perimeters. You
know, cause I’ll punch the guy out you know, then I’ll get thrown into jail, that kind of thing. So I know I have work to do... I know I wouldn’t be good at political rally, cause I’d have everyone fighting. We’d be all fighting (laughter). It’s better if I write my feelings down, you know and someone else can read them. (Nikki, 16)

What is most important in this narrative is not the obvious confusion with which Nikki is speaking of her transformation. She is going in many different directions as she is speaking about her experiences with the course. This is a reflection of the various directions her own life was in the process of taking. She even refers to a political rally as an expression of her frustration with the issues addressed in her Women’s Studies course. This exemplifies the image of the militant feminists at a rally again, which Nikki evoked even without speaking the word “feminist.” But it also shows that for Nikki, those connotations may not have been all that negative. Indeed, she thought herself too radical for a rally, since she asserted that under her leadership, everyone would be coming to blows with each other. Notably, Nikki underwent a transformation from a wife, a woman who didn’t value herself very much to imagining herself as a leader in a political rally. Happily, this kind of feminist consciousness was ongoing, since she still thought she had much work to do, even though it had been a year and a half since she had been enrolled in the Turning Point program. Lastly, another important point in her narrative is echoed in the last sentence of the quote. Nikki thought she would be most effective as a writer of sorts, or a chronicler of emotions that she was experiencing. She felt that this could be her most meaningful contribution to the larger society. This is how her willingness to make a difference was manifested in her feminist consciousness.

Trinh Minh-ha has written about the process of feminist consciousness quite usefully. As we have seen, similarly to feminism, consciousness isn’t something one
either has or doesn’t have. As Trinh argues, consciousness is not the result of an accumulation of knowledge and experience but the term of an “ongoing unsettling process” (Trinh 1989, 40). This reinforces feminist claims that Women’s Studies engages, encourages, and unsettles patriarchal knowledge creation. It also reinforces the process that many of the participants engaged as they made their way through their paths post-Women’s Studies. Of course, not all the participants were finished with their courses. And even those who were may not have been embedded in a theoretical understanding of consciousness as a process of coming to awareness in relations. Indeed, Rosi Braidotti writes about consciousness as “a multiple and complex process of transformation and a flux of multiple becomings. Accordingly, the thinking subject is not the expression of in-depth interiority, nor is it the enactment of transcendental models of reflexive consciousness” (Braidotti, 2001, 77). Thus, it is clear that the participants are clearly involved in this flux, this uncertainty. As Marcia was trying to learn to be a more empathetic listener, as Shu was using her art as her communicative medium for feminism in her life, as writing might have been a catharsis for Nikki, speaking about their experiences may have been the same for many of the other participants. Thus, we turn to voice as a manifestation of the feminist consciousness discussed above.

**VOICE**

It was quite difficult to find a question that addressed and somehow assessed voice specifically while still leaving the interviews open to the meandering narratives of the participants. I started by asking whether the interviewees felt comfortable talking in
class and whether they had experienced an increase in participation towards the end of their respective semesters as compared to the beginning of the class. For some respondents, there was a clear-cut increase that they were able to discern, for themselves and for me. For others, asking whether their Women's Studies course helped them express themselves differently seemed to be more conducive to a response which spoke to a new language learned in class. Indeed, some respondents were eager to share their knowledge with anyone who would listen, friends, family, significant others, classmates. Trinh Minh-ha speaks of Helene Cixous’ who asserts that “‘life only gives in proportion to what one gives to it, ... it’s the same for words” (Trinh 1988, 132). The feminist language found in Women's Studies course gives students opportunities to grow and share their voice/knowledge with each other or with others outside the realm of academia. This space allows students to “denounce the shortcomings of existing language and its failure to translate women’s truths” (Trinh 1988, 129). As Gail Griffin filled a void at her university by offering to talk a feminist language with her students (see Chapters One and Two), many Women's Studies teachers engage in the same process even if it is just by encouraging women to speak about their experiences in order to help them recognize their value. Speaking out for many women, and especially for women of color entails danger. To quote Trinh Minh-ha again: “excluded from the named, she must also and ceaselessly work on language in order to make it permeable to feminine concepts, and for that difficult task, all the paths are lined with brambles” (Trinh 1988, 136). Women creating their voices and coming to a feminist language within the space of a Women's Studies course are walking down that path. In Hawai‘i, with its colonial past and strong Asian influence, not only is the path lined with brambles, it is mired in mud and
progresses on a steep incline. One constantly thinks one sees the end of the path, but it belies yet another bend in the path and therefore the journey. Coming into one’s voice, a difficult process fraught with danger and uncertainty, is a political act in itself. Helene Cixous likens it to a transgression and rebirth (quoted in Trinh 1988, 138). Voice entails a new beginning and a new language, often tentative, with which many of the respondents spoke to me. I was privileged to be a witness to these acts of transgression within the context of these interviews. The narratives that emerged with regards to voice are some of the richest of the interviews as a whole. Sometimes they were spoken with hesitance, and other times with force. Sometimes an answer took much probing from me, and other times a floodgate would open and some of the very things that had sparked participation in their respective Women’s Studies courses manifested themselves again. For those interviewees who were enthusiastic about the interviews, it is possible that the space of the interview could have been another feminist opportunity to engage the material they were/had been exposed to in their respective Women's Studies classes. Thus, the interview itself may have, in some cases, reproduced the experience of the class. This variety of responses reinforces the notion that feminist consciousness, through voice, is a process of becoming. Rosi Braidotti talks about it as an intransitive process [which] does not comprise becoming anything in particular, but only what one is attracted to and capable of sustaining to life’s edge, but not over it.... Even though not deprived of violence, becoming is deeply compassionate, forming an ethical and political sensibility that begins with the recognition of one’s limitations as the necessary counterpart of one’s forces or intensive encounters with multiple others. It has to do with the adequacy of one’s intensity to the modes and time of its enactment. It can only be embodied and embedded, because it is interrelational and collective (Braidotti 2001, 185).
As we will see below, the various ways the participants came into their voices support Braidotti’s assertions of embeddedness, collectivity, and interrelationality. Many of the interviewees were afforded the space to undergo this process in a Women's Studies class for the first time. This process was by no means linear. Indeed, it was often “intensive, zigzagging, cyclical and messy” (Braidotti, 2001, 187). Besides its end result, helping most of the interviewees create and/or discover their voices, the process highlighted the shift of “emphasis from Being to becoming” (Braidotti 2001, 187). This process is what most of the interviewees found so useful in their respective Women's Studies classes and voice seemed to be the most evident, physical manifestation of that development.

As we saw in earlier in this chapter as well as in Chapter One, feminism is a continuum. However, many of the interviewees chose to structure it not only as an either/or position. Within that dichotomy existed another, that of radical/liberal. Yet again, this illustrates the prevalence of the traditional Western dualistic thinking ingrained in so many of us. For many of the respondents, the concept of voice shared this dualistic structure. They either participated in class, or not, they either spoke a different, richer language after the class or not. But within those dualistic structures exist some wonderfully rich moments in the narratives. To illustrate the complexities of these responses, we now turn to the interviewees’ voice creation experiences.

**Participation**

As stated above, participation is quite difficult to identify, particularly since it was up to each respondent to gauge her own level of participation in the class. At first, I
simply equated participation with voice creation. However, as the interviews wore on, I became aware of a void that the simple causal relationship between voice and participation entailed. I then started asking the women whether their respective Women's Studies courses helped them express themselves differently. This led to a greater complexity of my understanding of what it means to create one's voice in the process of a Women's Studies course. When a feminist language enters the picture, the brambles on the path slowly start to diminish, the earth gets firmer, and the incline seems a little less daunting. The use of a feminist language enables the creation of voice. Still, participation initially seemed to be the best indicator of voice. Feeling comfortable in one's ability to participate in a class discussion necessarily entails a certain assertiveness, lacking if one's known voice/language is silence. One woman who did express a newfound voice was Chai. She was almost adamant in repeating my own words back to me:

I: Did you talk more in the beginning...

CM: No, I usually don't in the beginning because I don't know...

I: Did you talk in the end? I just mean over the nine weeks...

CM: Yeah.

I: Did the class help you express yourself differently?

CM: I think it encouraged us to be very um, (silence) to be free to express ourselves. (Chai, 7)

Chai's reluctance to speak in the interview about this particular topic is revealing, since she happily talked about the material she learned in class, as well as the teacher. However, when it came time to analyze her own participation in the class, it was almost as if she was frozen. Her voice simply would not come to her when she needed it most. I
had to ask her three questions in order for her to repeat my own words to me. Chai was comfortable hiding behind the subject matter of the course in the interview, but she did not want to separate herself from it and stand alone in the harsh reality of the world without the cloak of silence behind which to hide. The one-on-one interview format made Chai feel awkward because she was used to a community of women in her class to help her through those difficult moments. When she was faced with an unknown interloper, she was reluctant to share her voice with me. This points to the collective dimension in the class that is necessarily absent in a one-on-one interview setting. It is also indicative of the changing nature of voice. It can be used and deployed at any time, to the speaker’s convenience. When silence is a better option, many women choose it as an alternative to speaking out. A feminist voice is not necessarily deployed at all times. Many of the respondents were context-attentive and easily maneuvered between voice and silence, silence and language. Mimi’s experience with voice expresses that shift in context perfectly. She had differing levels of participation in different classes. She gave the following example: “yeah, if it’s too big, then maybe I wouldn’t be speaking out, but it was a small class, all women, it wasn’t as hard to speak out” (Mimi H. 9). A large class would inhibit her participation, but her Turning Point class created a comfort zone within which she was at ease speaking about her experiences. Not only did she know they would be valued, but she also knew there would be other experiences similar to her own, which encouraged her participation even further.

Another respondent, whether she was able to feel comfortable in her courses or not, was still reluctant to share her own thoughts with her fellow students. Indeed, she asserted that she would be “wasting her [teacher’s] time with my thoughts. I would
rather hear her thoughts. I’m there to learn” (Kathy C., 8). We have already examined this statement’s significance with regards to feminist consciousness, but with regards to voice, it takes on an entirely different meaning. That is, Kathy C. did not value her own knowledge enough to share it with others. She was ambivalent about participation in general at best, and with regards to her own speaking role in the classroom, she was emphatically negative.

Conversely, Martha was eager to share her experiences with the other students in her course. Indeed, she was taken aback when not everyone wanted to share their ideas and experiences as much as she did. When I asked her if she had a high level of participation, she replied with the following statement:

M: Ummm (silence) I think it could have, but I’ve always been so expressive, so you know I’m sure for those who… Like I said I noticed other women who couldn’t speak, you know learn to express themselves just like… you know writing more, or reading more. To be able to really stand up in front of another class and share what I read, I would say yeah, it helps. It helps a lot. (Martha, 8)

Martha’s experience is somewhat atypical of the other respondents’ experiences not only because she was aware of the other students’ level of participation, but also because she recognized the value in other types of participation, through reading and writing for example. Speaking out in class is not the only form of participation. Indeed, the written voice can be just as liberating as the spoken voice. Martha was the only respondent who attributed value to these alternative types of participation. She even put herself in the place of the other students who may not have been as expressive as she was to begin with, and recognized that the class may actually have increased their levels of participation. When we probed this topic a little more, she said:
M: Some took a little bit longer. But I would say, I would say like 95% percent at least opened up. Like some of them (silence) even just coming... you know they could barely even say anything, and it was just so heavy, and so getting the emotion out of them, was just like you know it’s affecting me. In the beginning, we would just sit there. It was pretty vulnerable. One girl, it was just way above her. Like she was just in a different league. I don’t know why, she was you know, you wonder why someone is there, just because, I was there because I’m able to talk, and I was like “I’m gonna get something out of this.” It was the same way that the other women were there and got something out of it. (Martha, 10)

Martha’s perception increased even further when she realized that for some women, coming to class was an act of resistance in itself. When she became aware of their respective experiences as the class wore on, she realized just how difficult coming to the class was, let alone speaking out in it. She assessed the vulnerability of the rest of the students and tried to make them feel more comfortable by speaking out herself. Martha is Hawaiian, therefore, the context of a Women in Transition course at Leeward Community College was not at all foreign to her. In fact, she emerged as a leader in her course, shepherding other women to their own voices. The other students may have been comfortable with Martha, since she had come to this class just as they had, in some type of life transition. For Martha, who was determined to get something out of the class, being that leader helped her make progress in her other courses. When I talked to Martha, she had already transferred to West O’ahu and was on her way to getting her Bachelor’s degree in Political Science. She told me that even though she had not taken the Women in Transition course during her earliest semester at Leeward, she felt she should have, because she would have been able to get more out of it. She was encouraged to see that the other students were just beginning their college careers, and she thought that the class would be of great benefit to them. It is possible that Martha became the class leader because she was already familiar with the educational process at
Leeward Community College. Even if this was the case, she was emphatic about letting me know that the class was still very useful to her and her educational endeavors.

Yuki was also enthusiastic about the knowledge she had gained in her Women's Studies course, but unfortunately, she was not able to apply it to that particular course. For Yuki, the language barrier was quite infuriating. She was not a native English speaker. Indeed, she had only been in the United States for a few months when I spoke with her. She had a remarkable handle on English, yet did not feel comfortable participating in class discussion, whether in her Women's Studies course, or any other course for that matter. This exchange testifies to that discomfort:

I: Oh, wow OK. And so do you talk a lot in the class?

Y: No. First, I'm an international student, so I do not know what I want to say as fast as I want to. So, sometimes, I speak if I have a question, but the language barrier is very big, so not very often.

I: Oh, OK. And it's only because of the language? Or is it because you don't feel comfortable in the class?

Y: Only the language. I like speaking. I like expressing my thoughts, my opinions. That is not wrong. But unfortunately, I can't speak like without thinking for long time, so I cannot. (Masako, 5-6)

Yuki was uncomfortable speaking English in the first place, let alone facing the pressures of speaking in a large class, Women's Studies or not. She apologized profusely to me for her "terrible English" during the interview. When I reassured her that her English was fine, she dismissed me and apologized again. Yuki's life had been an incredible journey. Coming to Women's Studies was no small feat for a woman who had been trapped in an arranged marriage in Japan for many years. She had dared to divorce, something so unimaginable to her family that she was no longer on good terms with them. She had also worked in a traditionally male-dominated field, as a sales representative for heavy
equipment all over the world. She had had to overcome many stereotypes and biases in order to come to Hawai‘i to get her coveted Women’s Studies education. Even though she had only been here for a short time, she already knew that she wanted to major in Women’s Studies. To make matters even better, she wanted to bring Women’s Studies back to Japan with her and teach it in schools and universities there. Thus, Yuki’s voice may not have been directly linked to her participation, but her desire to bring feminist thinking to her own country would definitely count as voice creation. If the courses had been held in Japanese, I am certain that Yuki would have been a primary contributor to the class discussions. Only because she was embarrassed about her English language skills was she reluctant to speak out. When I encouraged her to increase her participation, knowing that her teacher would not look unfavorably upon it, she shyly told me that she would think about it. This encouragement is illustrative of my own position as a feminist teacher within this research. In some cases, I provided some information about transferring, or majoring in Women’s Studies, or gave out a phone number where more detailed information could be obtained. In Yuki’s case, I encouraged her to speak up in her class more often. This embraces my own feminist teaching within the research I do about feminist teaching and learning. Often, I think I would be glad if an outsider came to encourage those students less inclined to participate to speak out because as feminism was an international language for Yuki, and indeed for many of the other women I interviewed, it can also play that role for my own students. Feminist language(s)’ possibilities were only this transparent with international students however.

It is possible then, that since the women who felt comfortable with English did not have
the language barrier to overcome, they were not as aware of the internationality of the feminist language, as well as its appeal to women all over the world.

Feminist Language(s)

A few of the participants noticed the link between feminism and voice creation. They were able to make the connection between the material they were learning in class and the ability to speak out about a wide variety of things, ranging from sending unsatisfactory food back to the kitchen in a restaurant, to speaking out about discrimination at work. Interestingly, some of the more recalcitrant feminists were the ones who made those connections. Perhaps for them, the difficulty of coming to feminism entailed more thought (and sometimes emotions) than for the others who had easily embraced it. For example, not only did Kathy X.’s feminism awaken her to the discrimination she was experiencing at work, it gave her a language with which to fight it, as well as the bravery to do so. She told me that:

KX: ... the whole thing about feminism, I got angry you know, and it was the first time I’ve gotten angry in a class in a long time. You know being in Hawai‘i, it’s pretty laid back. A lot of times you learn... I had [unintelligible] and things happen you know and you let it slide. And I’ve started calling them on it lately for some reason, I think because of a reminder of what’s been brought up in the class. It makes me feel better if I speak up about it. (Kathy X., 5)

Kathy X.’s class made her angry about the situations she was facing at work. In the context of the all male environment in which she worked, she used the feminist language she gained in the class, as well as the voice it had helped her create. This did not seem like a huge stretch for Kathy X. as she was really outspoken to begin with. She did
explicitly mention that usually, when confronted with an argument, she lacked the words with which to argue back. She thought her Women's Studies course was helping her overcome this barrier by giving her the tools with which to argue back and as she put it, “win.” Thus, not only was the Women's Studies class itself a site of resistance for Kathy X., that site was expanding to other areas of her life.

Another example of a woman who gained an increased sense of agency in her life was Luana. We have already examined her remarkable journey from a victim of domestic violence to that of a confident student and mother earlier in this chapter. The significance of her rising feminist consciousness is also directly linked to her voice creation. Even in the most minute of ways, Luana was more confident taking charge of her life. It was quite an achievement for her to send food back in a restaurant, but most significant is that Luana had taken the Turning Point class at Kapi'olani Community College over a year and a half prior to our interview and she was still reaping its benefits:

LN: Hmmm (affirmative). I think there's a lot of things I think that I still carry over from the class. A lot of things that before I thought were not OK to do, it is OK now. That I will say something if... like in a restaurant, if you're not happy with something, then don’t feel bad about sending it back or something like that. Whereas before I'd just leave it or order something else, but now it's like yeah, I do a lot better speaking up for myself. I'm not the doormat anymore (laughter) (Luana, 9)

Luana's interview was filled with laughter, even though we were in the Kapi'olani Community College library and we were asked to be quiet several times. However, understanding that asking for quality food in a restaurant was only the tip of the iceberg for Luana is crucial. She used the restaurant as an example, but her narrative was filled with examples of her new assertiveness. Thus, for Luana feminist language and voice were inextricably linked. Knowing that she had the right to ask for a new plate was the
center of her understanding of her value as a woman in this society. We must remember that Luana was from a Portuguese cultural background, which in Hawai`i is continually stereotyped in jokes for being too talkative. It is thus noteworthy that Luana, even having been raised in Hawai`i with that cultural background, had not wanted to speak out about the wide range of injustices she had experienced. Women's Studies offered her the space to become comfortable with her assertiveness. Like Martha, Luana became a leader in her Women's Studies class, setting the example for the other women that they too could make the best of their life changes. When she asked her husband to leave, she was eager to share the experience with her fellow students. She applied what they had learned in class about the cycle of domestic violence and had the courage to break it in her own life. Luana enjoyed her leadership role, however, where Martha was a little more recalcitrant. Martha ended up getting into several confrontations over the course of the semester with another student, a mainland haole. Martha took pride in her Hawaiianess, and was angry that a newcomer would insult her home by complaining about the high crime rate and the lack of courtesy of local people, among a host of other grievances. Martha's entire experience with voice in the class was defined by her change of attitude towards this other woman.

M: and I’m so expressive and I would leave there sometimes really upset and it started getting personal. And I was like “why is it personal when it’s just, she’s so different” and you know, she means well, and um, it was... I just felt like this close, just because I knew how she thought and she shouldn’t be here... “If you think it’s so bad and the crime rate is so bad, and you have so much pressure, why are you here? Why don’t you go back to San Francisco?” I mean in a nice way, but I was like, “you don’t have to be here” I don’t think it’s all that bad. I leave the kids at Sunset Park for a couple of hours. I totally trust it here. I’m never worried about it. Someone’s gonna take care of my kid. She was like “no, there’s so much crime...” and definitely what I got out of it at the end was I learned to speak... I learned to understand to see it from her [point of
view] not that I liked it, but it made me at least open up enough to see the other side, where before, I was like I don't want to see the other side cause it's wrong. But by the end, I was able to just say OK, that's just how she feels even if I don't like it. (Martha, 7)

Even though Martha was comfortable expressing herself from the beginning of the semester, it took a series of confrontations with the aforementioned student to encourage her to examine her own attitudes towards people with different cultures and experiences. It would seem unfortunate that in this case the woman in the traditionally subordinate racial position was forced to change her way of thinking to accommodate the haole woman's way of thinking. However, it became apparent as we spoke at greater length on the subject that what emerged was a mutual respect for one another. The mainland haole woman and Martha encouraged each other to respect perspectives different from their own. This led to an overall change in the class atmosphere, so that towards the end of the class, most of the women were comfortable talking with each other about their respective experiences. Since I was not able to interview anyone else from Martha's class, I am not sure if everyone felt this way. It is possible that Martha's cathartic confrontations that led her to a greater understanding of the other woman were not reciprocated. Of that I will never be sure. However, Martha's perception of the role those confrontations played is significant to the understanding of voice creation not only as a difficult process, but also one that engages the students' entire beings, thoughts, and emotions. The fact that Women's Studies courses can be a space for those developments to occur is somewhat of a phenomenon in itself. Feminist pedagogy, which encourages discussion and values women's experiences as constructive learning tools, is central to this process.

Voice creation and learning feminist language seem to have been most aided by some sort of a cathartic process after which the respondents were comfortable asserting
their new skills. That is, as with Martha’s experience discussed above, for many of the respondents, voice may have come slowly over the elapsed time in the Women’s Studies course, but it was usually one significant event which pushed it to the forefront. For example, Nikki said:

NO: Sometimes I did, and sometimes I’d be quiet, when you’re taking in the information. But yeah, when a button got pushed or something, I made myself known, cause I’m not shy... That’s what we’re there for, you know, that’s what we’re there for and so.

I: Did the other people talk too?

NO: Hmmm, yeah, everybody did. Some of them in the beginning were really quiet. There was only two of us that were talking, you know “I think that’s a bunch of bull crap,” or something like that we would all, you know... But boy, by the end of the six weeks the quiet ones were pipin’ up too, were talking too, so... (Nikki, 18)

Nikki’s “buttons” had to get pushed before she would assert herself in class. Knowing what we know from Nikki’s haole cultural background, it is not surprising that she was speaking out in class. However, it is also significant to note that she noticed the increase in participation on the part of her classmates. As mentioned above, the great cultural divide faced by Nikki and her classmates would have seemed to be unbridgeable, but over the time of the course, Nikki did seem to gain respect for her classmates’ viewpoints and perspectives, perhaps precisely because the increase in participation was palpable and this is a trait that Nikki would have had respect for in the first place. To illustrate this, we can see the change in Nikki’s attitudes towards her fellow classmates in this example:

NO: ...But everyone’s telling her, “You’re a great nurse” and she’s wondering “how come I’m not happy nursing?” I think women in general just always think, “well, I’ll put on a happy face,” and “hey happy you gotta great husband, a great job and what more could you ask for?” And well why can’t we ask for more? (laughter) So I was one of the loudmouths in the class goin’ “so why is this and why is that?” (Nikki, 9)
Speaking in terms of her own voice, as one of the “loudmouths” in the class (and I don’t think there were many others) Nikki did recognize the difficulties some of the other women might have faced in their own lives. Nikki’s recollection of this other woman’s experience with nursing is relevant not only to her own voice conception, but also to her understanding of women’s role in society. By the end of the class, Nikki was confident that women should not have to put up with what they are freely given in this society, rather they should “ask for more.” Her explanation of society’s expectation of a woman’s satisfaction with having a husband and a job led to her understanding of the insufficiency of those things if they are not what makes that particular woman happy. Nikki was comfortable rebelling against the societal dictate that women should be happy with what they have because she was coming to terms with living out that particular struggle. As we saw above, Nikki was in the process of deciding whether to leave her husband, either on a short-term separation basis, or for good. Her Turning Point course helped her to see that there were other options out there for her, and that she should take them if she could. Ironically, her husband, in an attempt to make her happy, had encouraged her to return to school. I am not sure if he knew that she had chosen to take this particular course. I am also not implying that a separation may have been good for Nikki and not for her husband. As I did not speak with him, I cannot make that claim. It is simply interesting to note that Nikki’s already present voice was able to speak the language of feminism after the end of her Women’s Studies course. Like Luana, it had also been almost a year and a half since Nikki had taken her course, and she was still engaged in the decision-making process with regards to her relationship with her husband. Thus, voice creation or in Nikki’s particular case, voice rejuvenation may have
been more prevalent during the time of the class and waned off slowly after the class had ended. It seems as if for those women who went through with the major life changes during the course of the semester, the long-term effects of voice creation were more apparent than for those interviewees who simply contemplated making major decisions about their lives.

Regardless of these differences, one of the common threads weaving throughout the interview narratives is the fact that as the semester progressed, a small community of students emerged, enabling even the shyest of students to come out of their shells. Barbara was perhaps the most soft-spoken of all the women I interviewed. She told me that it was easier for her to speak at the end of the semester, simply because she got to know everyone (Barbara, 7). She told me specifically that this community creation was directly linked to her increase in participation. The beginning of the semester, with new faces staring back at her, was very intimidating for Barbara. Only as the semester progressed did she feel more comfortable sharing her experiences with those of others. It is possible that since so many of the other women in her Turning Point class were experiencing similar life changes, that this type of community may have been more easily created. This is not always the case in Women's Studies courses at the University of Hawai‘i, thus it is possible that there is no direct correlation between community and voice creation, since the interviewees who talked about voice creation came from both types of Women's Studies courses. However, the existence of a community did seem more conducive to voice creation for those women who seemed least likely to come into their voices in the first place, whether it was in a traditional Women's Studies course, or in a women’s transition education program.
Voice Negation

One woman who combined new feminist terms with voice was Verna. Instead of taking her new feminist vocabulary and using it, however, she chose to do exactly the opposite. For example:

I: OK, is it helping you express yourself in a different way, like is it giving you words and a vocabulary that you didn’t know before?

VT: Yes, like glass ceiling, or um, women... about work and the sticky floor. Yeah.

I: Do you talk a lot in the class? Do you personally?

VT: It depends on what the topic is.

I: OK, like what topics do you feel comfortable talking about?

VT: I feel topics like... talking about like differences between women and men. If it gets really personal and hits home, like that disorder thing, the eating disorder, I don’t talk about that. (Vema, 7)

Vema was learning a new language, but when the topics of conversation got too personal for her she retreated into her silent safe haven. This safety net was apparent for many of the women I spoke to. It seemed to be a negation of the possibilities of voice. After having learned of their potential, their possibilities, and their opportunities, these women made conscious choices to remain silent. There were various reasons for this silence, and therefore created different kinds of silence. Vema's silence mentioned above was chosen to suit the situation. Vema told me that her mother had an eating disorder and that she didn’t want to divulge this information to the rest of the class. Therefore, when the subject came up in class, she did not share her experiences with her classmates. However, since she was interested in psychological differences between women and men,
she felt free to explore the subject further in class by participating heavily in the discussion. She was trying to examine her relationship with her fiancé, and she told me that the discussion in her Psychology of Women course had helped her gain some understanding of the differences between men and women. Vema was not able to see past these differences however, and the interview was peppered with essentialist references to men and women. Since Vema was interested in this topic, she brought it up time and time again throughout our interview. Sometimes it was in reference to her personal relationships and other times it was in reference to the subjects covered in class. She told me that she spoke about this topic with ease in her class, and indeed, I spoke to two other women in her class who made references to her outspokenness, without any comments from me. I spoke with Vema after one of her fellow classmates and before another. Without knowing the dynamics of the class, I was able to discern Vema’s participatory role in the class. However, it is interesting to note that even with her obvious comfort speaking either to me, or to her classmates about topics of her choice, she was still conscious of not speaking out about another issue she found personal and important, her mother’s eating disorder. This deployment of voice on suitable occasions then, is significant for many of the women I interviewed, and I argue for women in the larger society. When it is useful and safe to make one’s voice known, many women do so. However, in many cases, the dangers of revealing one’s voice are very real. In those instances, many women choose to remain silent. This could be called a survival tool.

We can also see that for Women's Studies courses to be successful and true to their life changing potential, the knowledge and confidence to deploy one’s voice must be made available for students to grasp for themselves, their lives, and their experiences.
Erin, whom we discussed above with regards to gender stereotypes being applicable to women, but not necessarily to herself, evidenced her discomfort with voice throughout our interview. When I walked away from the interview, I was surprised she had volunteered to talk to me in the first place. No extra credit was given in her class for participation in my project, so I cannot begin to know why she would have wanted to take the time to talk to me, since our interview was very strained and difficult. Erin not only felt uncomfortable talking to me, she also felt uncomfortable talking in class. When I asked her if she talked a lot in class, she told me:

EO: No (laughter), no. But I listen.

I: OK, um and do you feel uncomfortable talking because certain people always talk, or like...

EO: No, it’s just, I don’t know. I just feel I don’t know, in some ways they cover whatever you know like if I had a question or whatever, or it just confirms what I think, or you know so I don’t need to talk. I don’t need to take up everyone else’s time. And if I want to speak up or something, I’ll do it on my own time, you know, not on their time.

I: Oh, like office hours or something?

EO: Yeah, yeah. Unless it’s something I feel like really strongly about.
(Erin O., 6)

For Erin, listening to others speak was what she thought to be most helpful to her. However, I argue that she did not have the inclination to speak because she was so entrenched in Japanese cultural practices, such as strong expectations of women’s silence that it would have been completely out of character for her to speak out in class. This is the case in many classes in Hawai‘i, but it is by no means universal. This is not so say that culture is a substitute for lack of consciousness or voice. Or that culture can easily be shed. Just as feminist consciousness and voice are processes, cultural practices weave
throughout the narratives of the respondents. Just as gender is a performance, culture can also be acted out (on). Thus, while some of the other women I interviewed were of similar cultural backgrounds as Erin, they had chosen to amass feminist knowledge in order to deploy their voices when they felt the time was appropriate. Sadly, I walked away from the interview with Erin feeling that this time would never come for her. When I pressed Erin further about some of the issues that she would have felt strongly enough about to talk in class, she was not able to think of any. This leads me to believe that regardless of the issue, Erin would not come into her voice during this Women's Studies course. It is possible that this course would have laid the foundation for another Women's Studies course to lead to voice creation for Erin, but that is speculative at best. Not only is there a shortage of Women's Studies classes at UH West O'ahu, but Erin was graduating soon, and was not likely to take another Women's Studies course before she did.

In the same course, Annie recognized that some of the other students were not as apt to participate as she was. She narrated their silence as a choice they made in each class. She told me that she identified with many of the issues discussed in class, she was comfortable sharing her experiences with the rest of the class, especially her experiences as a mother, and that she was one of a few “key talkers” in the class (Annie, 6). This last statement gave me a glimpse of some of the dynamics of the class itself. If Annie herself was one of a few people who spoke a lot in the class, this means that many of the other students, mostly women, were silent. It is significant to note here that Annie is haole, and was outspoken to begin with. I would argue that it was not this class that led her to voice, rather this class gave her some of the feminist language with which to speak. However,
Annie’s offhand characterization of the rest of the class as relatively silent besides a few consistent speakers is characteristic of her own position of racial and experiential privilege within the realm of this particular classroom. Due to her major in Political Science at UH West O‘ahu, Annie was well versed in classes that are focused on discussion and was comfortable asserting herself in any classroom situation. Many of the other students might not have been so quick to claim their voice in an unfamiliar situation, at least in the beginning of the semester. Annie kept up her position as a key talker throughout the semester, perhaps at the expense of other students who may have had something to say were she not so quick to speak up. Unlike Marcia, who made a conscious choice to remain silent because of her evident haoleness, Annie had no desire to do the same. Thus, classroom community or not, Women’s Studies or Turning Point class, race still plays a part in the voice dynamics of any course in Hawai‘i.

Gardenia and Luana: Two Perspectives on Voice and Pedagogy

Two examples illustrate the role pedagogy plays in voice creation. Gardenia and Luana were in a Turning Point class with the same teacher, albeit in different semesters. It is unlikely that the teacher underwent a major transformation in pedagogy from one semester to the next, although it is possible. However, from the narratives regarding the class structure, I was able to discern that there was no palpable change in the way the course was taught during Gardenia’s semester and Luana’s. Thus, it is useful to compare the two perspectives these women had on the same class in order to discern how it may have affected their perceptions of their ability to create a voice. Gardenia was
disappointed in the lack of space provided for classroom discussion. She told me that she would have preferred the following:

GL: Yeah, more um, more of what we call... what used to be called the Socratic method of teaching. I would have appreciated that more. That's what I meant when I said that you know... she seemed to know so much. Cause I know that every single person in the class had a lot more to contribute than we were given the opportunity...(Gardenia, 10)

Thus, for Gardenia, the classroom structure was too restrictive and she felt that had there been more a space given for discussion, more women could have occupied it throughout the semester. She was reticent to tell me that she outright disapproved of her teacher's pedagogical techniques. This is evidenced by the fact that she made sure let me know that she admired the amount of knowledge the teacher had to impart to her students. However, her disapproval of the teacher's style of teaching was obvious. She thought this was a direct contribution to the lack of voice creation made possible by the teacher in her class. Again, I must emphasize that voice, like empowerment, is not something the teacher can give or impart to students. Rather, it is something to be facilitated and cajoled, coaxed and nursed into being.

Luana, on the other hand, was very enthusiastic about her experiences in the class. She was happy that her teacher was knowledgeable, and she also recognized the open class structure as crucial to the ability of newfound voices to come through. She said:

LN: I really did... It was really on track sometimes. You know sometimes it was really helpful, on one personal side... Like one time in particular one woman was deciding whether to leave her husband or not so... I talked about a lot in the class. Everybody’s situation you know, they were comfortable bringing it up. Then everybody put in their two cents, you know so it was nice... It wasn’t that structured... There was some structure, but it was real, there was a real good flow there, so either way...(Luana, 8).
Luana’s appreciation of the class structure is evidenced by her characterization of her class having “good flow.” This implies that not only was there a flow of knowledge from the teacher to the students, but that there was also a reciprocal flow of knowledge from the students to the teacher, and between the students themselves. This sharing of experiences, voice, and knowledge contributed to a classroom atmosphere where discussion was instrumental in learning. In all fairness to Gabrielle’s assessment of her course, no two classes are the same, and it is quite possible that even if the teacher taught the same way, the students in the two classes may have responded differently. Those in Gardenia’s class may have been more reluctant to participate than those in Luana’s class. However, it was Gardenia’s experience that students had more to contribute than they were given the opportunity to, thus leading us back to completely different perspectives on the same pedagogical techniques.

These two widely variant points of view illustrate quite an interesting dilemma in this type of research. Because these narratives are the text to be interpreted for this project, it leads us to remember that the interviewees’ experiences are their versions of the truth, and that those truths are not fixed, nor permanent. These interviews are only a snapshot in these women’s lives. Not only could the narratives have changed from one day to the next, it is obvious that experiences and perspectives also change from one respondent to the next. This enables me to reaffirm my commitment to the diversity and multiplicity of locations of the participants in this study. Luana and Gardenia’s widely differing reads of similar situations is a wonderful example of this multiplicity and serves as a reminder of the participants’ multiple locations and how they may have nuanced the answers I got in a myriad of ways.
Voice and Community

As mentioned above, some of the respondents shared some of their newfound knowledge with others in their lives. Initially, I had thought to include this section as an extension of the changes a Women's Studies course could have on the respondents' roles in their workplaces or communities. However, it became clear that while this extension may have made sense, it would not have been possible without the respondents using their voices to share their knowledge with others. I asked all the respondents whether they had met many people in their respective classes. Most of them said they had. Some were still friends with the people in their classes, others had lost track of their fellow students. Barbara fell into the latter category, but she told me that even though she hadn't talked to her classmates, she felt like they "had shared a bond there" (Barbara, 4). This bond led her to an enabling application of her voice, at work and with her family.

Barbara had not undergone any major life changes in recent times, nor was she contemplating any. We cannot assume that every time a woman takes a Women's Studies course she will undergo major life changes. I don't believe that this is a desirable avenue. However, learning to narrate oneself positively within the context of one's class, one's education, one's workplace, or one's community, whatever that may entail is quite desirable. Each woman I spoke to defined communities differently. Some defined communities as confined to a particular classroom, others saw community as encompassing their entire school, still other defined community on terms outside of their educational endeavors. Volunteer work brought Luana to a new community. A
charitable organization brought a community to Elizabeth and her family. Marcia defined her community through her major in art. All of these women used their voices, feminist language and knowledge to “spread the word.” They took it upon themselves to talk to friends, family members, acquaintances as well as work colleagues about the material they were learning in their Women's Studies courses. When I asked Verna how often she discussed what she was learning in the class outside of the classroom, she responded in the following way:

I: OK. And how often do you discuss what you’re learning in the classroom outside of the class?

VT: A lot.

I: OK, with who?

VT: The professors, the students, everybody on the campus.

I: What about at home?

VT: No. (Verna, 8)

Verna led a complicated family life, and her relationship with her mother was very strained. The latter kept encouraging her to drop out of school and get a “real” secretarial job, which would help pay the family bills. Thus, it is not surprising that Verna would not discuss her Women's Studies course with her mother. However, like Toni, Shu, and Marcia, she was enthusiastic about sharing her knowledge with anyone else who would listen.

Luana’s voice led to her greater involvement in the larger community. She became a volunteer at her son’s school as well as at the zoo. She became involved in a myriad of causes she had previously shied away from as a direct result of her experiences in the Turning Point program. She stated:
LN: Yes, actually I got a lot more involved. I guess when you're in an abusive relationship, you tend... you want to hide things, so you don't want people to see. So it's like now I'm a lot more involved. Everybody says I know exactly what's going on with me, so I'm a lot more involved. I've been tutoring at my son's school in the reading program and volunteering and working... I even volunteered at the zoo. So a lot of things that I've always wanted to do, you know I'm trying now... so I'm still trying... (Luana, 10)

I would argue that Luana is as close to a poster child for Women's Studies courses as one could find. Since the Turning Point class helped her make the transition from victim of domestic violence to a woman confident in her self, her role as mother and community member had dramatically changed. Luana was an agent in her own life and making life decisions on her own terms. This agency was almost bursting out of her when we spoke. It was a pleasure to see the sheer amount of positive energy she radiated. She was thankful for the opportunity the Turning Point course had given her. It was an opportunity to understand and name the structures of oppressions that she had faced.

This naming process is what led her to voice. Furthermore, her voice creation led her to her changed roles within her family and her community.

These direct links were not as evident in the other respondents, but they were present in many other ways. For example, as mentioned above, Elizabeth belonged to a church that had helped her get back on her feet after she had come to Hawai‘i practically penniless. This church was a stepping-stone to the creation of a community where she felt her children would be safe. While it was not clear whether she remained a member of that particular church's congregations, she told me that the Angel Network, combined with welfare assistance, ultimately enabled her to rent a place big enough to accommodate her and her three children. She told me that what she characterized as "rough times," being homeless and broke, led her to look for a community which would
accept what she considered a tainted past. She felt that the Angel Network was such a place. While she may not have shared her Women's Studies knowledge with them, it is significant that she found this community important to her well-being and that of her children. It is possible that she envisioned her role within this community differently after having taken her Women's Studies course. Indeed, in an interesting turn of events, Elizabeth called me after our interview was over to tell me that she was involved in an outreach program with her church talking to teenagers about pregnancy. With trepidation, I asked her what this program entailed. She told me that it was an anti-abortion program that involved church members talking to their younger parishioners about abstinence and spreading pro-life propaganda. Needless to say, this completely floored me, since I had thought that Elizabeth was using her voice in more feminist ways. I was disappointed, but thankful that she had called me to let me know about her outreach work and how much her community meant to her.

Marcia's community also played a significant role in her life. She spent so much time at the university that she had created a "support network" there (Marcia, 10). Because of her impending, possibly life-changing, decisions, she had taken refuge at the university so that she could take the time to make some difficult choices. She was taking five classes and told me that she was constantly making connections between her Women's Studies class and her other classes. We discussed her criticism of her art classes above. Her critical questioning of the space women are given in the curriculum also extended to history and English classes. One of the most significant ways I was able to discern Marcia's weaving of voice and community was that she referred two other women to my project without me asking her to do so. This was a significant extension of
her feminist voice, since she told me that she thought it was important for everyone to take a Women's Studies course and that my project might be step in making Women's Studies courses either a requirement or readily available throughout the curriculum. Not only did I feel that this was a great compliment to the significance of my project, but in the meantime, I also gained two new respondents.

CONCLUSION

The intersections between feminism, feminist consciousness, and voice are many. From the assertion of childhood feminist views, whether positive, negative, or a combination of both, to culturally variant feminist views, the respondents narrated themselves within feminism in multiple ways. Learning about feminism in Women's Studies courses offered sites of resistance to the status quo in various ways in some of the interviewees' lives. Some examples included Jennifer's changing relationship with her boyfriend, Lesley's insistence on giving back to her community, as well as Toni's newfound assertiveness after having taken a Women's Studies course. Other feminists needed reassurance, like Nelia, while others ranged from being reticent to enthusiastic feminists. Elizabeth and Kathy X. faced racial and class issues within their narratives of feminism, even while explaining to me how feminism had reached some minute details of their lives. Talking about Women's Studies and the other academic subjects revealed the influence of feminism of these women and their critical understanding of some of their other courses.
In Luana’s case, feminist consciousness manifested itself in her comprehension that she no longer had to be a victim of domestic violence. For Elizabeth, paying greater attention to the representation of women and the Third World in the media proved to be a manifestation of the intersection of her feminist consciousness and what she perceived to be the American Dream. For other respondents, feminist consciousness entailed an awareness of gender stereotypes, as well as gaining the tools to fight against them. Using art as a specific academic discipline was useful in examining one respondent’s views not only on her own artwork, but also on feminism in the art curriculum. Finally, for Nikki, feminist consciousness was equated with politics, a rather distasteful and rowdy endeavor.

Voice was equated with an increase in participation, but also a different, richer feminist language. Some of the respondents needed to be in the presence of their communities in order to feel comfortable deploying their voices. Others’ voices were context attentive. The recalcitrant feminists most easily discerned the connections between feminist language(s) and voice, perhaps because they had the most invested in understanding (or denying) feminism. Kathy X. started speaking out at work about issues she felt needed attention. Luana started sending food back in restaurants. Martha and Nikki had cathartic moments in their respective Women’s Studies courses that led them to their own voice creation. Unfortunately, other interviewees suffered a process of voice negation during their Women’s Studies classes. For Verna, topics close to her personal life caused her to remain silent in class. Erin admitted that she would never speak out in class. Indeed, she would rather talk to her teacher in a one-on-one setting, perhaps during office hours. Finally, Annie, herself quite outspoken in class and beyond, may have
contributed to the silence of other students in her class, since she rarely gave others a chance to speak.

Gardenia and Luana expressed two widely different perspectives on the relationship between voice creation and pedagogy, reminding us of the fluid and fleeting nature of the truths embedded in these interviews. Regardless of these perspectives however, a common theme throughout most of the narratives was the emergence of small communities within the context of Women's Studies classes. Even if she did not keep in contact with her classmates, Barbara felt that she had shared a bond with them. Verna shared her knowledge with others at her school. Luana engaged in volunteer work. Elizabeth was involved in an outreach program for youths through her church. Finally, Marcia was proud of the support network she had nurtured through her art major.

These different communities are a testament to the pervasive subject matter found in Women's Studies courses. Whether it is delivered with feminist pedagogy, its content extends beyond the Women's Studies classroom. That in itself is quite an encouraging feat. This indicates that some of the political and methodological implications we visited in the first two chapters might indeed be starting to come to fruition. That is, the fact that the participants themselves were able to gauge their increased levels of participation, their increased feminist consciousness, their analyses of feminist perspectives shows that Women's Studies classes are offering, and delivering to students what their initial emancipatory feminist ideals promised. That is, Women's Studies classes do not only offer a feminist perspective on knowledge, they also enable their students to create new knowledge. This knowledge, in turn, enables the Women's Studies students to make connections with their lives they would not have necessarily made in other academic
disciplines. Indeed, Women's Studies' interdisciplinarity is one of its great strengths, appealing to a broad base of students, and teachers, from all types of fields.

Another valuable consequence of this study concerns the methodological questions examined in the first two chapters. Having started the narrative analysis of the interviews, I can see that this qualitative method has enabled me to elicit a multiplicity of responses, even within the same interview. The richness of the experiences I was privileged to be invited to is astounding. It is certainly true that another interviewer, perhaps of a different color, gender, class, or sexuality might have drawn out a completely different set of interviews. However, I am aware of these factors and am striving to continually (re)locate myself vis-à-vis the researched.

The extensions of these political, as well as methodological implications, are also a beginning of the application of voice, feminist consciousness, and feminism through the lens of empowerment. The next chapter will help us understand the respondents' narratives with regards to how that empowerment may have affected their lives in a variety of ways.
CHAPTER FOUR: POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

The road to empowerment is fraught with uncertainty just as we have recognized voice creation to be. As discussed earlier, empowerment in and of itself is problematic. Not only can the students misunderstand it as something that the teacher can give them, but in many cases it is preceded by an upsetting state of disempowerment. This process is linked to the feminist conception of power initially articulated by Nancy Hartsock and others after her, that the patriarchal “power over” which implies dominance, is quite different from the feminist “power to” which implies a relationship (Hartsock 1983, 224). This can be exacerbated by the power relation between teachers and students, which is often even more problematized by many feminist teachers’ ambivalent attitude toward power in the first place.

Another aspect of power in the feminist classroom can be conceived in terms of competence then, instead of dominance. While this is very much an examination of empowerment, especially with regards to Women’s Studies/feminist knowledge, Trinh Minh-ha has troubled this aspect quite productively in Woman, Native, Other. She asserts that the western notion of “knowledge is power” is problematic because while increasing knowledge has the potential to bring about enlightenment, it also has the potential to bring about “endarkenment” (Trinh 1989, 40). This is linked to consciousness in that it is a question of degrees, and [enlightenment and endarkenment] are two degrees of one phenomenon. By attempting to exclude one (darkness) for the sake of the other (light), the modernist project of building universal knowledge has indulged itself in such self-gratifying oppositions as civilization/primitivism, progress/backwardness, evolution/stagnation. With the decline of the colonial idea of advancement in rationality and
liberty, what becomes more obvious is the necessity to reactivate that very part of the modernist project at its nascent stage: the radical calling into question, in every undertaking, of everything that one tends to take for granted – which is a (pre- and post-modernist) stage that should remain constant. No Authority no Order can be safe from criticism. Between knowledge and power, there is room for knowledge-without-power. Or knowledge at rest... (Trinh 1989, 40).

Evaluating empowerment in light of these intersections of power does become more difficult. Indeed, conceptualizing empowerment is no easy task. It is possible that this may lead us back to the notion that students can mistakenly assume that their Women's Studies teachers will provide them with some concrete notion of empowerment, without thinking critically about its implications. However, thinking about empowerment in terms of a process also allows us to revisit and rethink the initial feeling of disempowerment that some women may have felt in the beginning of their classes by understanding that this preliminary impression may bloom into an enduring notion of empowerment.

For many women, understanding that they are living in a patriarchal society leads to an understanding that this has affected and will indeed continue to affect every aspect of their lives. This initial state of what I would characterize almost as disbelief is less prevalent in the older women I interviewed than in the younger women I teach in my classes. The latter don’t see sexism as a problem that they have had to deal with, whereas the former have been confronted with it time and time again. Therefore, it is less difficult for them to acknowledge systemic oppression than it is for younger students in Women's Studies classes.

While this may be the case, however, empowerment is often more difficult to achieve for mature students, because in many cases they are already entrenched in a
sexist system on any number of levels. For some, sexism exists in the family, for others in the workplace, others still face sexism at school, and finally some women are confronted with it on all those levels combined. Thus, it is easy to understand why some women are resistant to taking hold of the empowerment they are invited to discover in their Women's Studies courses. I argue that those women who were most likely to create voices were also the most likely to gain a sense of empowerment after having taken a Women's Studies course. Indeed, voice could be considered a manifestation of a more general sense of empowerment. But the reverse could also be the case. Voice creation could likely be the first baby step to a more general sense of empowerment pervading different life situations. Thus, I am suggesting that voice can be an articulation or expression of (empowered) thoughts learned in/through Women's Studies. Empowerment in and of itself can be the application of those thoughts/expressions in daily life.

In this chapter, we will explore the sense of empowerment gained by the interviewees as they navigated through their lives during or after having taken a Women's Studies course. Similarly to feminist consciousness and voice, there are varying degrees of empowerment, ranging from leaving one's abusive husband, to helping others help themselves by sharing their newfound sense of empowerment, from feeling more confident at school, to standing up for oneself in the face of adverse situations. The following stories illustrate these actions and will enable us to understand the extent to which Women's Studies can facilitate them. Thus, as we shall see throughout this chapter, empowerment is the cornerstone of the redefinition of agency for many of these
women. In this sense then, it is directly linked to the discovery of feminism as well as its expression through voice creation.

The Teacher's View

I only interviewed one teacher from the number of classes I visited. This was done purposefully, as I was more interested in hearing the voices of students reflect on their Women's Studies courses, rather than the instructors’ views on the changes their students were experiencing. However, this one interview with an instructor at Kapio’lani Community College was special. Jodi K. was not only an instructor of the Turning Point classes, she was also a counselor in the Single Parent Displaced Homemaker program. Therefore, she saw the students before they took the class, during, and sometimes long after they had finished. Since Jodi was instrumental in giving me access to many of her former students, I thought it would be a courtesy to interview her as well. Through talking to Jodi, I did gain great insights on empowerment. When we spoke about her experiences as a counselor in the program, she was enthusiastic with her response:

JK: Mmmm [affirmative]. That’s the satisfaction of this job I think, is because we see growth over time. And um, just the strength that they have. Sometimes they start and they don’t realize they have the strength, you know they have everything that they need and they don’t see it. And then later on, they go “Wow, I can do this. I’m on my way.” And they get into a program that get into the program they want to and they’re on their way. [That’s Cathy Wehrman, our director. I should have introduced you, but I didn’t know what she wanted to say.] You know, and so you see that confidence building and everything else. So that’s really neat. Sometimes, they don’t get into the program that they decided. So we work with them redirecting with “do they have what they need to do to wait a semester” and oftentimes no, they don’t right, and so we do some redirecting. Um, but you know, our students are really good students. So most of the time they do get in. Or if there’s a redirection, there’s another
program that they perhaps can get in, or you know just kind of hang in there with it. It just depends, you know, sometimes just things happen where they... Sometimes, some of our students... a lot of our students sometimes they just stop out a little bit and they just come back. And they end up coming back. (Jodi, 4)

Jodi was so proud of her students’ accomplishments, she wanted me to talk to as many of them as possible because she thought that this project could be helpful to her program in the long run. By making the community, academic and otherwise, aware of the wonderful things her students were doing, she hoped to gain greater access to funding and improve her program’s services for future women who might need it. In her view, empowerment was only the manifestation of a strength that was already there. It simply needed to be nurtured to life by the Turning Point course. She asserted that watching the confidence build in her students was one of the most rewarding aspects of her job as a counselor and teacher. The Turning Point course content is very practical, focusing on finding a career for non-traditional women students returning to school, so that they can ultimately support themselves and their families with, as well as find rewarding. To this end, the students take various aptitude tests, including the Myers-Brigg test, to discover what types of careers they might be suited for. After the results are revealed, the students discuss them with each other and with the teacher. Then, the teacher works with the counselors at the Single Parent Displaced Homemaker program (in Jodi’s case, she was one and the same) to determine which program would be best suited for the student, whether it is vocational or academic. Therefore, the Turning Point students experience the change this particular course can offer them firsthand.

I argue that this is why many of these students were more outspoken about the sense of empowerment they had gained than some of the students in the more academic
Women's Studies settings. In the latter case, women may discover some of the conceptual ideas behind gender oppression for example, but they have a more difficult time making the connection between those ideas and their practical application. For example, a botany major would become a botanist, or a pre-law student would go on to law school and ultimately become a lawyer. Unfortunately, a Women's Studies major does not have a predetermined career to go into, indeed, most social science or liberal arts majors are faced with this dilemma. While it can be seen as an opportunity for further exploration of one’s potential, or a learning of critical thinking skills that are applicable in many areas of life, it can also be disheartening to find out that, while one has completed two, four, six, or ten years of school in Women's Studies, there isn’t necessarily a job or career waiting at the end. This is where the hands on approach to Women's Studies found in the Turning Point and Women in Transition classes are often successful in translating a localized Women's Studies empowerment into a “life in general” type of empowerment.

Foundations, Major Life Changes, and Self Discoveries

For many women I interviewed, empowerment either entailed leaving significant others, or realizing that they deserved to be happy, whether they were involved in a relationship or not. Three of the respondents we have already met, Luana, Elizabeth, and Pat, had left abusive husbands and were using Women's Studies classes to understand their situations as victims of domestic violence. This understanding was creating an interesting phenomenon. Through our interviews, these women expressed to me their
desire to escape their situations. Some had done it earlier, and for others, the experiences were still fresh, vivid in their minds. For example, Luana told me the following about her course:

NN: It set the foundation. It was kind of there, but it was like an earthquake, it was really shaky. Life was real unstable for me. Living with an abusive husband, it’s like living on eggshells. You never know what kind of mood, and then... It was like for the sake of the children, and then it was like, nah I’m out of here. It made the foundation stronger. Yeah for the first time in my life, it’s like I feel happy. It’s OK to be by myself. I don’t need a husband, I don’t need a man. It’s like if one comes along fine, if one doesn’t then fine. So that’s... I think that’s the biggest change. I’m not afraid to be alone. Or to be me. (Nancy, 12)

Luana had denied being herself and being happy for as long as she could remember.

Only after having left her husband did she feel that she was entitled to those two basic human needs.

One of the most interesting aspects of this passage with regards to empowerment, however, is the reason why Luana finally left her husband. Initially, she thought she was doing it for her children, but eventually she allowed herself to think that she was the one who deserved a better life, along with her children. Being afraid of being alone is a characteristic many mature women face in our society. They are bombarded with mass media messages that they are more likely to be hit by lightning than to find a husband after the age of forty. For this reason, many women feel that they are better off staying in unsatisfactory, and oftentimes abusive relationships, than venturing out on their own.

This is the case because society, in conjunction with the media, dictates that women who are alone are somehow lacking. The discovery that this is a myth is quite empowering for many women. Indeed, as Martha related to me, several women in her Women in
Transition class underwent this process and discovered their own identities for the first time.

M: ... “My husband is ...” every word that came out of her mouth was her husband, there was no her in anything and then by the end she was like “I’m leaving him,” and we were like, we’re not telling you to leave your husband or anything, and she was like “I know, but I need to, but I just never had enough strength to do it. He abuses me...” and she was just going on and on. And there was maybe three or four women like that, that just went for it. And me just sitting there, looking at how hard they work and how far they came and I know... (Martha, 5)

Seeing her classmates come to the realization that they finally had enough strength to leave their significant others enabled Martha to critically examine her own relationship and determine whether she wanted to remain with her current boyfriend of many years. Martha was empowered by the other women’s empowerment. This is another characteristic of the community some of these classes create. It lends itself to reciprocal sharing and enabling of students to accomplish their goals, or at least gain some encouragement in the process. It is interesting to note though that Martha refers to some of her other classmates’ cautionary words to the woman who had decided to leave her husband. While they were supportive, they did not want to be responsible if her attempt to leave her relationship failed.

Martha’s description of this other woman’s situation is reflective of many of the classes I encountered. The most important aspect of empowerment may well be the discovery of one’s selfhood. Of course, this language can be quite problematic since it can indicate that there is an essential or authentic self that is waiting to be found underneath a multitude of layers of social conditioning. Selfhood, in this case, should be taken to mean the fluid creation process of one’s subjective self. This ongoing process of emergence is certainly one of the more fruitful, and sometime physically evident, aspects
of the self-production of the participants in this study. For example, many of the adult learners I interviewed had married young. Thus, in many cases, they had gone from their parents’ homes to their new homes with their husbands. Due to the nature of extended family in Hawai‘i, this often entails the couple moving to the husband’s family’s home. There is little chance for these women to discover their own respective identities, since they are usually so busy caring for their families. Once they reach a Women’s Studies course, it is often the case that they have either undergone a life transition, or will do so throughout their time in the class. Indeed, going back to school after a long hiatus can be intimidating in the first place. Taking a Women’s Studies course, even more so. As we saw in the previous chapter, women are often reluctant to admit to themselves that gender oppression exists because they are so mired within it. Thus, breaking free of these oppressions takes a certain courage, which I would argue is promoted by Women’s Studies courses.

The women I interviewed were embedded in their gender, race, ethnicity, class, and a host of what social scientists like to call analytic categories. But, as we shall see in the next chapter, it was their respective locations as mothers, wives, girlfriends, students, workers, etc. which had in many cases, inhibited the changes they were attempting to effect through returning to education. This is not to say that the two lists are mutually exclusive. Of course, connections exist between them. Women’s Studies courses enabled them to break down those barriers and helped them create opportunities for them to create possibilities. Again, in Martha’s experience, figuring out that she had to live for herself and not her children, her ex-husband, her new boyfriend, or her mother was a significant step in self-assertiveness. She asked herself
In this passage, Martha was explaining to me that her boyfriend was encouraging her to drop out of school and stay home. He was telling her that she didn’t need to work or go to school. He could provide for her financially. However, for Martha, that was not enough. She needed to know that she was doing something for herself in order to feel good about her life. That something was going to school. It was important for Martha to finish her Bachelor’s degree so that she could feel that she had accomplished something on her own. Martha is an example of a local woman who had married early and had gone straight from her own family into her husband’s. For her, going to school was empowering in itself, taking a Women’s Studies course was a reinforcement of that empowerment. Martha asserted that she had rights, to not be married, to finish school, to raise her children as she saw fit, to have another child if she wanted to. While she was ambivalent at the time of our interview whether to pursue her education and become a teacher, I have seen her several times since then and have learned that she is eager to pursue a teaching career and is planning on applying to the University of Hawai‘i College of Education next year. Martha’s experiences are typical of many of the other interviewees. Education was empowering, but Women’s Studies courses were an affirmation of the entitlement to that empowerment. Of course, it was wonderful to hear such positive things about Women’s Studies courses, but it was more wonderful to hear of the critical understanding of these women’s selves.
One example of these discoveries was reflected in Barbara’s narrative. As mentioned earlier, Barbara was very soft spoken, but when it came to discussing empowerment, she had a surprisingly simple, yet powerful understanding of it. When we were speaking about the impact of the class on her future, the following exchange took place:

BH: Mmmm. I guess a little. I think it made me more aware that I want to get better, to do good.

I: What do you mean by better?

BH: I don’t know, I just feel like life... You know I never went to school, I didn’t like it, then I got married, and I was just getting by. And now that I’m single, I live alone, I realize that there’s a lot that I could learn, if I start somewhere...

I: Is that what you hoped the class would be for you, a starting point?

BH: Yeah... (Barbara, 8)

While it took some prompting from me to discover what Barbara meant by getting “better” and doing “good,” the understanding of the class as a starting point is quite evocative of Barbara’s confusion when she started the class. This also echoed similar issues to Martha’s dilemmas. She narrated her life in such simple terms, yet there is so much left unsaid in this passage. She glossed over her marriage, her work, her life as a single mom in a few words. However, I could sense that these were issues that meant a great deal to her and had impacted her definition of her self in many ways. For many years she had defined herself as a wife and mother. After her divorce, she was thrust into the life as a single mother and did not, indeed could not recognize herself within it. She had never had to have an identity of her own. Her Turning Point class was a starting point for her thinking about herself. She was slowly beginning to define herself as
something other than wife, or mother. She was going back to school to see if she could improve her life. Like Martha, she was slowly coming to an understanding that she this process was not necessarily only for the benefit of her children, but for herself as well. This understanding of the class as a starting point was manifested for some of the other interviewees in a completely different way. For those we shall discuss below, a Women's Studies class was not only a vehicle for their own empowerment, but also for that of others.

**Collaborative Empowerment**

The process of thinking about their selves was the manifestation of empowerment for many of the participants. Communities, which developed in many of the Women's Studies classes, were crucial in engendering the collaborative quest for empowerment. Some of the women who were facing the most difficult situations were the ones who were most intent on using their empowerment for others. Not only did they benefit from the reflections of their respective Women's Studies communities, but they also wanted to pass its advantages on to others. For example, when asked what she thought of when she heard the word empowerment, Nikki said:

I: What about empowerment? Is that related to power for you, or is that something else?

NO: No, not power of money, or power over somebody, or power.... I just think being comfortable with yourself, with your environment, and with what you’re doing with your life, that’s power right there. And that you could pass on what you know, positive things about what you know to somebody else. (Nikki, 17)
Not only was empowerment a positive gain for herself, but it was also a tangible asset that she could pass on to others. For Nikki, and a few other women, empowering others was truly the definition of empowerment. It has often been said that the best way to learn about something is to teach it. While this is true from an academic standpoint, it is also true in more general terms. Nikki thought that passing on her Women's Studies knowledge made others feel good about themselves. This, in turn, made her feel good about herself and contributed to her sense of agency in a community within which she was faced with many struggles (see previous chapter).

This agency was also reflected in Elizabeth's comments about empowerment. Since she had had great success with her getting tutors to her children's school, she had gained the confidence that if she alone could get results, those might be even greater if she was acting in concert with others. For example, Elizabeth made the following statement regarding her definition of empowerment:

"EC: (silence) Well, we have the power to do it. We have to strategize in a way where we can get together in a group. I learned that if you get together in a group, you can maybe have empowerment. You know, to move on that issue. And nobody will hear you if you don’t get together in a group, or petition people to understand what you’re doing so that they can hear, even hear what you have to say, because um, if you’re just alone, it’s like “well, that’s your opinion” versus, if you know, you have a whole group it can like... it threatens them, or intimidates them to do something about it. (Elizabeth, 8)"

It is interesting that despite her previous successes, she still thought that she would be better off joining with others. However, her way of constructing her description of the way one could get results was very patriarchal in nature. She thought the best way of going about getting results was to threaten or intimidate people. While one would have thought that Elizabeth was articulating a collaborative quest for empowerment, she was
in fact using a typically male construction of power as domination. It just happened to be more effective if there was more than one person doing the intimidating. The conflicting nature of Elizabeth’s statement reflected her own conflicted life. While she had had a difficult life as a single mother, she was also cognizant of the power of her church in helping others since she had herself recently benefited from that assistance. So it was easy for her to apply the concept of empowerment to a greater entity than just one person. It is possible that she so easily linked power with domination because that is what she experienced at church. However, I argue that Elizabeth herself would not have characterized it as such. Thus, it is unclear whether she made this connection consciously or unconsciously.

Elizabeth equated the success she had had with getting tutors for her children with empowerment. As we saw in Elizabeth’s articulation of feminism, this was a major step in her development through the Women’s Studies process. When I asked her what empowerment meant to her, we had the following exchange:

EC: Cause I stood up for them, to them. And I said you know, “why? Why doesn’t she have the help?” [They said] “well, the teacher can’t help her.” Well, who can? [I said] “do you want me to get some women together, some women that are staying home to volunteer to help them? I go... I don’t really care who helps them, but I just want her to do better in the subject.” So then about two weeks, or a week later, they told me they got the tutors.

I: Good, good for you. Good for her. That’s great.

EC: So now they’re helping her. They got the students here. In fact the students saw me and told me “oh, I’m tutoring your son and daughter!” So now I see them, and I thank them so much. I’m so grateful that they were able to volunteer that help for my kids. You know, the people that I come to school with, that they took time to help me get who I need to get. Cause they’re supporting me. I think it’s great. I love it.

I: It’s a good idea actually.
EC: But they were very challenged by that. They were like “wow, wait a minute, just a second. We want to help your child.” Well, then let me see that you want to help her. See that’s what I mean about that kind of woman thing. I don’t mean to be like rude and I always apologize “don’t take it personally, but my focus is to get my child through this, you know to do, you know the level that she’s on.” And how can I progress if she’s not going to progress. I want to do it as a family. I want to do it as a team. So I want to work together and if I have to raise hell to give her what she needs that’s what I’ll do. You know. (Elizabeth, 13)

Here Elizabeth talks about a different kind of empowerment. She has gone from a dominating type of power to speaking about a collaborative empowerment not only in terms of her family, but of her fellow university students who are tutoring her children as well. As we have seen, Elizabeth’s narrative was filled with what could be considered inconsistencies. However, it is important to note that this is how Elizabeth narrated her life. This is ostensibly how she saw it because it made sense to her this way. Her definition of empowerment was not static. On the contrary, it was subject to constant change. It even changed from one sentence to the next. This does not mean that Elizabeth is “wrong” in any way. Rather, that while some of the respondents may have given me one definition of empowerment, even if they used a variety of words, Elizabeth offered me at least three. She felt she was getting support from her fellow students, even if it was not directly for her, but for her children. This was a source of pride and empowerment for Elizabeth. Interestingly, even though Elizabeth had made glowing references to her church and had articulated her own feminism, voice and to some extent her empowerment through its lens, she had no problem challenging its authority when it came to the well-being of her children. As stated earlier, her children were enrolled in the church’s school, thus her insistence on getting tutors for her children was a direct defiance of the church. She was not happy to let her children fall behind in their reading,
so she did something about it, even though the school officials had told her that they would take care of it. She ignored them and found a solution on her own. This shows an agency that is an extension of the empowerment Elizabeth was gaining in her Women's Studies class. She related this example to me because it illustrated the fact that she had enough self-confidence to challenge authority. This self-confidence, she told me, was a direct result of learning about other women engaging in similar practices in other countries, and in many cases, facing problems much greater than hers.

A completely different narrative of empowerment came from Lesley. She had tangible plans for the application of her empowerment to that of others. She was interested in reaching out to the Native Hawaiian community with regards to HIV/AIDS.

She told me that she wanted to get involved

LR: ...with the Pacificare, but I want to get more into... to the point where um, I can talk fluent Hawaiian, and get out to the Native Hawaiian people in the island and let them know that the resources are out there and get them empowered and get outreach programs and instill some empowerment in them, so they can help themselves. (Lesley, 3)

Towards this goal, Lesley was very busy with school, taking Hawaiian language classes at Honolulu Community College, as well as many other requirements for her major in social work. It is interesting that Lesley, while herself in need of empowerment, didn’t think twice about turning it around and using it for others. A single mother of two young children, Lesley was going to school full time and volunteering at Pacificare. Needless to say she was quite busy. She told me that she would get so tired in the afternoons she would desperately want to take a nap, but that her two children, happy to see her after a long day in day care and preschool respectively, wouldn’t let her. Since I know the feeling well, we commiserated for a while, before returning to the question at hand.
regarding empowerment. For her, as well as Annie, Yuki, Toni, and Pat, empowerment was directly linked to education and knowledge. For Lesley however, this connection was pushed one step further. Through her Women's Studies class, she had learned that there were programs to help women if they were in abusive relationship, or needed financial assistance from the state. Stemming from her desire to become a social worker, Lesley immediately applied any ideas she had about empowerment to specific programs. What kinds of programs were available to women? How could more people find out about them? How could she help, at the very least in the dissemination of what she considered to be vital information to the larger community? These were all questions that troubled Lesley and which came up again and again throughout our interview. Thus, for Lesley, empowerment was couched in terms of helping others. While this may be considered an extension of what society traditionally views as a woman's role, it was also the manifestation of her agency.

Toni was also interested in empowering others, specifically women. When I asked her about empowerment, she told me that it was part of her major. Interestingly, her major was Women's Studies. She explained empowerment to me in the following way:

TM: Because it's part of my major and I'm interested in empowering women and the way to do that is to empower myself (laughter). I come from an old school, you know, where women were not entitled to education. My mother only went to eighth grade, my father only went to eighth grade.

I: What made you come to the realization that "Ok, I want to go to school, I want to empower myself?"

TM: Because, I was alone, my children were grown, and somebody asked me "if you could do anything in your life that you hadn't done, what would you do?" And I said I would go to college (laughter) and they said "well
you could do that" and I said "I can?" and they said "sure" and I said "well I'm going" and here I am. Hard... (Toni, 4)

At sixty-three, Toni did indeed come from a different generation than many of the women I interviewed. However, she had also led an unconventional life, having been a showgirl in Las Vegas for twenty years at a time when that lifestyle was seen as non-conventional by many. Toni was interested in empowering others, but she thought the best way to do that would be to empower herself first. While she laughed about this in the interview, it was clear that this was her way of understanding empowerment.

Not only was a Women's Studies class, or a Women's Studies major for that matter, empowering, but so also was education in general. This was the case for many of the other participants as well. Toni had found empowerment after her children had grown up and left the house. She was a grandmother now and was very proud of the fact that she had returned to education after such a long hiatus, especially given her family's incomplete relationship with education. Toni's empowerment was coming at a relatively unusual time in her life. She was definitely not the average student. However, she did have very similar collaborative aspirations as some of the other respondents mentioned. She wanted to help other women and was using her Women's Studies classes as a way to understand how to do so. Regardless of age then, or place in the life cycle, through the words of many of the interviewees, Women's Studies courses can offer a sense of empowerment to those students who are ready to embrace it and hopefully use it. Whether that use is for others or for oneself largely depended on the respondents' life experiences until that point. As we shall see below, some of those experiences led to radical redefinitions of self-determination.
Self-Determination and Confidence

Some of the other participants, while not disdainful of collaborative empowerment, whichever form it may have taken, were more interested in their own lives with regards to empowerment. Yuki’s narrative made one of the most basic connections conveyed within these interviews. Since she had had an unusual life (see previous chapter), at least from a Western point of view and with regards to many of the other interviewees, her sense of empowerment was almost heightened as compared to that of others. When I asked her what empowerment meant to her, she replied: “radical, people can decide what they can do. And um, education, struggling, expression” (Yuki, 7). As a young woman, Yuki had led a very traditional life in Japan: her marriage had been arranged. This lack of ability to make one’s own decision with regards to this major event in life struck Yuki as very wrong. To her, empowerment was the beginning of self-determination.

Yuki wasn’t concerned with the capability to make a major life decision. That never even crossed her mind. Due to her life experiences in this regard, she had never thought she couldn’t make the actual decision, rather she wasn’t allowed to. For Yuki, if one thought one had the right to make one’s own decisions, that was the beginning of empowerment. All of the words she used to define empowerment have to do with the right to make one’s own decision with regards to one’s own life. Using her own words to craft a very short construct of empowerment is a symbol of the process that had led her to make a radical decision to end her marriage and get an education. She had struggled with
that decision, but was happy to have made it because now she felt free to express herself. As we have seen, Yuki was majoring in Women's Studies and was intent on bringing her knowledge back to Japan in order to empower Japanese women as well. In a sense then, Yuki was also interested in a collaborative empowerment. In her case, her life experiences commingled with a solitary quest for empowerment. This self-determination is what Yuki hoped future students of Women's Studies in Japan would gain as well.

A few other respondents chose self-determination as a defining characteristic of empowerment. While Yuki's experiences were by far the most fascinating, others' are worth mentioning as well. For example, while speaking about her lack of empowerment during her years of marriage, Elizabeth told me: “Oh, during that time, very low control. I had no choices, um. Whatever I had to say was irrelevant to what they were talking about (Elizabeth, 10).” Again, Elizabeth uses the term “they” to refer to those in power. And during this time in her life, she felt that she could not count herself among them. However, after her valuable contributions to her children's school, she did feel herself among those in power. This change in self-perception clearly reflects what Elizabeth's confusing explanations of empowerment may have obscured. She had a clear sense of knowing her worth in the world, and whether she constructed that world in patriarchal or authoritarian terms, she still felt that she belonged among those who controlled the power in society. While this may have been a misconception, what is important is that Elizabeth herself felt this way. She had shed her powerlessness and was embracing her newly acquired empowerment on her own terms.

I heard a variety of short definitions for empowerment. As stated above, knowledge was by far the most prevalent. However, equating empowerment with self-
confidence was a close second. Vema thought her Women's Studies class was giving her a greater sense of self-confidence with regards to her intellectual life. Since her mother constantly challenged this aspect of her life, this small gain was very important for Vema. Nelia chose to define empowerment in terms of her relationship with her husband. After a rather long silence, she told me that it meant "being unsubordinated" (Nelia, 5). Nelia created her own word to give me her definition of empowerment. Since we know that Nelia was insistent on her own identity instead of as her husband's wife, we can see that her definition of empowerment is reflective of that struggle. She considered empowerment as a site of resistance to her husband's appropriation of her identity. Like Yuki, although on a different level, Nelia gained a sense of self-determination as a manifestation of the empowerment she was gaining in her Women's Studies class.

Annie spoke to me of an exercise they had done in class about expressions of power. While defining power, the class had fallen into dualistic thinking by assigning outwardly aggressive manifestations of power as masculine traits and emotional, internal manifestations of power as feminine. The teacher had tried to use this exercise to disturb their dualistic thinking about power in order to help the students shake their essentialist notions of gender and power. Annie had understood this exercise to mean that power was not necessarily only available to men, and that women could be powerful through inner strength (Annie, 5). With regards to power and empowerment, this validated her dualistic thinking that she was somehow superior to her boyfriend, the father of her child, because she was able and willing to express her feelings freely and he was not. Thus, Annie used her interpretation of the power exercise she had done in class and applied it to her relationship with her boyfriend.
Kathy X. used her empowerment as a means for understanding gender discrimination issues at work. As we have seen, she used her voice to alert her coworkers to her discomfort about some of the comments they were making about women. When I asked her about empowerment, she repeated a similar scenario to that of her articulation of voice. Obviously, her work was very important to her. Indeed, most of the interview was a narrative of the relation between her Feminist Theory course and her own work as a filmmaker. Thus, the practical application of her Women's Studies course led Kathy X. to her understanding of empowerment.

On a similar, yet disturbingly different note, Dee related her definition of empowerment to her former work. She had been a prostitute for many years. When I asked her about her definition of power, she responded with a laugh: “Prostitution” (Dee, 5). When I asked her why this was so, she very quickly responded by saying: “Because that’s where I felt empowered. I felt control” (Dee, 5). To Dee, being in control of men’s desires was empowering. Even though she later told me that her pimp had abused her for most of the years she had been a sex worker, she still had felt empowered by her sexuality. Unfortunately, this empowerment and the money she had made from it were wasted on drugs and a life of homelessness. The state had taken her children away, and she was in the process of trying to get them back. This is why she had left her life of drugs and prostitution. She had gone back to school and enrolled in the Turning Point program in order to show the court that she could be a worthy parent. Unfortunately, I am not sure of the outcome of Dee’s story. However, I am sure of my reaction to her definition of power. Needless to say, I was surprised when she associated the word “prostitution” in relation to power so quickly. I came to find out through another
interview, further research, and several conversations with one of my students that it is common among many sex workers to feel empowered by their work. Thus, in exactly the opposite of what I had anticipated, Dee’s Turning Point class had in fact led to her feeling of disempowerment. As some have suggested, this would seem to be a common, if only temporary feeling for some women coming to Women’s Studies for the first time. In their cases, the initial disempowerment would ostensibly occur when the barrage of information on gender injustices would be revealed. However, learning about possible sites of resistance, their own and other women’s, would reverse this phenomenon and lead to the much more prevalent feelings of empowerment examined above. This allows us to revisit the empowerment paradox that started this chapter.

In Dee’s case, it would seem as if the initial disempowerment was embedded in her experiences with prostitution. It is significant to note however, that when Dee explained why prostitution was empowering, she did not say that she herself felt in control; rather that she felt control. This may simply be that it was just Dee’s manner of speaking, but I suspect that it had deeper roots than semantics. For much of her life, Dee had not had any control over her own future. She was either controlled by her mother, her abusive boyfriend, her pimp, or the drugs she used. She briefly experienced control when she considered herself able to make decisions; in other words while turning tricks. I would argue that she was not in control of the situation at all. Rather, the man who was paying her to have sex was, or if her pimp was forcing her to take clients, he was. She was not in control at all, but she felt like she was. And this is what is important. She felt as if her Turning Point class was a symbol of her disempowerment. Even after having been out of the life of prostitution for a few years, she still equated it with empowerment.
Unfortunately, Dee's Turning Point class had not enabled her to see or seek alternatives to the type of empowerment she had encountered through her work as a prostitute.

Luckily, this lack of alternatives was not very prevalent throughout the interviews. In fact, many participants did feel empowered by the plethora of choices they felt had been offered to them by their respective Women's Studies classes. This is not to say that they were miraculously offered a myriad of career opportunities after having taken their courses. However, in most cases, the courses did offer a different way of looking at some of the situations they were faced with in their daily lives. Perhaps it was this differentness that led so many of the respondents to remember and value the knowledge they had gained throughout their time in class.

**Choices and Decision-Making**

Another respondent who mentioned choices was Chai. Self-determination was at the forefront of Chai's mind when she spoke to me about empowerment. She told me that empowerment meant: "Um, having the ability and um, um, being able to do every... have choices and to follow our choices. That would be..." (Chai, 6). Thus, not only having choices, but also being able to abide by one's choices was central to Chai's definition of empowerment. Interestingly however, Chai was sure that her empowerment stemmed from others' influence (Chai, 10). She felt unsure that her success in education was of her own doing. Unfortunately, she strongly believed that her teachers and friends were more instrumental in her success than she was. Central to her definition of
Empowerment was the ability to make the choices of who to listen to and whose advice to discard, thereby enabling her to indeed, follow her choices.

Similarly, Mimi defined power as "someone having control" (Mimi, 8) but articulated empowerment as the following of choices or "having control within yourself" (Mimi, 8). It is significant that Mimi, like Gardenia, was a recovering alcoholic who was involved with Alcoholics Anonymous. It is possible that she defined empowerment as "having control" because that is what the process of repudiating alcohol had done for her. She found it empowering to have control of herself, instead of the alcohol having control of her. Thus, a Women's Studies course was an affirmation of that process. Not only was it empowering for Mimi to be relatively free of alcohol addiction, but it was also empowering to make meaning of the world through the lens of a Women's Studies course.

Luana was also cognizant of empowerment through the ability to make choices. She told me that through her time in the Turning Point class, she had come out of her nutshell and had been forced to take a hard look at some of her choices (Luana, 6). She asked herself whether she liked certain situations or aspects of her life and was forced to admit that she did not. Sara Ruddick argues that when feminists see mothers and children living in households where domestic violence is a fact of life, they tend to "recognize women's tendencies to 'submit' or take the blame for men's violence, or, worse, get their children to do so" (Ruddick 1989, 238). Thus, for Luana empowerment was making choices that dealt with those adverse situations and improving her own life in the meantime. Since she was such a comedian, Luana joked about her children's definition
of empowerment. When I asked her if power and empowerment meant something

different to her, she said that power is...

LN: ...what I have now. (laughter) I always joke I have absolute power,
the thing from Star Wars. So that’s become their favorite thing. “Yeah,
mom has absolute power now.” This is nice, it’s like with my ex the
shoe’s on the other foot so... (Luana, 7)

Luana was very outspoken about her newfound power. She equated it with the
empowerment she had gained through her Turning Point class. For Luana, having
control of her life was empowering. For her children, seeing their mother in control gave
them a greater respect for her. For her ex-husband, who had had control over her for so
many years due to his physical abuse, Luana’s empowerment was quite a role reversal.
She was confident enough to set boundaries around herself and her children that she felt
he could not cross. This process strengthened the respect her children had for her as well
as the respect she had for herself. And instead of the cycle of domestic abuse, a cycle of
building mutual respect ensued. Needless to say, I was more than happy to hear about
these significant changes in Luana’s life.

An Empowerment Skeptic: A Case of Mistaken Identity

Ruby was a little more skeptical of empowerment. She was a single mother of an
8-month-old daughter at the time of our interview. She was very soft-spoken, but as with
many of the other interviewees was interested in helping others as a vocation. She simply
had not yet found the avenue through which to do so. For her, however, helping others
was not rooted in her own or anyone else’s empowerment. Her definition of
empowerment was quite cynical:
RG: Empowerment. Um, oh boy. (silence) Empowerment I kind of have a problem with because it comes from a different kind of drive. I don't know whether it's based on, like what someone thinks they're gonna get out of something or maybe something that's happened to 'em that drove them, maybe like um, a will, their own like will or what not. Or... yeah, will and personal ambition and drive. (Ruby, 5)

When Ruby expressed her apparent distaste for empowerment, I thought it was possible that she had misunderstood my question. Was it possible that there was no mention made of any type of empowerment, whether using that term or another, in her class? When we spoke further, we came to the realization that she had been referred to me by mistake. She had never taken the Turning Point class at Kapi'olani Community College. She was advised to take it by Jodi K., the counselor we met above, but she never did. She was a participant in the Single Parent Displaced Homemaker program, but she had not taken the actual Turning Point class. I asked her if I could still ask her some questions anyway, and she agreed. Despite the miscommunication, we had a nice chat, and then went our separate ways. What is interesting about Ruby's narrative with regards to empowerment is related to some of the decisions I had had to make with regards to methodological questions before undertaking this research. If we can go back to some of the trials and tribulations of Chapter Two, we can remember that I had initially thought to include some sort of control group of students who had not taken a Women's Studies class, to which the same questions would have been posed, in order to determine whether Women's Studies did in fact have specific impacts on adult women learners. While I decided to omit this portion of the research due to a variety of factors discussed earlier, I did get a glimpse of what one of those interviews might have sounded like when I spoke to Ruby. This is not to say that she was "unenlightened" in any way. However, some key words often mentioned in Women's Studies classes I asked Ruby about, she had
never heard of. Or, in some cases, she had some serious misconceptions about them. I believe her definition of empowerment is an example of one such case. Not having taken a Women's Studies course, she interpreted empowerment as shutting out others for one’s own benefit and using one’s personal ambition to satisfy one’s own drive and needs. She saw these terms in a negative light and did not understand how their construction could also be a vehicle for self-determination. After all, Ruby’s words could be considered an echo of Yuki’s words about self-determination. However, as much as they were positive for Yuki, they were negative for Ruby. The latter had no conception of empowerment as a fluid term, one that may change over time and to suit different needs and situations. Rather, personal ambition and drive, instead of being positive manifestations of empowerment, were almost seen as greedy traits that should be discouraged. Yuki felt fortunate enough to even have the right to have her own personal ambition, instead of being subjected to that of her family or her husband. Ruby thought self will was a mark of someone who would use empowerment for their own gain, instead of that of others. As mentioned earlier, Ruby was interested in some sort of a “helping profession.” Thus, this may have been the reason why her definition of empowerment would have necessarily been antithetical to her own desire to succeed.

Because Ruby’s interview was a “mistake” I was forced to think about whether it was education in general which was empowering these women, or if it really was the specific Women's Studies courses they were taking. Of course, I had hoped to find the latter. Ruby did feel empowered by her educational process; she just didn’t have the feminist vocabulary to explain it to me as such. This does not mean that she was not empowered, just that she had other ways of talking about it. Thus, as we shall see in the
section below, Women's Studies courses encompassed within the realm of education in general were significant factors in helping me discover what I was trying to find. Of course, I was interviewing women with this goal in mind. However, many women did speak of education in general as a major player in their life changes, with Women's Studies being a specific way of interpreting and making meaning of their worlds and experiences.

EDUCATION

Going back to school after a long hiatus is difficult for anyone. Besides the benefits of the knowledge gained, there are classes to be attended, study habits to be (re)learned, papers to be written, tests to be taken, as well as a host of new skills needed to navigate through the educational experience. For some of the women I interviewed, taking the time away from work and families was the most difficult aspect of going back to school. Some women mentioned that this was the first time their significant others had had to prepare dinner for their children, or that they had had to work extra hours either early in the morning or late at night in order to make up for work time “lost” in class. However, even with all these obstacles, as we shall see in the examples below, most of the women I spoke with found their educational experiences richly rewarding.

It was pointed out to me when I was starting my research that I was trying to interview probably the busiest population possible. These women did not “only” work and raise families, but they also had the added burden of going to school and all that it entails. How could they possibly take even more time to talk to me? Luckily, more than
a few women did. However, it was often with constant interruptions. As evidenced by
the exchange below...

I: What about, you said education's really been empowering to you?

PF: Yeah, it really has been. It's like, I don't know what I would have
done, you know. It's made me a stronger person and it's giving something
to hold on to especially in this situation. You guys, this is really
important... (Pat, 7).

In this case, Pat and I were talking on the beach after she had finished surfing. Her sons
were with her and after we had talked for a while, they got bored of playing with each
other and started to ask her questions. Her youngest son, who was three at the time, sat in
her lap and started playing with her lip as she was talking making the eventual
transcription process quite difficult for this portion of the interview, since it sounded on
the tape as if she had a large rock in her mouth when she was talking. However, her
narrative did not cease to extol the virtues of her education and all that she had been able
to withstand, knowing that she would eventually have her education to guide her through
life after domestic violence and divorce.

Many women also spoke of education making them better people. It is interesting
that they did not characterize themselves as using their knowledge to improve their own
lives, rather education was almost draping them with some kind of better-ness. I would
argue that this is characteristic of the banking model of education¹, and its insistence on
disallowing students to be agents in their own education. When speaking of education in
general then, it is no surprise that many of the respondents made similar types of
statements. Some women, like Nikki and Luana, were not necessarily interested in

¹ In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paolo Freire's argument that the traditional model of education can be
visualized in the following way: the teachers open their students' heads and pour the knowledge in, then
getting a degree. Rather, they were interested in gaining knowledge and gathering information (Nikki II). For example, Luana was happy to have regained the “thirst for learning” that she felt she should have had as a child going through primary and secondary school. Indeed, she told me that she thought she would never stop learning (Luana, II). As a teacher, this was music to my ears. Students who want to be in school seem to be the most motivated. And in the case of these non-traditional students, they had had to overcome so many obstacles to get to the point where they were going to school that they really were happy to be there, happy to learn.

To Degree or Not to Degree? That is the Question

In Chai’s case, not only was she happy to learn, but she also gained a feeling of validation for all the learning she had previously done on her own. She told me that since her divorce, she had read a lot and tried to become involved in her community through volunteer activities. For her, education was some sort of a stepping-stone to other career goals, but that stepping-stone was proving to be invaluable as a confidence builder as well.

CM: But I had gone through a long self-probe, self-education. I read a lot. I have you know... I have gone through self-empowerment, everything, so I was kind of especially... I understood everything about myself, the only thing I was left with would be the education part, you know the career goals. That was my... and so I couldn’t get anything, only because I guess, um... some way I have not found out... I think when I tried I wasn’t given the opportunity to go to art, music... so everything I liked, I didn’t have a chance to develop, and... and... I’m practical now, so that’s my problem. And your question as to whether it affected me

---

close the heads and move on to the next subject matter, without any critical thinking about the kind of knowledge they are receiving (very often oppressive/colonial/patriarchal) being asked of the students.
personally, I think in some ways it did concern a lot of things that I’m doing right. (Chai, 5)

Chai was confident that she would graduate with a degree that would lead her to a rewarding job. This confidence was increased by the knowledge she was discovering and the fact that it was similar to what she had been able to discover previously to coming back to school, on her own. When I asked her whether her Turning Point class had affected her personally, she chose to respond with a narrative about her relationship with the institution of education. That is, going to school was proving to be an empowering confirmation of her efforts at self-education after her divorce. She told me that she had been so busy taking care of her family that she had neglected herself for many years. When she was presented with the opportunity to go to school, she grabbed it. What she learned there, in her Turning Point class as well as others, she already knew. However, she explained to me that she knew she needed a degree to get a good job and that’s why she was sticking with it.

Conversely, Mimi was not only ambivalent about her degree prospects, but also ambivalent about the place of education in her life in general. She was extremely stressed out about doing well in school. The first few semesters had been very difficult for her, but she had given up her goals of being a straight A student when she realized that it was infringing on the time she was spending with her daughter. She thought that this was more important to her than getting good grades and decided that she could be satisfied with a B if it meant that she would be able to spend more time with her daughter. She explained to me that she still strove to do as well as possible, but if that meant lowering her standards a bit, she could live with it (Mimi, 11). Even after telling me all this, she did not see a change in her approach to life. She told me the only reason
she didn’t see any changes in her life was because she was only going to school part time.
I would argue that she might have been more interested in what she was getting out of her
education than the actual grades she was receiving, since I had come across a statement
like this in another interview, this time with Marcia. It is certain, however, that Mimi
would not have concurred with this statement because she was racked by insecurity. For
most of the interview, she contradicted what she had told me only a few minutes earlier.
It is possible that she may have been nervous. It seemed much of her life was filled with
anxiety of one form or another. As mentioned above, Mimi was a recovering alcoholic.
She still worked as a waitress in a bar, however, making her recovery quite a difficult
one. When I asked her what her overall educational goals were, she answered in the
following way:

MH: (quickly) Bachelor’s. I might not... It’s like the way I feel now, it’s
like I’m not probably capable of it, but who knows? You know what I’m
saying? I don’t know we’ll see, but right now, my goal is the Bachelor’s.
(Mimi, 5)

Margo was so insecure in her ability to succeed in education that right after telling me
that she wanted to get a Bachelor’s degree, she recanted by telling me that she thought
herself incapable of reaching that goal. One could argue that she was taking it one step at
a time and that this approach was the best way she knew how to go about her education.
However, I argue that this uncertainty was a symptom of a larger insecurity about her
alcohol addiction and its impact on her life in general. It is possible that, as with
Gardenia, Alcoholics Anonymous’ Twelve Step program had more far reaching
implications than simply stopping oneself from drinking alcohol. It seemed to have
pervaded Mimi’s life and she was approaching all of her endeavors in a similar manner.
The responsibility for quitting drinking, according to Alcoholics Anonymous, lies solely
in the hands of the drinker, although the organization does encourage help from another
member of the AA chapter, a sponsor. Thus, it would seem that AA’s doctrine of self-
reliance would be somewhat of a positive foundation for starting the multiple journeys of
the empowerment process. Unfortunately, however, Mimi’s evident reluctance to believe
in herself was not remedied either by her Turning Point class, nor her overall education.
By saying, “who knows?” with regards to her Bachelor’s degree prospects, she did allow
for the possibility of success, but it is obvious that she wasn’t sure if she would succeed.
Throughout the interview, I tried to point out all that she had accomplished, but she was
reluctant to even acknowledge those achievements and we left each other with me feeling
as if I had not done enough to “help” her. Of course, it was not my goal as a researcher
to “help” these women. Indeed, even my thinking so is problematic. They did not ask
for my help. In fact, they were helping me. I suppose I thought that by offering
encouraging words, I could somehow move them along the path to educational success,
whatever that may have entailed for them. In some cases, the women asked me questions
about graduate school, or Political Science classes at UH Manoa. Those questions I was
confident I knew the “right” answers to, I answered. If I did not know answers to their
questions, I referred them to counselors in academic advising centers, going so far as
having the number with me so that I could give it to them if they needed it. In some
cases I also referred them to some websites that provide information about financial
assistance, especially to those who had expressed the desire to go on beyond the
Bachelor’s degree. I had hoped that this type of advice would be my small contribution,
or reciprocation in some way for their taking the time out of their busy schedules to talk
to me. Unfortunately, there is no way to know if this did in fact “help” anyone.
Intellectual Impacts

As I noted in the previous chapter, feminism and feminist consciousness were quite pervasive in many of the respondents' sense of agency as learners in their other classes. Thus, in this section, we will see how the participants' education in general may have been affected by Women's Studies courses, not necessarily by their feminist consciousness per say, but simply by the fact that they had taken a Women's Studies course. Several interviews stand out with respect to the impact of Women's Studies on other intellectual endeavors. The reason they stand out is that, for the most part, they were unsolicited responses with regards to the politicization of these adult learners in their other classes.

In the most general sense, Jennifer wanted to learn how to debate in a more effective manner. School had changed Jennifer's outlook on life in more ways than one. Previous to her enrollment in school, she had admitted to me that all she did was work, drink, and be lazy (Jennifer, 7). Fortunately for her, or unfortunately depending on how one looks at it, she was a waitress on the ubiquitous Waikiki sunset booze cruises for many years and as such was easily able to combine money making activities with her favorite pastime, drinking. Jennifer did not reveal herself to me as an alcoholic, nor did I sense that she had a problem with alcohol addiction. Indeed, when we spoke she was too busy with school to bother with that. She was eager to learn about a variety of viewpoints so that she would be able to provide evidence when she was arguing about political issues with her friends and family. I would definitely consider this an
unorthodox reason to go to school, but it definitely seemed to work for her because she was excited about school. Of course, who am I to say what is orthodox or not with regards to this issue anyway? That excitement is what teachers spend a lot of time during the semester trying to elicit from their students, and Jennifer definitely had it. It was a pleasure to see. In fact, she was so excited that she was going in many different directions at once, not yet having settled on one avenue on which to direct her energy.

She told me the following:

JD: I wanted to learn to talk about feminist issues and all kinds of issues, but I don’t have a lot of background in any of them. So I don’t have a good basis for what I’m arguing. I just say “Na, you’re wrong, not true.” So I’ve always wanted to... so that’s why I’m taking Political Science now, cause I don’t know a lot about politics and it’s everywhere. I just wanted to educate myself in it so I could figure out what I’m talking about. The same with the feminist class, or Women’s Studies class. I want to know statistics, I want to know history, I want to know all about it. And this particular class, for some reason the philosophy I wouldn’t have chose [sic] particularly, but everything else was closed at the time that I registered, but I do enjoy every aspect of it. And I enjoy the liberal arts as well. I’ve taken a lot of classes in history that have pertained to that subject, and you know history involves all that, so... (Jennifer, 4)

In this passage, she talked about her Women’s Studies course, her Political Science and History courses, as well as her Philosophy class. She was excited about all of them, learning about different things and a variety of perspectives. I was pleased to hear this, because Jennifer was a student in my introductory Political Science class. It is possible that she was just telling me all this to make me feel good, but she wouldn’t have had to talk about her other classes if this had been the case. Thus, I believe that it was not only her Women's Studies course which was sparking her desire to learn, but it was the combination of all her classes, whether they were lecture based or not, feminist or not,
which enabled her to question what she was learning as well as apply that knowledge to her life outside of school.

As Jennifer exhibited a general enthusiasm about school in general, I found that Lesley was also quite enthusiastic, albeit in a completely different way. When I asked her if her Women's Studies knowledge had leaked into any of her other classes, she immediately answered that it had affected her way of looking at her Political Science class. We had the following exchange:

I: Huh, OK. Um, do you think it’s affecting your intellectual life, like how you see your other classes maybe?

LR: Yup.

I: OK, how so?

LR: Um, my Political Science class. Yeah, (laughter).

I: What Political Science class are you taking?

LR: 110

I: That’s what I teach.

LR: Yeah, 110. Um, because he’s a man, he totally doesn’t look at women’s viewpoints. But he can’t help himself cause he’s a man. You know, and I know that, and I try to keep an open mind, but he can’t do anything about it cause he’s a man.

I: And do you tell him?

LR: No, no, no, no. You know, don’t challenge the teacher. Don’t make him be on your bad side. But you know, he’s opening up a little bit, he’s having us read about Joan of Arc, so at least not everything is about a man, like Conan, or whatever, so he’s trying. But when he does explain, it’s still more a man’s point of view and he doesn’t... He says she challenged people because of her religion, he doesn’t say because she’s a woman. But we’re all women, and we all know that. (Lesley, 5)
There are several significant strands of thought in this exchange. First, taking a Women's Studies course had enabled her to discern the lack of space afforded to women in the general curriculum. Second, she acknowledged that the “add-women-and-stir” approach to the Political Science curriculum her teacher was taking was only a step in the right direction with regards to including women in the curriculum. Lesley was aware that there should be women writers assigned for readings for example, not only that there should be a token outstanding woman included in the discussion. Third, she was critical of her teacher's insistence on treating Joan of Arc's greatness as a result of her religion as opposed to Joan of Arc being amazing because she broke out of the traditional female roles of the time, albeit in drag. Finally, however, even while being critical of all these things, she was reluctant to translate her criticism into action and tell the teacher that she, and her fellow women students, would appreciate learning more about women in the political arena. Thus, the site of resistance of her Women's Studies course had expanded to include some of her other classes, specifically her Political Science class. However, due to the authoritarian and patriarchal pedagogy her Political Science instructor used, she did not want to get on his bad side and risk the chance of alienating him or compromise her grade in the course. It was not clear to me whether her instructor was haole or not. It is quite possible that this may have also been a factor in her reluctance to confront him. Within the University of Hawai‘i system, 70% of faculty is white, while over 80% of the student body is of color (Center for Teaching Excellence 1992, 47). Lesley, herself part-Hawaiian, may have had to overcome this barrier as well, thus her reluctance to confront her teacher may have stemmed from this added obstacle to their male/female relationship.
In a completely different manner than Lesley, Shu engaged in a similar type of resistance to the general curriculum. Women's Studies pervaded all of her education. When I asked her if her Women's Studies course had had a specific impact on her education, she responded in the following way:

SR: Oh, yeah, I think I started... well, how it affected my academic life was every opportunity that I had to a research paper, I would do it on a woman. If it was science, and I could pick the subject, it would be something related to women. If it was art and it was our choice of an artist, it would always be a woman, so I found out... I supplemented my curriculum and it always had something to do with women, so that was really good. That awareness, I would not have had that. (Shu, 6)

Shu uses the word awareness. While that would have been an obvious indicator of a feminist consciousness, I chose to include in the general education section as opposed to the discussion of feminist consciousness because Shu herself revealed the relevance of Women's Studies to the curriculum of her other classes. Where she saw a lack of women, she supplemented it herself, by doing research on women. Whether it was women artists or science research related to women's health issues, for example, Shu credited her Women's Studies courses for pushing her to make these discoveries. As we shall see below, Shu also applied her feminist knowledge to her work at a relatively large trust company. She was conscious of the feminist repercussions of her Women's Studies classes on the curriculum she was creating for herself, where the space was allowed by her teachers, but also on her own life as well.

Yet another type of impact on the general education of one of the respondents was the ability to name. This may sound awkward, but in Katherine's case, she found it to be the most important characteristic of her education. When I closed the interview by
asking her if her education in general had affected any of her political beliefs, she replied by saying:

KP: (silence) I think my education’s given me labels for my political beliefs.

I: Anything in particular?

KP: It was surprising, cause I didn’t have labels for how I believed or how I looked at the world, and it’s kind of given me a clearer direction, and willing to expand my beliefs, research my beliefs and test them out. So yeah… (Katherine, 8-9)

Katherine was a very politically active person even before she had come back to school. Yet she credited her education with the ability to put definitions to names she had been throwing around prior to returning to school.

Katherine’s story was an interesting one, to say the least. Katherine had also been a prostitute, although she had not found it nearly as empowering as Dee. In fact, she was in a situation where she was just about as disempowered as someone can get. She called it white sexual slavery. She told me that she had been a prostitute on the streets of Honolulu as a young girl, when she was abducted and taken to a house on Tantalus. In this house lived a minister of some sort of obscure faith, the name of which she didn’t recall. He kept her as his prisoner and sexual slave for three years. She was not allowed to leave the property without an escort, the man’s chauffeur, nor was she ever allowed to come in contact with anyone else but the man’s servants. One night, the man was taken ill, in retrospect she believed it was due to cancer, and was bleeding from the anus. His maid and the chauffeur were taking care of him and trying to clean him up. Seizing what could have been her only opportunity, she escaped by climbing a wall adjacent to the street. Then she started running. She literally ran for her life without shoes or other
clothes besides the cut off jean shorts and t-shirt she was wearing. She had no money and no family in Hawai‘i. Indeed, she had become a prostitute in the first place because her mother had left her in Hawai‘i to fend for herself at the ripe old age of sixteen.

Some kindly person found her wandering the street in a daze and knew enough to get her shelter, food, and subsequent help. I could feel my eyes getting wider and wider as the story progressed. After she finished, I think she could tell I was in minor shock. She proceeded to give me website addresses for white sexual slavery so that I could verify the veracity of her story. Not that her story was on a website, rather that there were things going on like this all the time, but they were relatively unknown to the outside world. It is little wonder that Katherine had become political. She told me that she had done well in high school but had had to drop out in order to make enough money to pay rent, and feed and clothe herself when her mother went back to the mainland. Her years as a prostitute and sexual slave had been so traumatic that it took her a long time to recover. In perfect symbiosis with Katherine’s story, Rosa Braidotti argues that “as memory is the databank of one’s identity, the struggle to remember or retrieve the embodied experiences that are too painful for immediate recollection is a formidable struggle. It also makes for no less formidable narratives” (Braidotti 2001, 187). I would argue that Katherine’s narrative is just that. Formidable.

Although this is certainly not the end of the story, only the end I was privileged enough to hear, here is the little I know of the rest of Katherine’s story: she did not go back to finish high school for quite some time. When she did finally get her GED and started attending Kapi‘olani, she found that her life experiences had put her way ahead of the other students in terms of being able to deal with adverse situations. She simply felt
that she could benefit from the formal definitions of the things she had known all along. This is what she had meant by being thankful for the ability to name. She had been involved with the Hawai‘i Labor Party for some time, and was involved in producing a show on ʻOlelo called Hawai‘i Employees Today. She told me that she was so busy with school, she had not been able to find the time to produce another show, but that she was looking forward to incorporating her new knowledge with the show as well as furthering her own general education.

The various ways of incorporating Women's Studies knowledge into their own educations were quite striking. As we have seen, for women adult learners, who face a multiplicity of barriers to educational attainment, simply going to school is an act of transgression. For them to make strides in including women in their respective curricula is even more significant. The relationship between the knowledge gained in Women's Studies courses and the more general education classes they were taking is quite apparent. It may have been on the surface of these women's narratives, but it was by no means superficial. At this point, I would like to focus on one participant and her quest for knowledge. Shu's experiences are atypical of most of the women I interviewed, but simply because I cannot make generalizations about a greater number of women in this study does not mean that I should omit what I consider to be one of the most transgressive stories of all.
Shu’s Education

At this time, I would like to revisit Shu’s story with regards to the inventive ways she had crafted of including women into her own curriculum. As a preface to this section, however, I would like to say that talking with Shu was a pleasure. It was as if she was telling me everything I wanted to hear because Women’s Studies had affected her in so many ways. She had been referred to me by another of my respondents who had already gone through the interview process, so it is possible that the latter had told Shu what kinds of questions I was asking so that she could have thought about them ahead of time. Whether this is what happened or not, I will never know. What I do know is that Shu’s answers were long and evocative of the arduous process of returning to school.

The impact Women’s Studies had had on her education was evident. She stated:

SR: Yes, absolutely. I started looking at curriculum and recognizing how much of women’s history was left out of regular curriculum and started recognizing that I shouldn’t have to take a Women’s Studies class to get that, you know, that should be in the regular curriculum. You know, I think from that perspective also made me especially look at classes and how not just the curriculum, but how it was conducted, the sexism of male teachers that would um, (silence) hit on me, the male teachers that hardly interact with female students, you know younger students. Now it’s more, cause I’m aging, you know my own invisibility as a student, as opposed to a younger female student in a class where the teacher, a male teacher is on that level. So it’s definitely helped me be aware of those kinds of things. (Shu, 5)

As in the last section, Shu mentions awareness, indicating that her feminist consciousness is always deployed. We have already discussed Shu’s insistence on creating her own feminist curriculum by doing research on women or women’s issues. What is significant in this passage, however, is her mention of the sexist teaching methods some of her male teachers were using. One could characterize the exclusion of women from the curriculum
as sexist. Indeed, I believe it is. However, what Shu is alluding to is that as an adult learner, she was much closer in age to her professors. It is within this scope that she had felt the sexist intentions of her male teachers. After an embarrassed silence, she mentioned that she had encountered sexual harassment on the part of her male teachers. It was almost as if she was trying to decide whether to tell me or not. When she did, she passed over the issue quickly and moved on to something else. She was the only interviewee who mentioned sexual harassment, even just in passing. There were no other mentions of sexist actions on the part of male professors, besides their deliberate (or unthinking) exclusion of women from the curriculum, of course. Shu credited her Women's Studies courses for making her aware that this type of behavior was simply wrong. Because Shu was so glad to talk about the content of her Women's Studies courses and their impact on her other classes, we never revisited this issue. This is quite unfortunate, since it is a direct manifestation of one of the fundamental discriminations women face in the classroom or workplace, and is thus applicable to almost any woman in any learning or work environment. Furthermore, Shu's own mention of her age and her “invisibility as a student” seems to indicate the complex location she, as well as many of the other respondents, occupies as an adult learner. There is an inherent contradiction between the two sentences, one mentioning her age as a direct factor in the male professors’ seemingly justified sexual innuendoes, and the second sentence refuting that statement by asserting that she had felt invisible as a student compared to younger female students. These two sentences in the narrative, along with the last sentence which asserts her consciousness stemming from her Women's Studies courses, constitute that in-between space so many of the interviewees inhabit. They are students, but they are
different, because they are older. They are workers, but they are different because they are students. They are mothers, but they shoulder added burdens because they are students. The multiplicity of locations, their combinations, and their respective responsibilities could go on endlessly. In this case, Shu’s age made her male professors feel that she would be receptive to sexual advances, but in other classes, it made her invisible to other students as well as professors. Negotiating these constant changes must have been exhausting for her; nevertheless, she was glad that her Women’s Studies courses had given her names for what was happening to her. In Shu’s case, naming her situations gave her the sense of agency she was seeking by returning to education in the first place.

Shu was so enthusiastic during the interview; it was almost infectious. We spoke about the various Women’s Studies courses she had taken, and she was intent on giving me practically the entire course description for each class. She also explained to me, in great detail, how each of the classes related to her life situation at the time. Needless to say, I was quite thankful for all this information. Shu answered many of the questions I was going to ask her before I had a chance to ask them. Still, the interview was one of the longest and most fruitful of the entire research process. In the following narrative, we can see Shu moving from her general perception of Women’s Studies courses, to a more personal application of each course to her own life.

SR: They all were great. Really. They all have just been so good because again, they’ve looked at things from you know, a woman’s perspective and even just a perspective that considers women. You know, most of the perspectives in the classes just don’t consider women, at all, you know. Art classes, it’s all about men. You know, women are just not good enough, by their standards, not good enough, you know, they just don’t even deal with it. So the first class, this is interesting, the first class that I took was actually psychology of women, not the intro, so um, I think it
was just... I personally was going through some things at that time, you
know having worked in a business my whole adult life and dealing with
the discrimination. Even now, even right now. You know, especially
commercial real estate is um, such a macho, male dominated profession
and um, but I've been dealing with that all my life. I think just going
through a divorce, and getting into therapy and recognizing that I have you
know, like everybody internalized you know, from really early on. I was
really, really academically, really, have done really well. You know, and I
got to high school and just dropped it all for guys and that became the
focus of my energy, my goal, you know... I had graduated with honors
and chose not to go to college. You know, I mean I came to UH after I
took a year off. I wasn't gonna go to college at all. And then I came to
UH. Met a guy, dropped out you know, I mean that was, that marriage,
spent all my time and energy putting him through school, taking care of
him, divorced, got married again, real short, same thing! And then at that
point, it was like, you know, I went through my second divorce and just
that's sort of when I just started going "wait a sec" you know. There's
more to life, you know, I'm not using any of that energy for me. I'm
using all of this great energy, to help a guy. And so that is part of what I
discovered. (Shu, 4)

Here we can see Shu's educational process in quite a clear light. She finished high
school with honors, but decided to forgo college. She had made this decision because she
got married instead. She went to college, but only halfheartedly, and never finished. The
whole process repeated again and after her second divorce, she decided to go back and
finish.

As mentioned earlier, she was working for a large trust company in Honolulu.
She had started out as a secretary fifteen years earlier and had steadily moved up and had
gotten a higher paying and more prestigious position within the trust company. She told
me that it was in no small part due to a woman trustee who had become her mentor. Shu
mentioned that for most of her time at the company, there had only been male trustees
and that as soon as a woman had become a trustee, the entire work environment had
shifted to become more generous, empowering, and enabling. It is possible that she
recognized this because of her Women's Studies courses, but it is also possible that she
simply felt more comfortable at work and deciphered a causal relationship between the arrival of the female trustee and her increased happiness at work. This female trustee encouraged her to go back to school and finish her degree, even though she knew that Shu wanted to get her degree in art, not business. Shu was grateful for this little push and had thrown herself into her education with much gusto.

Shu’s description of her artwork was directly related to her work in Women's Studies. It was quite personal, and also feminist, in nature. When I asked her what her art entailed, she gave me the following reply:

SR: I do ceramics. I do some mixed media. I’ve done a little bronze, but sculpture. So I did... One of the first pieces I did was a piece on my hysterectomy, then a piece I did, I called... It was a dress in ceramics, it was a wedding dress, and it was one year after the wedding so I had the hourglass, virginal white as the mythological... and that was about the myth of it. And mine was about the reality of marriage, so it was dirty and soiled, it was hunched over and thick in the middle and the sleeves were torn, and I called it “Tattered Dreams.” I’ve done pieces on spiked heels as symbols for the objectification of women, sexual objectification of women that we do things that are bad for their health, in order to appear, to fit the male definition of what is a woman. I’ve done... I did a bowl, a breast bowl that was talking about breasts as a functional object rather than a sexual object. I’ve done lots of stuff. It’s primarily gender oriented. And then I’ll do some, you know, funkier stuff, and I’ll do stuff that’s about me personally, not necessarily gender related, but related to my family. But a lot of my stuff is specifically related to the work that I did in those classes (Shu, 11).

Similarly to Marcia, Shu engaged her personal life in her artwork. However, unlike Marcia, who was expressing her frustrations with her marriage unmediated by her Women's Studies class in her clay chandelier-making, Shu made a direct connection with her work in Women's Studies courses and her artwork. The two were embedded in each other for her. She used the background of her Women's Studies courses as a site of resistance in the gendered world of art. She understood that her art contributed to that
division, yet she was proud that it would be considered women’s art. That is, marriage, the female body, or the objectification of women inspired her art. While those are stereotypically seen as women’s issues, Shu turned them around and used them to create art that was reflective of her life and also quite feminist in content.

This leaking of Women's Studies courses into other educational endeavors is what I believe Women's Studies should be striving for. It is also a reflection of the empowerment of its students. That is, if professors in other departments aren’t going to change their curricula to include women, even in the most basic “add-women-and-stir” manner, then it is up to Women's Studies students to do it for them, and for themselves as well. While it would seem that this is an undue burden to students, I would argue that many of them are glad to take on the task. In many cases, as we have seen with Marcia and Shu, they decide to do research on women in other classes. I have often encountered this phenomenon through my experiences as a teacher. Students tell me that they are applying what they have learned in our Women's Studies course to their other classes, and using a variety of strategies to do so. Most often, they follow the same route as Marcia and Shu, they use what they have learned in their Women's Studies courses as a basis for extending their knowledge on particular topics they are interested in. Whether this takes the form of art or research in a history class, is up to the student her or himself. In any case, when I hear about Women’s Studies reaching out through the voices, and actions of my students, I cannot help but feel as if Women's Studies has accomplished something, has overcome yet another barrier to end sexist oppression, has empowered someone else, has encouraged yet another student toward feminism.
Another facet of this leakage is related to the community aspect of Women's Studies, discussed earlier. In the previous case, it was related to voice and the interviewees' community creations, not only within their Women's Studies courses, but in other aspects of their lives as well. An extension of these communities can also be associated with empowerment as well. As we have already seen, Toni was extremely involved in her community and was eager to share her newfound knowledge with her friends. Another manifestation of this occurrence can be seen below:

TM: Well, I have friends I go to the beach with and sometimes they're interested, you know, I took French everybody was interested, but with these classes... And now they're annoyed because I play Scrabble and I know all these words, and they're like "What does that mean? What's that word from?" (laughter) (Toni, 9)

In this case, it seems as if Toni's learning extended out from her educational community to her network of friends. She felt good about herself because she knew things they didn't as a direct result of her education, more specifically from her Women's Studies courses. Toni was being sarcastic about her friends' annoyance at her knowledge because she was laughing as she was telling me the story. Something that seems so trivial as Scrabble meant a lot to Toni. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Toni was retired from show business, and besides attending school; she was free to pursue her interests. One of those interests was Scrabble. She was intent on doing well, even more intent on outdoing her close friends. Toni found empowerment in that she had a competitive advantage over those friends due to her university attendance. For her, that was one of the important benefits of going to school. For now, Toni was satisfied with improving her position in her own world.
On the contrary, Annie was focused on changing society in general. As we saw in the previous chapter, Annie was interested in becoming a high school teacher. She hoped to make a difference in young girls' lives within that realm. When I asked her how she would do that, she replied:

AS: Definitely. Like I already, I mean, I don't know if it'll be possible, but I think that some of the stuff that I've learned in this class, I would really love to teach a girls' class in high school about things to help them succeed. Cause it's needed, you know. If they can be aware of factors that tend to their success, at least they know what they're walking in... the path they're walking down when they're doin' it. I think that would be a really important step in improving... society (laughter) (Annie, 8).

While the laughter at the end of the narrative would seem to suggest that she did not really take these thoughts seriously, I would argue that the fact that she was even thinking about this possibility and framing it as an opportunity for herself and young girls in the process is quite significant. As an aside, in each of the Women's Studies classes I have taught, I have assigned a group project in which students are asked to come up with solutions to what they determine are societal problems. Invariably, one group decides to design a high school Women's Studies course. They have gone about it in different ways, but each group has decided that adolescent girls need this Women's Studies knowledge the most out of any population they can think of. Thus, Annie is by no means the only one to come up with this idea.

The entire passage can be read in two different ways. In the first way, we can see that Annie is thinking big; improving society is her goal, no less. This would indicate a sense of general empowerment since she feels entitled to dream this big. However, one could also read the laughter at the end of the narrative as a telltale sign that she knows that women are not allowed the tools in this patriarchal society, to effect changes of this
magnitude, especially if they are high school teachers. I would suggest, however, that her laughter is simply a symptom of the uncertainty of the perceived validity of the project. I think it is significant, regardless of the end result that Annie, along with many others, has thought that Women's Studies courses belong in the high school curriculum. It is also noteworthy that each of these students has thought that these classes would, among other things, enable a greater equality between men and women and that education had the power to do this in the first place.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have seen that empowerment can be characterized as a continuum. It is engaged in a conversation with the concept of voice, each one stemming from the other. In many cases empowerment can be problematic, especially with regards to adult learners. They are so embedded in a patriarchal social system, that it is difficult for them to engage in paradigm shifts of their entire lives and experiences.

Jodi K. offered us the teacher's view of student empowerment. She explained that it is simply a manifestation of a strength that was already there, but that Women's Studies courses nurture empowerment to life. In her case, she was speaking about the practical empowerment students gained from her Turning Point classes. I would argue that because those classes are geared towards practical applications of Women's Studies concepts, the empowerment gained is more easily identified and articulated by students. In the academic context, students gained a more conceptual sense of empowerment,
especially as it related to their other classes. This is not to dichotomize the two, but rather to enable us to see either end of the continuum.

The discovery of self was, for many respondents, a direct and empowering result of their Women's Studies courses. They discovered a multiplicity of locations, but uncovering those connections led for some interviewees to greater confidence in decision-making. When the class was over, they had begun to define themselves in terms of their own self, rather than as mothers, wives, daughters, workers, etc. Of course, this was not the case for every respondent as we shall see in the next chapter, but several participants were eager to articulate this self-determination as an empowering result of their respective Women's Studies classes.

Many women also conveyed a quest for collaborative empowerment, whether that was taking place in a classroom community, or whether they were speaking of reaching out beyond their classrooms to help others discover the empowerment they had been able to find. Lesley was interested in helping others help themselves as a manifestation of their, and her own, empowerment. Another expression of this was witnessed through the only constant in Elizabeth’s narrative, inconsistency. These two narratives revealed empowerment’s continuum, whether solitary or collaborative.

Many respondents spoke of knowledge as the most empowering result of education. Indeed, they defined one in terms of the other. However, they went a step further, by talking about self-determination and confidence as two signs of empowerment. For example, Yuki’s empowerment was linked to creating/having a space to make her own decisions. Kathy X.’s confidence manifested itself when she spoke out at work. Dee’s story was not quite as cheerful. She felt disempowered during her
Turning Point class, after having perceived much more control during her years as a prostitute. The variety of choices and the ability to make them instead of the choices being made for them was the central indicator of the empowering idea of self-determination.

The interviewees faced a multitude of obstacles with regards to their return to education, making them an extremely difficult population to interview. Needless to say, I was glad at least some women decided to participate in this research project. Whether they were going to school to get a degree or simply to gather information or gain new knowledge, I had hoped to be of assistance with logistical questions they might have had. I did the best I could to answer the questions they asked, and if I couldn’t answer them, I hope that I pointed them in the direction of someone who could. It isn’t clear why they thought I would know answers to their questions, since we were all from such varying backgrounds, educational and otherwise. Perhaps it was their perception of me as a graduate student who would have by definition spent much more time at the university that they thought they should ask me questions about which paths to take or what kinds of degrees I thought would serve them better in the long run. Regardless of their motivations, it was clear to me that for the most part they were eager to continue their educational endeavors.

Women’s Studies knowledge definitely leaked into the participants other intellectual undertakings. For example, Jennifer was going in many directions. Her main goal however, was to become better at debating. Lesley, on the other hand, was dissatisfied with the lack of women in her Political Science class’ curriculum. Katherine was finding the ability to put definitions to words and concepts she already knew were
quite rewarding and empowering. And finally, Shu’s educational experiences, from her mentor encouraging her to return to education, to talking about women in the curriculum, from experiencing and being able to recognize sexual harassment, to transforming her art into feminist and personal work were all accomplishments directly related to the empowerment Shu had gained as a result of her Women's Studies courses.

Thus, looking at these narratives, it is clear that the empowerment acquired in Women's Studies courses encourages students to branch out on their own in search of feminist content. That is, even if Women's Studies is plagued with a perpetual lack of funding, we can be sure that our courses are enabling students to venture into the uncharted waters of feminist curricula within their general education classes, or even their majors. The fact that these students undertake these searches is a testament to the power of the knowledge gained in Women's Studies courses. That power is not limited to educational attainment, however. This student-centered search for feminist knowledge underscores the agency many of these women engaged as they struggled with the messy, “one step forward, two steps back” (and probably a few steps to either side as well) empowerment process. Some interviewees had initially encountered disempowerment as we saw in the beginning of this chapter. Others’ life experiences had left them ready to begin the struggle for empowerment within the space of their respective Women's Studies classes, in order to apply it outside of academia. As we have seen, regardless of the situation, most of the participants were eager to continue the process in a wide variety of ways. As we shall see in the next chapter, searching for feminist content can also be witnessed through the interviewees’ meaning making of their own identities.
CHAPTER 5: IDENTITY

“Identity is all about power and resistance, subjection and citizenship, action and reaction. I would suggest that we cannot afford to pass over this casually. Rather we need to profoundly rethink identity if we are to begin to comprehend the meaning of power. This is one sense in which ‘identity’ is a challenging subject: it challenges us to rethink power, and all the banal and brutal simplifications and subjections that have accompanied the exercise of power…” (Amina Mama, “Challenging Subjects: Gender, Power, and Identity in African Contexts”: 2002).

As we have seen in earlier chapters, there are many possible interpretations of the respondents’ narratives. Indeed, in no case more than in this chapter. Recognizing the ambiguities instead of trying to impose consistency makes for a more complex reflection not only on, but also of, the narratives and of the women who shared them with me. These ambiguities with regards to identity, feminist and otherwise, are the focus of this chapter. How did the respondents narrate themselves within their conceptions not only of their gender roles, but also as feminists, as mothers, as students, as workers, as citizens, as community members, etc? The range of responses to these questions is astounding, again reflective of the wide variety of respondents and their various life experiences. It is also reflective of the “transformative force that propels multiple, heterogeneous ‘becomings’ of the subject” (Braidotti 2001, 190). I do not want to imply that the participants were on their way to becoming one new identity in any way, even if they were very different from each other. Rather, I am arguing that the multiplicity of responses to my questions about identity reflects the intersectionality of their subjective positions. Abby Ferber states that “we can argue that some forms of identity ought to be retained, while others abandoned; however, not on the grounds that some are more important than others. Instead, our arguments to retain certain identities must be recognized as political decisions, based on strategic and ethical grounds” (Ferber 1999, 151). Thus, we can see that the intersectionality of the respondents’ identities has marked
political consequences. Furthermore, “the deconstruction of essentialized race and
gender [and other] identities is not the same thing as saying we need to abandon these
categories of identity.” (Ferber 1999, 151). In this chapter, I intend to show that throwing
a rock in this pond of categories necessarily entails their productive disturbance.

Identity questions proved to be some of the most difficult responses to elicit.
Actually, I changed the questions several times so that I would not have to clarify them
with qualifiers at each interview. Initially, I asked women to describe themselves to
someone they didn’t know. This elicited descriptive terms of physical characteristics.
When I probed for deeper meaning, I was rewarded with yet another dose of what I
originally considered to be superficial character traits. Inwardly, I became frustrated
because I was not able to elicit the responses that I wanted to hear. I realize how
problematic that is now, and in retrospect, it is fortunate that I was not able to force the
women into having them tell me what I wanted to hear. With regards to descriptive terms
for the respondents, I was looking for neat and tidy terms, such as: woman, feminist,
local, mother, student, secretary in that order according to importance. Of course, not a
single response reflected that wish and thankfully so. What came out of the respondents’
narratives echoed the complex nature of each and every one of the interviewees
themselves. The reason I was looking for these “neat and tidy” terms is that if women
identified themselves as women first and foremost, they would easily be able to identify
with feminism, which is an integral part of most Women’s Studies classes. This would
enable them to make an easy connection with feminism which would not only play a
major role in their life decisions, but they would have ostensibly remembered where they
learned it as well. I have stated before that I did not go into the interview process with

215
any hypotheses in mind. Certainly, I did not have any written down. However, I have also stated that it is impossible to go through the interview and writing process without any partiality. Thus, while I was hoping to find this connection between identifying oneself as a woman, being a feminist, and learning a lot in a Women's Studies course, when I discovered that this was not to be, I let go of the idea (granted with some difficulty) and allowed space for theory to develop.

The range of self-analysis and introspection in the interviews was also very wide. There were a few women who did not have words to describe themselves, and there were a few women who had extremely interesting insights into their selves. Some women talked about themselves as a sum of parts, others approached their identities in more holistic terms, seeing that while there may be separate parts to one’s self, they overlap and melt into each other. Keeping this in mind, I realized then, as I do now, that asking identity questions is problematic, not only because the answers are not necessarily “neat and tidy,” but also because asking women to separate their identities, and thus possibly leave themselves open to identity politics, is also problematic. By this last statement, I mean that asking for separate identities is not only impossible, but also somewhat dangerous. It is difficult enough to sit through an interview, with an unknown (in most cases) interviewer, but it is even more difficult if that interviewer is asking one to separate oneself into parts. This is practically an untenable position because it can lead to a fracturing of one’s own identity; this being the most negative aspect of identity politics. It is useful to think of the respondents as looking in a mirror, and me asking them to break that mirror, describe and explain the different parts they saw in the mirror to me, and then having to put the mirror back together. We all know that once a mirror has been
broken it is impossible to fix it as if it were new. So this is where the dangerous ground lay for the interviewees. Just as Audre Lorde argues in *Sister/Outsider* that she should not be asked to split herself into partial segments (Lorde 1989), I did not want to ask the interviewees to have to engage in this practice to satisfy my research needs. Furthermore, it is asking someone to choose which part of her is most important, when such a weighting of parts is impossible. Thankfully, I didn’t ask the respondents for percentages of the various identities they revealed to me. But that was really what I wanted to hear. Again, thankfully, the respondents had the wisdom not to indulge me and thus I ended up with a much richer picture of the variety of individual identities, and have been able to collect them into a more complex sum of parts, while still allowing me to create groupings of similar identities.

For example, this chapter examines some of the more general statements the interviewees made about their identities, some of the ethnic and cultural differences in the understanding of identity that I was privileged to encounter, as well as some of the more specific aspects of identity which the participants shared with me, such as what it meant for them to be daughters, mothers, wives/girlfriends, and adult learners. The respondents chose these last characteristics of their identities as significant, and as such I included them in this chapter as representative of their agency in creating, narrating, and making meaning of their selves for the purposes of this project.
From No Self to a Sense of Self to Identity

I think the saddest quote that I have come across throughout this entire project, even sadder than all of the stories of domestic violence, abuse, drug addiction, prostitution and even sexual slavery has to come from Erin, whom I interviewed at UH-West O’ahu. She was nearing the end of her term in a Psychology of Women course, and I already mentioned her with regards to her lack of feminist consciousness in Chapter Three. When I asked how she would describe herself to someone whom she didn’t know, she didn’t have an answer. After some unproductive urging, I simply gave up. However, looking over her entire interview after I transcribed it, I was able to discern a pattern besides her love of short answers. As part of that prodding, when I asked her whether she thought of herself as feminist, I was certainly not prepared for the answer: “I don’t think of myself as anything. I don’t know” (Erin, 4) she replied. I almost laughed because I thought she was kidding. Thankfully, I restrained myself, especially when I realized that she was absolutely serious. Erin had literally no sense of self. Not only could she not come up with descriptive terms, even in a physical sense. She was not able to think of herself in terms of anything. There was no inner self, or even outer self that she could offer to me even as a description. This may have been due to her particularly restrictive family life which she mentioned in passing, or that she just was not prepared to share anything with me. I thought of this throughout the interview and afterwards as well, since she had displayed such obvious reticence to my questions. But then why go through the interview process in the first place? Her teacher had not been one of those
who had offered extra credit, so Erin was definitely a willing participant in the interview process. Sadly, this leads me back to the initial proposition that Erin just didn’t have a self to describe. While it is certainly possible that Erin’s response did not adhere to what I perceive as a sense of self (probably in a very Western and ethnocentric sense of the word), Erin was engaging in a local cultural practice viewed as valuable by many students. Self-effacement has been documented by many. I have seen this happen not only in my classes, but also in other teachers’ classes as well. While this is certainly a possibility with regards to Erin’s narrative, it is also possible that she did not want to give away or reveal any part of herself to me. This leads me back again to the wonderment as to why she would participate in the interview. Unfortunately, I have no definite answer. However, Carol Gilligan’s discussion of patterns in women’s sense of themselves is still useful here because it highlights women’s repeated “reluctance to judge [which] stems rather from their uncertainty about their right to make moral statements, or perhaps from the price for them that such judgment seems to entail” (Gilligan 1982, 66). Erin was reluctant to talk about her self, because she believed she did not have a self to describe and for her the price of naming it, and thus making some type of claim to it, was too high to pay.

Erin was not the only participant struggling with issues of self. Pat, whom we also encountered at length in Chapter Three, was also besieged with low self-esteem.

This is illustrated in the following example:

---

1 I am thinking here specifically of Kathleen Kane’s work through the Center for Teaching Excellence and the Office for Faculty Development and Support and a number of pamphlets and informational booklets they give out to new teachers and teaching assistants. This literature is intended to help new faculty deal with and understand local cultural practices in Hawai‘i and how they might encourage students to remain quiet despite the teachers’ efforts at engaging them into discussion.
PF: Like right now I feel pretty weak [holding her youngest son in her arms as he plays with his lip], even physically, but um, I don't know. I'm really striving to get out of the hole. You know what I mean? I don't know how I would describe myself cause right now I don’t have the best self-esteem (laughter) you know what I mean? (Pat, 7)

Pat herself attributed her difficulty in describing herself to her current lack of self-esteem. She didn’t feel as if she had a self worth giving out or describing. While self-esteem is extremely difficult to measure quantitatively, I can be sure that if a respondent herself defined her own lack of identity in terms of low self-esteem, this would mean that she has a low self-esteem. If Pat asserted that she had low self-esteem, then I, as the researcher, had no choice but to believe her. Even more interesting though, is that Pat herself reminded me that this snapshot could always change. She told me that while she may have been in a slump at this moment in her life, if I asked her another day, she might be feeling better and would use another tone, another narrative to describe herself (Pat, 9).

Pat did remind me of this, but it was also at the forefront of my mind while I was conducting the interviews. That is, I was well aware of the snapshot nature of the interviews I was conducting, not only that I was the one framing the picture with the questions I was asking, but I would also be developing the film with my interpretation and analysis of the interview texts themselves.

There is a comical nature to this portion of the interviews. There was much going back and forth of terms as some of the respondents were trying to get a clear idea of what I wanted to hear. We must remember that some of these women were relatively new to formal secondary education and were unsure of my location in relation to theirs. With Mimi, I had the feeling as if she thought I would be grading her on her performance, or reporting back to her teacher in some way, even though I had assured her that the
interview was completely confidential. Regardless, Mimi asked me several times whether the answers she was giving me were "right." I pointed out that there were no right or wrong answers, and in fact that all her answers were right for her. This would satisfy her for a while, and then she would ask me if she was doing all right five minutes later. She got confused several times with regards to my questions. In all fairness to her, I was also relatively new to the interview process, as she was only my seventh interview in a total of twenty-nine. After some clarification from me, she first described herself as a mother. That seemed like it was going to be her definitive answer, but when I started to move on to the next question, she quickly jumped in and said "I’m a mom and uh, a student, is that right? And a waitress, and that’s all" (Mimi, 9). After having closed the chapter on that portion of the interview, she seemed relieved and relaxed a little bit.

Mimi’s identity descriptors are not particularly significant for their content. Rather, the way she came to them is representative of many of the interviewees. They had to think about the question for a while and either when I asked them for more terms, or started to move on to something else, they came up with some other terms to fill in the blanks. In these cases, it seemed as if the best prompting of further responses was my silence. It was as if they wanted to be sure that I had recorded everything they wanted me to record, so that they had a sense of having done justice to themselves. This might be construed as an opportunity for the interviewees to articulate themselves through the interview process and I do believe that this might have been beneficial to several of the respondents. However, this was not the entire goal of the interviews and I cannot take credit for something that happened with a few interviews but not in others. I think the most significant aspect of this reciprocal process would have been when several of the
respondents thanked me for helping them reflect on the effect their Women's Studies classes had had on them. In these cases, I was only too happy to oblige them, as it was at least as productive for me as it was for them. Regardless of their experiences with their Women's Studies classes, most of the participants, wanted to make sure I had as complete as possible a picture of their respective identities. What is particularly interesting to note is that with the current societal and media emphasis on being a “superwoman,” being a mother, a wife, a worker with a high paying job, thin, beautiful, and smart among other things, it is no wonder that many of these women felt as if they needed to give me more terms to describe themselves. I believe they thought that one or two terms, even if well chosen, would simply not have been enough of a representation of their selves to the outside world.

There were others who had trouble defining themselves in any terms that applied to their own identities. When I asked Rita what she thought was the most important part of herself, she replied that her family defined her. When I prompted her some more, she told me that she couldn’t define herself outside of her family and that she never told anybody about herself (Rita, 5). Similarly to Erin, it is possible that Rita’s family might have been a factor in her lack of self-development. However, when we spoke about her life in Taiwan, she seemed to speak very fondly of her family and told me that she missed them very much. Rita had been in Hawai‘i for about two years, and while she was happy pursuing her education in Honolulu, she was sure that she would go back to Taiwan as soon as she was finished. It is possible that Rita’s family was oppressive and that she wanted to go back for some of the same reasons that victims of domestic violence often want to go back to their homes. They lack other alternatives; their abusers have
convinced them that they are not worthy or capable of living on their own, etc. Likening Rita to a victim of domestic violence is certainly a stretch, but there are similarities between Rita’s lack of self-definition and the same phenomenon in a victim of domestic violence. Thus, I found it problematic that Rita was reluctant to define herself outside of her family at all. I can’t be sure why this was so, since I was only with Rita for a limited time, but there was definitely a sense of lack to Rita’s narrative of the self. Although her work has come under a great deal of criticism for being essentialist and not paying enough attention to the fringe, indeed for not even acknowledging that there was a fringe, Carol Gilligan’s work is relevant again here. She asserts that in various stages of women’s development, the relationship of the self with others takes on different connotations. At first, goodness is “equated with caring for others. However, when only others are legitimized as the recipients of the woman’s care, the exclusion of herself gives rise to problems in relationships... [This leads to] a central insight, that self and other are interdependent” (Gilligan 1982, 74). Thus, while Rita may not necessarily have been involved in a physical caring relationship with her family, it is apparent that Rita’s definition of herself exclusively within the realm of her family was attentive to their interdependent relationship. Gilligan’s work may also relate here in a different way. Rita had not worked her way to what Gilligan calls the interdependent phase. She may still have been in the mode of thinking that she should care for others, at the expense of herself. Gilligan argues that conventional patriarchal expectations put women initially in an “everyone else first, me last” position, and that it is very difficult for women to realize that they themselves are worthy of care, that they can care better for others if they also care for themselves, and that it is not “selfish” to do so. Therefore, it seems evident that
Rita is still putting family first, rather than seeing a set of interrelations that require reciprocity.

Luana also described her previous self in terms of her family. However, in her case, since she had been able to leave her abusive husband, she had been able to turn her identity descriptors around. She had been unhappy, putting everyone else's needs before her own, and not taking care of herself, and once she asked her ex-husband to move out, she told me that she underwent a miraculous transformation to someone who took pride in herself, and her right to be alive and be happy (Luana, 9). This is not only reflective of the oppressiveness of abusive homes, but also of the possibilities one can encounter once the abuse no longer occurs. It is also reflective, once again, of the changes that the respondents had either already gone through, or were going to go through in the future. Indeed, Nikki also extolled the virtues of change, telling me that she was "not the same person [she had been] three or four years ago" (Nikki, 19). Nikki had been having trouble in her relatively new environment in Waianae, where she had moved with her husband, and she made the connection herself between the loss of her empowering network of friends and her community and her own loss of identity (Nikki, 7). This was one of the central reasons why she felt she would be a good candidate for the Turning Point class. She was not only conflicted over her lack of identity, but she was literally at a turning point in her life. The supreme irony of the similarity of her point in life and the name of the class was somehow lost on her, but she did tell me that she understood that the decisions she was making now would continue to affect her life in the future. When I asked her what the word identity meant to her, she immediately related it to her current situation:
NO: Oh, no identity, real unsure of myself, don’t know what direction I’m goin’ in. It sort of one of those things that I still have that I’ve moved on the road with. Like I still don’t know if Hawaii is the place that I need to do what I need to do, when I find out exactly what that is. It has something to do with my artwork. I know what I’m doin’ now isn’t the end. It’s evolving you know. But you kinda let that open. But before, like our teacher was saying, that some personalities, they get a decision in their head and they just do it! And I’m like that! I’ll just go do it! I’ll just move to Hawaii, I’ll just go move to this place, or I’ll just end this relationship, or I’ll just start this relationship or something... Sometimes it’s been successful, and sometimes it’s been a big bomb! (Nikki, 19)

The most striking statement in her litany of exclamations is “but you kinda let that open.” She was living her life by allowing surprise to make decisions for her. If she thought one route would be good for her, she would just take it without looking back, but she would always be open to another route. This is significant since we know that she was at a crossroads in her marriage and she was not sure whether she wanted to stay with her current husband or not. Nikki was unhappy in her current marriage and couldn’t understand why her family and her husband were so adamant that she try to “stick it out.” She felt they were trying to repress her free spirit, which she characterized as being the essence of her identity. Letting oneself be open to multiple paths can be a critical part of a changing identity. Indeed, many people have difficulty engaging in this way of life, but for Nikki it was a central part of her definition of herself, even though she started her statement out by saying that she had no identity. This juxtaposition of oppositional concepts in Nikki’s narrative was also present in some of the other interviewees’ narratives. However, Nikki’s was by far the most obvious.

Martha told me in no uncertain terms that her Women in Transition class was useful for “just finding me.” She mentioned that she had problems with her mother after her father passed away a few years ago, and that she had felt a lot of anger towards her.
Although the reasons for that anger were unclear, she credited the class for allowing her to see other people’s struggles and enabling her to make the determination that her own problems were simply not that awful. She told me that the class helped her define her portrayal of herself to others. This is particularly interesting; since that was not the question I had asked her. She insisted on telling me that she always portrayed herself as very strong. From the outside looking in, it seemed that she had been doing it for so long that she believed it really was her self.

Elizabeth was another strong woman I encountered. Whether it was real or perceived, a little bit of both, or neither is open to interpretation. We have already examined her relationship with her church, her children and her education. She constructed her identity in terms of those relationships, as well as others. When I asked her what she thought of when I mentioned the word identity, she replied:

EC: To me it’s like a really broad statement. Identity could be a lot of things, you know. What I think, for me, I think myself, you know, my identity. You know, who I am, as um, a person here in society and what I benefit and what I can benefit to them and what they can benefit me (Elizabeth, 8).

She immediately recognized the multiplicity of possible identities one could describe, but she chose to use her relationship with society to illustrate the importance of her identity. Not a single other interviewee narrated their identities in these terms. She felt such a sense of agency, presumably after her educational experiences both at the University of Hawai‘i and her church, that she was confident in expressing it as an integral part of her identity. Unlike many younger students one can encounter in a community college or university setting, adult learners do not display nearly the same sense of entitlement as their younger counterparts do. In comparing the younger and older students in this study,
we can see the older students are less embedded in a sense of entitlement. In most cases, they have struggled long and hard without a college degree, whether in the workplace or at home, and they feel lucky to be able to take time (or make time in many instances) to attend an institution of higher learning. They know their time is precious and valuable and they try to make the most of it. We can remember from Chapter Three that Elizabeth had not exactly led a sheltered or privileged life, having been abused and literally robbed of her home, then homeless for a time here in Hawaiʻi before having the opportunity to attend the University of Hawaiʻi. Thus, life had not been kind to her, but Elizabeth was particularly insistent on giving back to society in return for what she felt it had given to her. She told me that Women's Studies courses had instilled some sense of the injustices against women going on all over the world, and that she wanted to make sure to give back to her community in order to make a small difference in her own world.

Nelia made meaning of her identity in a much different way. Her narrative was much more rooted in the confusion of her self and the various degrees of importance her various identities held. That is, she was more self-centered than Elizabeth had been, but of course, in the context of a chapter on identity of the self, this is a positive trait. She credited her education in general for making her “more of an intellectual” (Nelia, 6). Indeed, she told me that before starting school, she didn’t have much of an opinion of herself and was plagued with self-esteem problems. She asserted that after having been at school for a while, she felt much more confident (Nelia, 6). When she started to talk about what identity meant to her, she faltered at first, as if she wasn’t sure exactly how much of her self she should reveal to me. However, after less than a minute, she regained
her composure and shared with me the following statement, offering her confusion almost as a condition of her selfhood:

NA: I think that I’m a student. Because you know I always push myself. I give a lot of time to this. And sometimes I think it’s too much. I think I should spend more time with my daughter. I have to be with my daughter, and with school, and I feel like I need to give more to her… (Nelia, 6)

Nelia’s various identities were conflicting and pulling her in all different directions. She didn’t know whether she should concentrate on herself, and thereby accelerate, or at least keep up the pace of her education, or if she should slow down or diminish her ambitions and spend more time with her daughter. As Gloria Steinem has stated: “I have yet to hear a man ask for advice on combining marriage and a career.” Nelia was caught in the dualism presented to women by society. Women have to be everything to everyone; their own selves come last. While this is similar to how Carol Gilligan’s argument might frame Rita’s position with regards to her family, the difference is that Nelia was having a difficult time deciding what to do about her dilemma and was frustrated with the untenable position she found herself in. Her Women’s Studies class had offered her some of the reasons behind that position, but no easy solutions. She was even more confused by the content of her feminist theory class, which she thought indicated that if she were an intelligent woman, she would be a feminist. But as we saw in Chapter Three, she was not sure that this movement included her, since she liked a more “traditional” relationship with a man, where male gallantry was highly valued. She found that this caught her in a dual opposition, where she had to either be what she regarded as a radical feminist, or not a feminist at all. This lack of a middle ground was similar to the lack of middle ground she found herself navigating between her time spent in school and her relationship with her daughter. Nelia was not alone in her dilemma. Indeed, this issue is plastered all over
women's magazines practically every month, with nary a valid suggestion as to how to deal with it. However, in this pool of interviewees, Nelia was the only one who mentioned it openly.

Other women expressed their selves in very diverse ways. Katherine thought of herself as a socially conscious worker, an advocate for children. She told me that she loved her children, but that they weren't the world to her (Katherine, 7). This is very different from some of the other women we will look at later, who see their roles as mothers as a central definition of their selves. Yuki told me that she would describe herself differently to Japanese people than to American people. For a Japanese audience, regardless of whether it was male or female, she would describe herself as an “exception” (Yuki, 6). For an American audience, she would describe herself as “positive” (Yuki, 6). When I pressed her further, she told me that experience was the defining factor in her identity. However, when we moved on to some word associations and the word identity came up, she immediately responded: “ethnicity, gender, sexuality” (Yuki, 7). This fell into the neat categories I had been searching for. Finally, I thought, a respondent who knows what I mean when I say identity. It came out later in the interview that they had literally covered the topic of the problematization of identity politics and social movements that very morning in her Women's Studies class. Thus, it is unclear whether Yuki was simply regurgitating information she had learned about that very morning (not necessarily a bad thing, considering she remembered it), and whether she would have chosen similar words to define identity if our interview had taken place the day before or a month later.
Discovering that there was an ephemeral element to all of these interviews, not only as I came to understand Yuki’s relationship with the word “identity,” but with other interviewees’ responses as well, I started asking whether the terms they were using to describe themselves had changed from ten years ago, and whether they would change ten years from now. Shu saw her own omissions in her earlier statements relating to identity. She stated:

SR: Ten years ago, I probably would have described myself... ten years ago... stepmom, um, married, a runner, one of the things I just realized I didn’t include in the current one was artist, and a student. I was just thinking back, I’m an artist and a student now as well. Ten years ago, I wasn’t an artist, and definitely not a student either.

I: OK, what about ten years from now?

JR: Ten years from now... Oh my God, artist! number one, feminist number two, healthy, number three, athlete number four, loves cats number five. (laughter) (Shu, 8)

Shu’s feminism was central to her art, as we saw earlier. Needless to say, when I heard her identify herself as a feminist, I was thrilled. However, it is interesting that she included her art, health, and athleticism in correlation with feminism, but that she included her love of cats in her descriptors. This could be interpreted in several ways, including the idea that loving cats was so important to her identity that she felt it necessary to include it with other, more important factors; or, that her feminism is about as trivial as loving cats, and therefore the two belong in the same list. I would like to think that the former interpretation is more accurate, but there is no way to know for sure, since I was unable to interview Shu a second time.

Another woman who recited a litany of identities was Luana. She started off by identifying her role as a single mother as central to her definition of herself and then
extended it to her role as a caretaker of her father, and then finally talking about herself as a student and a previously unhappy worker. She was going back to Kapi‘olani Community College to obtain her nursing degree, and it had taken years of abuse for her to realize that she needed to do things for herself instead of focusing primarily on taking care of others (Luana, 1 and 5). Equally focused on others was Chai, who told me that her identity was a sum of the parts of people she came into contact with. For her, identity was defined as a reflection of how other people saw her. It is also possible that the way she related to those people in those interactions in turn had a role in her own production (Ferguson 1993). She did not interpret this as a negative thing, since she asserted that she only took “something good and something valuable” from others (Chai, 7). Chai asserted that, like Mimi who told me that identity consisted of “knowing who you are” (Mimi, 8) she knew exactly who she was. What I find problematic here is that Chai did not recognize that those reflections simply mirrored back to the people with whom she came into contact. She, as the mirror, did not gain anything from them. She was there for their purposes, not her own. Chai, in asserting other people’s role in her identity, left out her own role in that creation. However, it must be acknowledged that it is possible that the self-in-relation would certainly create a reciprocal production of the self for all parties involved invoking a beneficial relationality for Chai’s emerging identity. This echoes Carol Gilligan’s argument about interdependence (Gilligan 1982), because in order for this to occur, like Rita and Nelia, Chai would have to include herself in her understandings of who deserves care.

As we have seen in the range of identity descriptors used by the interviewees presented above, one thing remains constant: there is some degree of certainty about
one’s role, one’s identity. That is, the participants, when asked about their identity, whether they were sure of themselves or not, whether they were uncertain about the importance of certain parts of their identities, were relatively homogenous in the fact that they had something concrete to tell me about identity. From what I perceived to be Erin’s certainty in pronouncing a lack of identity, to Nelia’s dilemma between continuing her education and spending more time with her daughter, and even to Chai’s reflection of other people’s identities onto herself, at least everyone had something to say. Kathy X., however, simply (or not so simply) told me after a rather long silence that to her, identity meant confusion. There was some uncharacteristic giggling after that pronouncement, and then she moved onto another topic. Since Kathy X. is a lesbian, I argue that there is a strong connection between the probable confusion concerning coming out about her sexuality she faced in earlier years, and the retrospective role it played in the definition she assigned to the term identity. While she was openly gay, she was still so strongly identified with that earlier time in her life, that she simply blurted out the word confusion. Kathy X. was the only “out” lesbian whom I interviewed. I believe one other woman was a lesbian, but she did not mention it in our interview, so I am choosing to protect her privacy even further by not mentioning it in any of her narratives I have quoted, or in any context which pertains to her. Since Kathy X.‘s sexuality was discussed, I find it useful to explore this connection further. Kathy X.’s sexuality was probably the most definitive aspect of her identity, yet when given the opportunity to say so, she chose to remember her days of confusion about sexuality and define her identity as such. Of course, I might be overreading the possible link between her lesbian life and her earlier confusion, as there are certainly other sources of possible confusion in anyone’s life. She was confused
about whether she was a lesbian or straight for a long time and during her formative years. Therefore, instead of the former term becoming her definition of self, the actual process of confusion became her identity descriptor. Of course, this may have been a productive confusion in terms of embracing the messiness, and welcoming surprise, or at least useful insights that may have come from it. It could also be linked either to some latent internalized homophobia, or that she didn’t want to come out and tell me that she was a lesbian with regards to identity, even though she had already mentioned it in the interview prior to this point. A little bit of all these possibilities is perhaps the most accurate interpretation of the situation.

There was another woman who was confused, but not about her identity. Rather, Verna felt my question about describing herself to someone was unclear. She asked me whether she would be describing herself to a man or to a woman. I asked her for clarification about both. This is how she replied:

VT: If I was talking to a woman, I would describe myself as kind, um, helpful and smart. Sometimes smart.

I: OK, and if you were talking to a man?

VT: I would say submissive, because that’s how I’ve always been raised to be submissive to men, um, I would use words like “I suppose, or maybe” you know what... like disclaimers is what they call them. Because, the thing in the book, it says um “if a woman is too tentative, she loses the women, but if the problem is she’s too assertive, she loses the male.” But it’s like we don’t win, no matter what we do. (Verna, 6)

Verna’s identity was different when talking to a man or woman. She wanted to present a different self in either situation. Verna’s social construction of gender and experiences with sex role socialization should have somewhat predicted the fact that she would describe herself differently when speaking to a female than when speaking to a male.
Vema was the only interviewee for whom sex role socialization was so prevalent in identity definition. That is, no one else even asked me who they would be describing themselves too, with the exception of Yuki who was looking for some cultural cues as to whether she would describe herself as an exception or not. Interestingly, when talking both to men and women, Vema would choose what she perceived to be positive words to the person listening to describe herself. These are words that indicate that she should not be considered a threat to other women, or to men. When talking to women, she wanted to be viewed as kind, helpful and smart, but when talking to men, she would say that she was submissive. In Vema’s understanding of sex role socialization, women were valued by other women if they were helpful, smart, and cooperative, and by men if they were submissive. Vema understood the impossible dualism she had been placed in by society, however, she chose to engage with it and perpetuate it. That is, after having realized this problematic position, she chose to ignore it and maintain its cycle. This illustrates that while Vema may have remembered what she learned in her Psychology of Women book and class, it does not mean that she was either ready or willing yet to engage her knowledge and practice it in everyday life. Similarly, Aiko also dichotomized male and female identities, but for a completely different reason. She told me that the most important part of her self was her gender. When I asked her why, she told me that she felt this way because men could not wear bold or nice clothes. I should have seen this answer coming from a Fashion Design major, but I stumbled into it completely blind.
Consciousness of Identity

The participants to whom we now turn are included in this section because they had already made connections themselves between their Women’s Studies classes and their own identities. Some were relating their classes to their own situations, and other students’ situations as well. For example, Yuki did not feel any kind of reticence talking about the way white people see the world and the way that Japanese people see the world. She thought it was very ordered, very different, and not that one was better than the other. She did not have any politically correct angst; she had never understood discrimination as such. She thought she had never lived among it. She thought she had always just seen it on television, or read about it in newspapers, but she believed that she had never experienced it. So for her, understanding that gender, racial, and class discrimination do exist, along with their prevalence in society, furthered her perception of their role in ordering the world. Her Women’s Studies course was the first course that had led to her realization that what she had experienced as the lone woman working for a heavy machinery company in Japan (see Chapter Three) could readily be called discrimination.

Another woman who came to different yet similarly startling realizations was Martha. She had been living her life with a fractured identity, displaying different parts of herself to (and for) different people. She told me that she really valued her experience in her Women in Transition class because

M: ... it was so touching because not even my friends see the whole picture of me. They only see parts of me. The only person that probably sees the whole picture is like my sister, my ex-husband, and maybe B ___. I mean like my best friends for all my life never see everything. And it got to the point where I was only pieces for different people. It was so
neat that they got to... that I got to share all of the things that make me happy and even some things that make me sad (Martha, 7).

The class helped Martha open her entire self up to others. It was an experience in which she had never previously engaged. It allowed her to reveal her complexity as a human being not only to others, but to herself as well. Sharing things that made her happy and sad with the other students in the class was quite therapeutic for Martha. Indeed, she thought it was one of the most important aspects of the course. Teaching through feminist pedagogy, most Women's Studies teachers value women’s experiences and start the journey of the students' meaning making of the material from there. It seems as if Martha’s teacher was quite proficient in this aspect of her teaching since Martha had already indicated to me that other students had benefited from this approach to knowledge as well. Here is an example of Martha’s perception of the other students’ journeys through the Women's Studies class process, as seen through the eyes of one woman:

M: ...To realize that, I mean... some of the women were just like leaps and bounds, by the end of the class, I was just like, “I remember when she first came in, she could barely even like say anything, and everything was so awful... My husband is ... every word that came out of her mouth was her husband, there was no her in anything” and then by the end she was like “I’m leaving him” (Martha, 5).

We have already examined this growing consciousness at length in Chapter Three. However, it is useful to mention here again in a different context. That is, while the students were aware of the possible hardships this woman might face and were reluctant to urge her to leave him, they were still conscious of the significance of her journey. She had gone from having no sense of self and prefacing all her sentences with “my husband” to taking the initiative to leave him and venturing out on her own. Martha’s mention of
this incident in her class is significant because it shows not only that students have the potential to undergo radical transformations throughout their Women's Studies courses, but also that they are encouraged by the communities they create within them, that these steps are at least possible, if not necessarily desirable or predictable.

As discussed earlier, Gardenia was one of the most reticent feminists one can imagine (see Chapter Three). She lived her life as a feminist, endorsed feminist values, but would not call herself a feminist. She insisted several times that she had not really benefited from her Turning Point class. One of the reasons for this was her inherent resistance to categorization. She made it clear to me that she was active in her resistance by relating this incident to me:

GL: Well, I really like what my daughter said the other day. She’s working at the family peace center, and she was being appraised by some of the children of these battered women, battered children too I guess. And all of the sudden one of these children stopped her and said: “what are you?” And my daughter said: “I’m a person.” And the girl said: “no, are you Filipino or what?” (laughter) And she said again: “I’m a person” (Gardenia, 10).

She had learned from her daughter that she should resist any categories anyone tried to put her in, which of course, is what she felt I was attempting to do when I asked her what part of her self she felt was the most important to her. With her joking, laughing manner, she deflected my question yet again, and we moved on to another subject. Gardenia was one of the nine haole women I interviewed; I did not find it problematic at the time that she stood firm against any mention of race in her interview. Indeed, as Ruth Frankenberg argues in *White Women: Race Matters*, this seems to be the norm for white women in a society where theirs is the dominant race or culture. This is not the case in Hawai‘i. For haole people here, the urge to hide behind the argument that we are all people, no matter
what race or ethnicity, is very strong. Indeed, it is a shield to hide behind for white
people in a place where they are not the dominant race or culture and where they seek to
minimize the influence of race on other people’s perceptions of them. Regardless of her
motivation, however, Gardenia succeeded in foiling me yet again with regards to my
“neat and tidy” categories. I was reluctant to admit “defeat” at first, but now I realize that
her resistance made sense to her, because she was reluctant to be compartmentalized with
other interviewees, whether haole women or women of color, simply because Gardenia
thought herself above such matters. It came out later in the interview that Gardenia had
not had to work throughout her life, and that she had only recently gone to work for
Liberty House (now Macy’s West) out of boredom rather than financial necessity. This
is why she had found the time to while away her boredom in the bottom of a glass of
alcohol. Her prejudices throughout the class, as well as throughout our interview,
concerning the journeys other women took throughout the course were heavily inflected
by her class based notions of who needed the Turning Point class, who was likely to
benefit from it, as well as who did or didn’t belong in categories. Gardenia’s haole
cultural influences were also evident in other interviewees’ narratives as well. Many
others related their own cultures in comparison to that of white Western society.
Interestingly, most, although certainly not all, significant passages about cultural
differences are related to whiteness in one way or another.
Cultural Differences

Cultural differences in the perception of the material gathered in Women's Studies courses were not initially going to be part of this analysis. However, it became evident that in the context of this project, they were repeated enough times for me to start paying attention. When I read the interviews over again, I realized that no matter what the participant’s ethnicity, she had made some type of comment with regards to her culture either in relation to the course material itself, or to life in Hawai‘i. Here we turn to some narratives that highlight the difficulty of navigating through ethnic relations in a place where ethnicity is thoroughly inscribed in everyday practices.

One woman we have already encountered at length is Nikki. Her experiences with her husband and his community are relevant here because they illustrate the difficulty of an outsider integrating herself within an existing community. Unfortunately, they also highlight Nikki’s persistent racism in the face of an unpleasant living situation.

NO: Yeah, well, the lesson I got out of that, after five years of being there, you know, cause I thought the lesson was, “Well, I’m supposed to love my neighbor, and love my surroundings no matter what,” you know. And I couldn’t do it. I tried to do it and I couldn’t do it, I just couldn’t do it. It was just horrible. I hated the people who live next door. I hate the chickens. I hate the garbage and the trash... And you’re driving down the road and they’re just throwin’ stuff cause that’s what they do in their country! Oh in the Philippines, I guess that’s what they do in the Philippines, just throw the trash out the window. Well, you don’t do that here, you know. And then the Hawaiians, “we want our land, we want our land” but they’re not taking care of the land they already have! That’s a big thing with me. Take care of the land you have, then maybe you’ll get some more kind of a thing, you know what I mean? So I found out that I’ll never, and I think the universe really wanted me to get this, cause I think I betrayed myself before in relationships, movin’ with a guy when I knew it wasn’t right. Always giving up your comfort to please somebody else and a lot of women do that, you know what I mean? So what I learned was that I compromised myself and I betrayed myself, you know
and I'll never do that again, you know, I'll never do that again. So I got it, I really got it. And if it takes a divorce, or if it takes moving to the Big Island, or if we get along and make it OK that's fine too, but it's like it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter. You have to be comfortable with what your, you have to live with what your core beliefs are ... your core values are. Don't compromise them for anybody or anything. You know it's taken me half my life to get that (laughter) (Nikki, 22).

This quote is particularly significant because of the way Nikki chose to link what she perceived to be her role as a wife with her negative experiences within her community. The fact that she thought herself to be powerless in her community, or actually her husband's community, was really reflective of her perceived lack of power in her marriage. The Turning Point course showed her that the latter situation did not have to remain static. Indeed, her proactive stand led her to do something about her life and move her life over to Hilo. There, she thought she would be freer to pursue her artwork, without the negativity she was experiencing in Waianae. Looking at the end of the above quote however, we learn that neither the class, nor anything else for that matter, was going to change her mind. While that may be a good thing with regards to one's deteriorating marriage, it also closes the doors to any other perspectives with regards to culture, race, or ethnicity in Nikki's mind. That is, her racist comments were likely to remain exactly that: racist. To illustrate her point, Nikki ascribed her decision to attend school at Kapiolani Community College instead of Leeward Community College, which would have been much closer to her home in Waianae, to what she perceived was a lack of interest in Women's Studies in her community. She told me that she thought that to take Women's Studies, one had to be Hawaiian. When I told her that this assumption was erroneous, she told me:
NO: You know why I drove over here to KCC... cause they have one in Wai’anae, a Turning Point thing or something like that, although probably not enough signed up, but the lady said, “you probably want to come over here.” Because if I’m just with a bunch of just local women who are all talking about the six kids and da local, da kine, da kine [spoken in an exaggerated pidgin accent]. It’s a different culture, it’s another culture, and I can’t... I don’t even know if I could... So that’s the reason I came here, cause a more diverse group would be here, and ... (Nikki, 17).

Thus, the counselor she has spoken with (I later found out that it was Jodi K.) perceived her discomfort in her own community and urged her to come to KCC. Nikki felt that this was wise advice and took it. She grumbled about the long drive, again blaming Hawaiian women in her community for a lack of interest in Women’s Studies and Turning Point classes. The “diversity” she was looking for, interestingly, she did end up finding. Nikki’s definition of “diversity” would probably have included other haole women, but it was not to be. Her class of nine was made up entirely of women of color excepting her and the teacher. Thus, Nikki’s seeking of “diversity” meant not local, rather than a search for an inclusive definition of ethnic and cultural diversity.

Another interesting facet of this narrative is the fact that Nikki’s husband was haole, but was raised in Waianae. Thus, while his race may have been the same as hers, their cultural perspectives varied widely and caused a large rift in their relationship. Since he identified with his community’s cultural values, he could not understand why she felt so alienated by them. She explained this to me in the following way:

NO: Yeah, Kaimuki. You know I could walk here to this school. Since I lived here in ’78, which is all Japanese here I guess, but you know they’re neat, they’re clean, they’re quiet, and I discovered about myself, and that’s what we talked about in this class too, you have these core values and beliefs that are in your being, and when they get violated it’s gonna come out somehow or another. And I didn’t have any idea that the environment, partly because I’m an artist, the environment that I live in, you know I take care of my environment that I live in. I didn’t know how important that was to me cause I never lived any place that I didn’t choose to live or let’s
say that maybe I'd get a little beat up little studio, but it was in a nice neighborhood and I always rented, so if I didn’t like it or it got too crowded I’d move out so I wasn’t stuck anywhere. And my husband Bob, comes from a military family, he’s Irish, you know O’Neill, but I really married a local guy, whereas I thought you know local meant you know Filipino, Hawaiian, or Samoan... (Nikki, 6).

These cultural and class differences caused added stress in their marriage because he told her that she was overreacting to minor incidents and that she should just relax. Of course, this infuriated her even more and since she was working on her artwork at home, she had the time (and the inclination) to look over into her neighbors’ yards and disapprove strongly of their activities. She had considered herself happy in Kaimuki before her marriage and she longed to go back to a similar lifestyle. It did not matter to her that the way she had ordered her world in Kaimuki had also been based on stereotypes, about Japanese people this time. The fact that they were what she considered to be positive characteristics, (“they’re neat, they’re clean, they’re quiet”) completely obviated the notion that she had in fact assigned them ethnic stereotypes nonetheless, just as she had done for the negative stereotypes of Hawaiians in her current neighborhood. In fact, she was so alienated from her surroundings that to her, starting fresh in Hilo sounded like a brilliant plan. It was unclear whether Nikki realized that Hilo is a community predominantly made up of people of color. However, it didn’t seem to matter to her. What mattered the most was that she had to get out; whether it was with her husband or not rested on his shoulders. In this way, she disassociated herself with any decision-making responsibility with regards to the marriage and put the blame securely on the cultural community she was surrounded with, which included her husband.

Nikki was not the only student who assigned blame to ethnicity in Hawai’i. However, most of the other haole students reflected their own whiteness into others’
perceived ethnicities. I purposefully used the phrase “reflecting their own whiteness,” instead of “reflecting on their own whiteness,” because like Elvi Whittaker’s mainland haoles, and Ruth Frankenberg’s respondents, most of the haole respondents considered themselves to have no ethnicity. I would argue that this is a major failure for Women’s Studies classes because this means that they often continue to leave whiteness unexamined. This perpetuates the notion that the feminist movement is based on the ideas of white, middle-class women in the United States does not examine the contributions of women of color to feminism. What is fascinating is that most of the classes I visited did in fact discuss writings by women of color and their theories were prevalent on syllabi, especially at the university level. However, it is possible that these ideas might not have had any reinforcement in the general curriculum, or that the students were too reluctant to engage in this particular material in a meaningful way. For the white respondents, ethnicity was something that only people of color have, and it is not necessarily a desirable characteristic at that. Pat skated around the issue, yet was very convincing (at least to me) in her assumption of racial superiority. When asked about her classroom community, she commented that there was no community to be made because she thought she had nothing in common with her fellow students. She made the following statement to that effect:

PF: Well, it’s also the school that I’m going to. It’s um... It’s really like, like an ethnic kind of subculture down in Kalihi you know? It’s very Filipino and small, and you know, the people are young and they’re coming from these back street neighborhoods so, um, it’s a little bit different you know? Coming from like the East Coast, Catholic school, you know what I’m saying? (Pat, 5)

When I pressed her further and asked her what she meant, she said:
OK. It’s just that you know, like I said, it’s real like Kalihi subculture kind of, I mean it’s more um, from the ghetto, you know what I mean, like people reaching out trying to... which I think these kinds of classes are really good for those kind of people, not “those kind of people” but for people who need that kind of information and education, you know? (Pat, 5)

Pat was desperately trying to maintain some semblance of political correctness in her statements, probably so that she would not be perceived as racist. While I saw her evasive tactics for what they were, I do not believe that Pat was trying to intimate that her fellow students were somehow inferior to her, especially due to her upper-class upbringing. However, Pat’s resistance to the classroom community was directly related to her own location as a haole outsider in what she termed the “Kalihi subculture.” She thought that they would have nothing in common because they had grown up in such disparate cultures. Thus, she did not attempt to make any efforts to create a community in her class, which, as we have already seen, benefited students in a variety of ways.

Conversely to Nikki’s experiences however, Pat recognized that while she did not belong to that subculture, there might be value to it. Nikki, on the other hand, refused to acknowledge that another culture besides her own might have value, or at least be worthy of consideration.

One respondent who had actual problems with local culture, as opposed to a perceived notion of discomfort with local culture, whether Hawaiian or not, was Elizabeth. Interestingly, Elizabeth was a woman of color. She told me that she was Black and Mexican. However, she strongly identified with the dominant mainland white culture. She explained to me that her children had faced discrimination and violence due to their mixed ethnicity (her ex-husband was white) and their status as newcomers to the islands. They had been living in Wai‘anae, in a housing project, and she felt that it was
unsafe for her children to go outside. They were constantly being harassed because they
"weren’t local or Hawaiian" (Elizabeth, 5). Thus, she was adamant that they move to
Manoa, as soon as she had graduated from Leeward Community College. This way, they
would be near her new school, and they would be free of harassment. It was not clear
whether the move resulted in this idyllic lifestyle Elizabeth had envisioned for herself and
her children. What is clear, is that she would not have been able to follow through with it
had it not been for the help of her church. (see Chapters Three and Four).

While the church may have been quite helpful to Elizabeth and her small family,
it acted in their favor by remaining a patriarchal outsider. It played the role of a
benevolent dictator, helping Elizabeth relocate her family, yet prescribing their every
move. Elizabeth somewhat rebelled against her subordinate role in this relationship when
she had the wherewithal to tell her church’s school that it was deficient in her children’s
education (see Chapter Three). Yet, she and her family remained in the fold of the
church, since she was still an active and willing participant in the congregation’s
activities. In comparison, Marcia’s repudiation of the church as oppressive is quite stark.
She came from a very strict church background and was using her Women's Studies
knowledge to navigate through some personal thoughts about religion in general. She
narrated her frame of mind in the following way:

M: I think, I come from a really strict church background, and (silence) I
was raised Southern Baptist since the fourth grade and I was that for 6
years, and it took me two years to get out of that, and then I went to
Catholic Church and then I went back to Baptist, and then to non-
denominational kind of churches. Um, I’ve studied Native American
cultures and I’ve studied some other... like different, non-Western culture
stuff and I just find it really interesting that um, ... I find that the concept
of God is so much reliant on other cultures. And my family is a very
traditional type of family, and I’ve always been getting slack from them
about, “well, why don’t you go to church” and those types of things like
“you’re not a good person unless you go to church” and this stuff that was coming up in class, it was interesting because I’m dealing with that on a personal level. I’ve learned that you don’t have to go to church to be a good person and that, that there is oppression within the structure of the church and I think that we need a foundation, but I don’t know if we need all the other stuff that goes with it is important (Marcia, 5-6).

Whereas Elizabeth had only relatively recently “found” the church, Marcia had been involved with some type of church organization her entire life, whether it was at the behest of her family or on her own, and was only now examining her relationship to the various formats of organized religion. She had taken the time to research various indigenous cultures’ relationships with spirituality and had made some links between them and her own beliefs. She was using her Women's Studies knowledge as a basis for a further exploration of those connections, as well as coming to some striking realizations that just because a church is structured a certain way doesn’t necessarily make it right for everyone. Thus, Marcia was using her Women's Studies course as a site of resistance to her family’s urging for more involvement with the church. The knowledge that she had gained there helped her assert herself and her own beliefs in the face of opposition from her family. She gained a sense of agency about this issue that not only allowed her to move away from the church, but also look into some alternatives, as well as resist family pressure.

Another story of resistance came from Yuki. While it had nothing to do with religion, it was a classic example (if there is such a thing) of a Women's Studies student using her knowledge as a stepping-stone for life’s daily activities, such as fending off men. At the conclusion of our interview, Yuki mentioned that she was sitting in Manoa Gardens a few days before and this white man who had worked at the Japanese consulate was making advances towards her and asking all kinds of questions about her. She said
"I really didn’t like him, and he kept asking me for my phone number, and asking me out to dinner and stuff and finally he asked me what my major was and I said Women's Studies and he walked away, he left. He said goodbye and left”(Yuki, 10). Yuki thought it scared him off because of her perception that white men think Japanese women are very easy, not necessarily sexually, but easy to convince to date, or submissive. In a related matter, she said that traditionally, Japanese women really admire white people, particularly their sense of dress or sense of style: they dye their hair to make it blond, or they get plastic surgery to get double eyelids. She spoke about the high proportion of Japanese women’s income going to the latest trendy clothes in Japan. She said that she didn’t feel or act that way, but that she knew many “girls” in Japan who did. Thus, Yuki was able to fend off undesired advances from a man simply because she was willing to say she was a Women's Studies major. While Yuki may have had a strong personality to begin with (we can remember her assertiveness through her refusal to make tea for her prospective employers during her job interview with the heavy equipment company), we can be sure that her invocation of her Women's Studies coursework was enough to repel a man who may have had some stereotypic notions of what Japanese women were like. It is possible that she reversed his ideas with the simple statement about her major. In fact, it was quite typical of Yuki to engage in stereotype reversal. She explained to me that since she had been born in Japan, by her own admission a very homogenous society, she was quite surprised at the diversity of the student body as well as the material covered in her Women's Studies course. However, instead of feeling intimidated with the newness of the material, she embraced it, feeling confident in asking questions about it, since she had had no previous stereotypes to unlearn about the various ethnic groups represented in
her class. Her then-current boyfriend was also being enlisted in her open-mindedness. He had quit his job and moved over to Hawai‘i from Japan to be with her while she was going to school. When I asked her how he felt with regards to her major, as opposed to her aforementioned experience with the haole man at Manoa Gardens, she replied:

Y: He doesn’t know much about Women’s Studies because he’s Japanese, and not young man, so um, he doesn’t have any reaction, but for example, he always asks “are you OK, with what you’re studying?” And in Japan, he would not have asked (Yuki, 8).

Her acknowledgement of her boyfriend’s behavioral change from what would have been accepted in Japan and what she was willing to accept here, after having taken Women’s Studies classes, was significant. Not only had he made changes in his frame of mind, but she was quite aware of the difference. She later mentioned that she was pleasantly surprised by it. She had not asked him to come to Hawai‘i and he had proven his devotion to her by giving up his life in Japan, and in subtle ways also being open to new ideas vicariously through her. Thus, Yuki’s position as a student of Women’s Studies enabled her to become her boyfriend’s teacher and reinforced her assertiveness simultaneously. This is quite beneficial given that Yuki hoped to bring Women’s Studies back to Japan as a teacher in the future.

Cultural Barriers (and Enablers)

Unlike Yuki’s positive experiences with cultural differences, some of the respondents either had problems with the various cultures they experienced or at least saw stark contrasts between the various cultures to which they were exposed. Others
used the cultural differences they were experiencing in order to enable them to see their own cultures more clearly.

Rita not only had language problems understanding the lectures in her classes, Women's Studies included, but for example, she had never heard of the Amish culture. When confronted with it in her Culture, Gender, and Appearance class, she told me she laughed out loud, because she thought it was a joke. Thus, she had a hard time taking it seriously and applying herself to learning about it. In another turn of events, Lia told me that her husband-to-be was unhappy about the Psychology of Women class she was taking because it was making her “more sassy, or back talking” and he didn’t like that. Laughing, she told me that he said she was “coming out of [her] Samoan culture and speaking like a Western woman” (Lia, 5). To him, this was obviously not a desirable turn of events, but she later asserted that she believed he was coming around to being more supportive not only of the class, but of her educational goals in general.

Lia was also being confronted with her own ethnicity in the face of her best friend’s denial of her own haoleness. When I asked her if she ever spoke about what she was learning in the class with someone besides her fiancé, she told me that she liked to talk to her best friend, D. about it, because she had always had a hard time understanding her haole mentality. Since Lia’s Psychology of Women class broached topics spanning women of various ethnicities and races, she felt she was gaining a stronger understanding of the people surrounding her. She thought this was an unexpected beneficial side effect of the class, to use a medical term as a nod to Lia’s goal of becoming a doctor. What Lia hoped to get out of her Women's Studies course was a common goal for most of the women I interviewed. She intended to learn a little bit more about herself through the
process of a Women's Studies class, but she furthered that goal by connecting her own cultural experiences with learning about others' cultural experiences, and trying to apply the best of both to her life. She told me that "in Samoan culture, it's really... the man is everything, and has the power, and with psychology of women, you can see how other women are, you can see about their power (laughter) (Lia, 4). Lia hoped to be able to learn about that power and use it to her own advantage in her relationships with her parents, as well as her fiancé. Still retaining what was best of the Samoan culture, she was eager not to replicate her parents’ traditional Samoan marriage.

Interestingly, in talking with other people of Samoan descent, I had come to the understanding that Samoan women were considered much more powerful than they are in the Western culture. However, since her parents were quite religious, it stands to reason that the missionary influence in Samoa, similarly to the case of Hawai‘i, may have corrupted the traditional Samoan marriage into a Western style dominant-male, subordinate-female marriage. Thus, what Lia may have termed “traditional Samoan marriage” would really have been defined by Western missionary standards rather than a Samoan marriage per say. Interestingly, Lia thought she was learning about power from haole women, when Samoan women had really had power all along, and it wasn’t until the missionaries came along that their power deteriorated. Again, this is similar to the case of Hawai‘i, as seen in Noenoe Silva’s examination of Hawaiian women’s resistance to the missionaries. Thus, the traditional roles Lia was hoping to avoid in her marriage were really the Western interpretation of a traditional Samoan marriage. However, having been somewhat awed by the power she perceived white women had in their marriages, she was hoping to emulate that in her own relationships. Her fiancé was in for
a surprise if he still thought he was going to marry a “traditional” (with all its attendant baggage) Samoan woman after Lia finished with her Women's Studies class!

Elizabeth’s Third World Women class also enabled her to see her own ethnicity in a clearer light, as well as raising her consciousness of the various structures and patterns of women’s oppression in the various racial and ethnic groups she was studying. She made the following statement to that effect:

EC: Yeah, they have all this dominance. Even now I see it, because where I come from Mexico, women are considered really inferior. And so I can see you know, the differences of the way the women have to handle, the... the way they live in the society and how they have to protect their families and I see that everywhere, in all the countries. I see that women have to do what they need to do in order to protect their families. And I see that we have to do that here too. (Elizabeth, 7)

While Elizabeth may have been making some generalizations about women being somehow more linked to their families than men in her statement, it is clear that the class had enabled her to use race in conjunction with gender as an analytical tool. This connection, along with her previous understanding of class prejudices discussed in Chapter Three, would have served her in good stead in her future Women's Studies coursework where teachers often make a concerted effort to illustrate the links between gender, race, and class oppression.

Like Elizabeth, Aiko became more aware of her own culture’s treatment of women. Aiko was especially thankful to be in the United States where she said women’s education was more valued. She told me that in Japan, it was still quite common for women’s education to be seen as superfluous, since it was perceived that women would get married and have children anyway. Thus, there would be no good reason to educate them in the first place. Never mind that mothers are the educators of the next generation,
boys and girls both, but that hasn’t seemed to deter those who would discount the need for women to be educated in the first place. Thus, Aiko felt that the emphasis placed on women’s education, especially in a Women's Studies class, gave her opportunities that she would not necessarily have had if she had remained in Japan to pursue her college education.

Finally, Erin also spoke of her Women's Studies class as enabling her to pursue goals she had not even thought of before. When describing herself, she told me that she was “determined, open to options, willing to change, a little better awareness you know regarding gender, or in regards to ethnicity, you know, other cultures” (Erin, 5). Erin’s class was making her more conscious of gender, but also of ethnicity, and like Elizabeth she was sure she would be able to use these skills in the future. While these skills may be beneficial for the participants’ future educational endeavors, it remained to be seen if they were going to help them in life’s daily struggles. The theme throughout this section has been an examination of the diversity with which the interviewees approach the feminist content in their respective Women's Studies classes, especially with regards to cultural (re)production in relation to gender identity. In some cases culture may have been a barrier that the participants had to overcome, and in other cases, those barriers might have proven to be a solid boost upon which to start yet another examination of their identities. Having considered the role that cultural differences may play in this process, in the next two sections, we will turn to the participants’ location of their roles as wives or girlfriends, and as mothers, through the lens of their respective Women's Studies classes.
Role as Wife/Girlfriend

The embeddedness of society's insistence on traditional roles seemed to be dissipating for many of the women I interviewed. Indeed, some of them were able to trace clear demarcation lines with regards to their own shifting beliefs about what was acceptable or even valued in a relationship. Of course, this is the type of narrative I was looking for in the first place, and as with so many of the other issues examined in this and the previous chapters, it is quite possible that the respondents were telling me what I wanted to hear. That is, knowing that the interviews were regarding the possible benefits of Women's Studies class for women adult learners, it is likely that they wouldn't have told me that they had not experienced any positive changes in their thinking at all. Thus, the self-selection of the participants, as well as the necessity of giving them a description of the project before they consented to the interview, may have contributed to the nature of the narratives examined below. Keeping that in mind, we now turn to one interviewee's experience before she returned to college and took Women's Studies classes. Shu put her first husband through college even though she had started attending classes at UH herself before she even met the man in question. She was resentful of all the energy she had spent putting him through school, especially because they had eventually divorced. The same pattern repeated itself with her second husband. When it came time for her second divorce, she realized that she had not used any of her energy for herself and was eager to start back at school and see if she could redirect her energy to help herself instead of helping her significant other(s). Shu decided to remain single for a
while and see where life took her. She was so excited about this prospect that while she was describing her experiences she was gesticulating wildly and knocked the tape recorder over. Her most significant discoveries, by her own assertion through both education and therapy, were that a single woman can exist fully and happily, and that being single is “an appropriate and acceptable choice” (Shu 6). Thus, Shu was still happily living the single life and by doing so, had more time to immerse herself, among other things into her education, her art, and her work for the trust company.

Another woman who had negative views of marriage was Katherine. As the former sexual slave, she had surprisingly liberal views on prostitution. That is, she was actively working to get prostitution legalized. She was emphatic that she didn’t condone underage prostitution, but that if consenting adults wanted to engage in prostitution, they should be free from the constraints of the law to do so. In fact, Katherine was adamant that marriage the way it is currently defined, is akin to prostitution. She told me that marriage had never made a whole lot of sense to her (Katherine, 7). She had already been married and divorced twice when we spoke and preferred raising her children as a single parent than enduring interference with her childrearing practices from what she seemed to consider were incompetent fathers. Katherine was already set in her views on marriage, and Women’s Studies class or not, they were not going to change either way.

Nelia ran into trouble in her marriage when she started talking to her husband about what she was learning in her Feminist Theory class. To illustrate the point, she related the following conversation to me:

NA: Um, yeah. My husband’s like “I don’t like you taking this class (laughter).” Cause you know, I was talking something about Cherrie Moraga, and he’s like you know, he’s Mexican, the whole family and I’m familiar with that whole you know “men, patriarchal thing” and um, you
know it’s like “do you know that like, you fit into this category and you know or whatever…” and he’s like “you have to stop taking this class” (Nelia, 4).

Related to the discussion of cultural differences yet also exemplifying Nelia’s confliction with her previous role as a submissive wife, this quote shows that the knowledge Nelia was gaining in her feminist theory class was problematizing aspects of her relationship which had previously gone unexamined. This was similar in many of the interviewees’ relationships.

Jennifer, who had previously accepted her boyfriend’s derogatory remarks about women, now saw the need to educate him not only about their source, but also about their possible impact. She related the following incident to me:

JD: Well, I fight with my boyfriend all the time. Because of everything yeah. Like he’ll be talking to his friends and will say something that’s totally out of line and I tell him that I’m sick of it. And you know actually we got into it last night, like he was talking about this guy and his girlfriend and he said something derogatory and very personal about this girl, this woman that his friend is dating and I was like you know, it all starts with you, you know, although you’re not a male, egotistical, what is it called...

I: Chauvinist?

JD: Chauvinistic pig, you sound like it and you act like it, whether you realize it or not, you really have to watch what you say, because it all has to do with society and how women are perceived, but it’s frustrating because he’s my boyfriend, and when he says it and it’s someone very close to you, you feel as though you have to correct them. I have to actually explain from beginning to end where I’m coming from and what I’m talking about, and then I say: “do you understand what I’m saying?” and he says “yes” (Jennifer, 5).

Thus, Jennifer’s Feminist Philosophy class was giving her the content to be able to argue with her boyfriend about injustice and the societal roots of gender oppression. If we can remember back to Chapter Three, this is exactly why Jennifer took a Women’s Studies
class to begin with: to be able to have a strong base to argue with her boyfriend and what
she termed “his chauvinist friends.” Not only did she learn to stand up for herself, but
she also learned to feel confident in doing so.

Nikki, undergoing her marriage’s trials and tribulations, credited her Turning
Point class for helping her see that she did not have to put her own needs second to those
of her husband’s. In the following narratives, we can see that she was really adamant in
her determination to turn her life back around.

NO: ...Always giving up your comfort to please somebody else and a lot
of women do that, you know what I mean? So what I learned was that I
compromised myself and I betrayed myself, you know and I’ll never do
that again, you know, I’ll never do that again. So I got it, I really got it.
And if it takes a divorce, or if it takes moving to the Big Island, or if we
get along and make it OK that’s fine too, but it’s like it doesn’t matter, it
doesn’t matter. You have to be comfortable with what your, you have to
live with what your core beliefs are ... your core values are. Don’t
compromise them for anybody or anything. You know it’s taken me half
my life to get that (laughter). (Nikki, 22-23)

Carol Gilligan interprets one of her respondents’ statements that she has a responsibility
to herself by writing that “once obligation extends to include the self as well as others,
the disparity between selfishness and responsibility dissolves” (Gilligan 1982, 94). As
we saw earlier, Nikki had given up her network of friends and her community to become
a wife and a stranger in a new community. This had had disastrous effects on her
marriage, as well as her self-esteem. The Turning Point class had helped her understand
the root of those events as well as uncover her dogged determination to make the best of
her life. She told me that while she had hoped there would be more time to talk about
problems with their respective significant others, she was nonetheless eager to get to the
class each week. She realized that the teacher’s role was to get as much material about
job seeking and work suitability as possible into the term, but she was still happy to have
had the opportunity to talk to someone else besides her husband, regardless of what the subject matter was. She even acknowledged that her husband had seen a positive change in her attitude since she had started the class. It is possible that she had been so unhappy about her living situation, that she had made life unbearable for him as well. Since I did not speak with him, we will never know his side of the story. However, Nikki did tell me that her husband, like a “typical man” wanted to fix whatever was wrong with her. When he realized he couldn’t, he was grateful that at least her opportunity to get out and see something else through her Turning Point class was generating some positive comments on her part and thus, from his point of view, making Nikki a little easier to live with.

Marcia, who had also been having problems with her marriage, told me that she was thinking about joining the Peace Corps. She thought that her husband would be supportive regardless of their marital status. Interestingly, this was Marcia’s second marriage to the same man, and the same issues that had shattered the marriage the first time, were surfacing again. This time, however, as a result of the knowledge gained in her Women's Studies class, Marcia thought herself better equipped to deal with the failure of the marriage.

Aiko was heading to a similar rocky end to her relationship. She told me that since she had started taking her Women's Studies class, she had started arguing with her boyfriend and taking refuge with her friends by discussing what she was learning in her class. As we saw in Chapter Three, communities within Women's Studies classes are conducive to learning and the retention of knowledge and connections after the class is over. However, it seems as if the creation and maintenance of communities outside of Women's Studies classes can have other beneficial effects on their members. Thus,
Aiko was creating her own network of friends revolving around Women's Studies, but she was the only one actually enrolled in the class. The feminist thinking she was encountering in class enabled her to disseminate that knowledge much further than the reaches of the classroom. Whether this occurred because the knowledge was so thought-provoking is unclear. Simply the fact that it did occur is significant. One additional caveat to Aiko's story is the fact that to her family's dismay, her Women's Studies class had encouraged her to keep her last name when she got married. Indeed, she said: "Yeah, why I have to change? It's crazy to change, it's not my name" (Aiko, 7-8). Since I also chose not to change my name when I got married, I could only cheer her decision.

Annie was also finding fault in the inequalities embedded in her relationship with her boyfriend during her Women's Studies class. Her case was different than the previous ones because she had always found this particular relationship problematic. However, it was only during the time of her Psychology of Women class that she decided to take action and ask him to leave their home. She admitted that she had been toying with the thought for quite some time and that it might have only been a coincidence that she had followed through with it at the time of her Women's Studies class. The two concurrent events were probably not consciously interrelated, but it is possible that the class had given her a sense of agency to follow through with her thoughts at this particular time. Some time went by and when I saw Annie again, she told me that they had resolved their differences and that her boyfriend was living with her and their daughter again. Indeed, in the most recent development to the story, I have come to find out that Annie is currently pregnant with their second child. I know that Annie is still
unhappy with several aspects of their relationship, but that she has decided to overlook
them in her desire to have a second child.

Another story that commingles motherhood and relationships with partners is that
of Martha. We have already discussed her struggles with other students within her
classroom as well as her leadership role in that context. However, it is useful to
understand the complexity of issues faced by at least some of the participants in this
study. Martha had seemed self-confident and assertive. Indeed, she had even described
herself as such. However, when it came time to discuss her current situation, uncertainty
seemed to be the order of the day. When asked about her significant others, she
unleashed a barrage of anxieties and indecision.

M: Oh, ok. So back then my husband worked a lot. He worked a lot to
give me things because I think he felt that I helped him take care of his
kids. I know that's why he worked. He always gave me whatever I want. He wouldn't deprive me of anything, but eventually, two years after I had C., came S., and then a couple of years after that I looked back and I said
"oh my God, my life is just flying by and I'm doing nothing." You know,
everything is not about me, it's about him. I stay home and take care of
his kids, [from a previous marriage] and he's working and he's going trips
cause he has to travel and I go nowhere cause I have to stay home. So
finally I left, but since then it's just a struggle. Like I thought I had it hard
there, and when I got out. I was just like, everything there just became a
struggle. I was really struggling and now I'm like halfway through,
almost halfway through school, I think, I'm almost there, the light is
coming, I can see it. Now you know, B. comes along and he doesn't have
kids, and he wants to get married and I'm just like "I don't want to do it
again!" I know I want to have children. I knew it before I even broke up.
I knew I would leave. I could feel it. For a year I thought about it before
I actually left. But here I'm 32 and I want to have more kids, and my time
is running out, but I don't want to get married again. I know how it is in
my family. Everybody has lots of kids. And then I look at B. and he loves
my kids, and he takes them, he helps me with them, it's a bond that you
wouldn't think would be there. He doesn't even have that bond with his
brother's kid, and that's his own brother. I mean there's a bond there too,
but so I look at all my struggles and I think... "What are you doing
Martha? Where are you gonna be? You want to be a teacher in a
classroom? Or do you want to stay at home?” I still have to go through all the training, and I don’t know how I feel about it (Martha, 11).

Similarly to Nikki, Martha realized that she had been living her life for someone else. Conversely however, this realization had come to her long before she had enrolled in a Women’s Studies class. But she had gone through the struggles that go along with leaving a significant other. Not only are there the attendant financial struggles of a single woman trying to make a living on the low wages given to people with little or no formal education, but in Martha’s case, there were also childcare problems. Martha was lucky in one sense, she was able to live with her mother so that she did not have to find and pay for a new place to live. However, with that move came the resulting feelings of hopelessness and failure. She had tried marriage and it hadn’t worked. Now she was back where she started but with the added responsibility of two children. Martha tried working for a while, but felt she was not living up to her full potential. Therefore, she decided to go back to school once her children had started elementary school. She was also urged to do so by some of the teachers at the high school where she was an aide. They saw that she had the potential to be a good teacher herself and pushed her to go to school in order to get her credential. Since Martha was living on the North Shore, she decided to go to UH West O’ahu. However, that school does not offer an education degree whereby students can earn their credentials at the same time as they complete their Bachelors’ degrees. Thus, Martha majored in Hawaiian and Pacific Studies but still had to complete her credential afterwards. When I last saw Martha, we spoke about her graduate education possibilities and she assured me that she wanted to follow up with her credential so that she could get a “real job” but that she was looking for financial assistance and was also somewhat reluctant to undertake the drive across the island.
everyday. Living near her, I assured her that the drive was not as terrible as she assumed it to be, but she was still hesitant. I am unaware of her current intentions when it comes to her further education, but I can only hope that she will follow her aspirations. I have no doubt that she would be an excellent teacher. Her leadership skills in her Women in Transition class, combined with her desire to accomplish something for herself and her children (see the following section) rather than living for her husband or boyfriend, clearly demonstrate her abilities.

Another woman who found herself in an even more intense situation was Elizabeth. We have already examined her narratives from several perspectives. However, in the following story, she outlines exactly what happened to her and her family in chronological order.

EC: We were in domestic violence, and I left him. Just picked up myself. We had a piece of land, one acre, and we had a mobile home and we had two cars. When he left, he was the main household income. He brought in the household income. He was the head of the household. And um, at that time when we had the mobile home he had a job as a construction worker, he got hurt. He got rehabilitated, he got a $40,000 check settlement, and that’s how we put down for the land and that’s how we bought the mobile home and that cars. And then he started getting into drugs, getting into drugs and all that and that’s when I became a born again Christian, which led me to a different lifestyle and everything, so during that time, before that, after I had my daughter in 1990, that’s when the violence began. It lasted like for 5 or 7 years. So then after that I decided that I wanted to get out. You know, he was in and out constantly. He looked a mess. He lost like 65lbs during the time we were married. It was like an in and out thing. It was really unstable. So I decided to go to a community... business college, during that time. So I went to business college during that time. From I think 1992-93, I still had my daughter, to like about... 1994. It took about two years to finish, and then in ’94 after I finished up college, um I wanted to work but I couldn’t cause I was getting beat up. And he wasn’t helping me. He had enough for three or four months, so I decided that I would you know, get a divorce, and get a separation, cause you know, he wasn’t around to help me, and I couldn’t work cause of the kids and it was really difficult for me. So then these
programs helped me to take care of my kids while I went to the college, ... (Elizabeth, 3).

As we have seen before, Elizabeth went through several extremely difficult periods in her life. Most significant in this narrative are two passages. The first is in the very beginning where Elizabeth explains that she just picked herself up and disappeared. From the rest of the interview and previous analyses of different portions of her narratives, we know that she came to Hawai‘i from Texas to stay with her sister, but that the latter ended up moving away shortly after Elizabeth got here with her children. Thus, Elizabeth was left homeless and jobless. This is where her Church came in and by her accounts, “rescued” her. Elizabeth was quite resourceful by her own means, and it seems unlikely that she was indeed rescued, or that she needed rescuing in the first place. When she told me the church rescued her, she had a smirk on her face that indicated to me that she didn’t really believe it herself. The second significant passage occurs shortly after the first. Elizabeth links the fact that her husband was bringing in the income, with her assertion that he was the “head of the household” when by her account, she was responsible for all of the childrearing and household duties, in addition to the full time job of protecting herself and her children from her ex-husband’s violent behavior. Of course, by current societal standards, the traditional feminine “women’s work” of caring for the home and family is quite undervalued and the masculine “men’s work” of outside, income producing employment is highly valued, so it would stand to reason that Elizabeth would go along with these assumptions. However, as the narrative progresses, we can see that she starts to place more emphasis on her own role in the family rather than worrying about what her husband was or wasn’t doing. Another important aspect of this narrative is the incredible amount of detail Elizabeth felt she had to give me in order to justify her situation.
Whether she was justifying it to herself or to me is unclear. However, what is clear is that Elizabeth was no longer subscribing to the aforementioned societal standards about masculinity and femininity, perhaps in part due to her experience as the current head of household of her family, but also due to her exposure to knowledge about Third World women's experiences with somewhat similar issues in her Women's Studies course. In Gilligan's terms, she may have come to reconcile her need to care for others with her need to care for herself, to define herself as someone entitled to care.

Relating course material to students' daily lives is an integral part of any feminist pedagogy. Thus, when, as a teacher, one can hit that mark and students get excited about the course because they can understand it through the lens of their own experiences, one can be satisfied that one has had a successful class. Integrating that knowledge is difficult in any classroom, since unless the students are willing to share their experiences, the teacher is unlikely to know the students well enough to make the connections for them. Indeed, that is not the point in the first place. The students themselves make the most beneficial connections. One such example is found in Pat's narrative. When I asked her about her family, she replied with the following story:

PF: Well, oh yeah, that's what... Well, I was in a really bad marriage with my husband. I actually got a divorce through the domestic violence center and I had a... like I had a really rough time and (laughter). I mean you can imagine being a single mom with three kids going back to school full time and working part time, so it's really, it's really been hard. And it's kind interesting how some of the ... the issues concerning the violence. They really, I mean they know what they're talking about. And it's like "Wow, I can relate to that?" on certain issues, but then like I said, many of the issues... 10 percent of the issues I can relate with and then the rest are um, you know referring to people with a lot harsher lives and worse problems than I ever, than I've ever experienced... (Pat, 6)
When the Introduction to Women's Studies class she was taking covered the topic of domestic violence, Pat was able to see the value of some the theoretical knowledge she was learning in the class. What is interesting however, is that even though she was able to make this connection with her own experiences, she was quite reluctant to admit that some of the other topics they had covered might also be applicable either to herself, or to other women. Another significant aspect of this narrative is that by all accounts, since Pat had moved to Hawai‘i, her life had indeed been harsh. Her husband forbade her to work; he beat her, and insisted she stay inside their home with the children when he was away at work. She was not allowed outside her yard, even though they lived literally on the beach, for fear that other men would try to pick up on her. She told me that he led her to believe he had “spies” in the neighborhood, which would report to him and tell him whether she had followed his directions and stayed home or not. If he found out that she had not, she would be “responsible” for the beating that would ensue. Once she was able to move away from him, she became much freer to pursue her own interests, whether they were school, exercise, or surfing with her children. It is possible that Pat did not consider her life harsh since she had been raised in a privileged environment on the East Coast, thus her perception of harshness might have been related to what she perceived was the “ghetto life” of her fellow students. Her experiences with domestic violence, because they were happening to a person of a higher socioeconomic background, might have seemed to her an aberration, instead of something that can indeed happen to anyone of any race or class. Regardless of her perception, while it is interesting that Pat chose to ignore the rest of the issues covered in her Women's Studies class because she felt she could not relate to them, it is also noteworthy that Pat was aware of her class status. Just
as we have seen that many white people are not conscious of their whiteness, many people with high socioeconomic status are also unaware of their privilege. Thus, Pat’s recognition of that privilege, although it may have been misguided when it came to the issue of domestic violence, may have been a step in her recognition of her gender and race as well.

The final perspective on her change in her role as a wife comes from Luana, whom I have previously termed the poster child for Turning Point. As we have seen in Chapter Three, Luana had asked her husband to move out during the time period of her Turning Point class. She stated:

LN: I had definitely, yeah, definitely decided that that was it, you know... It’s like I was a battered woman, battered wife and didn’t know it, kind of thing. And I always made excuses, it’s like “OK that’s it, I’ve had enough.” I put my foot down and totally separated you know like he was out, totally out. I got the restraining order, filing papers all at once (Luana, 5-6).

Not only did Luana use her class as support network through this difficult and trying time in her life, but the class had helped her recognize the cycle of abuse in her own life. She was able to name it, and thus own it for herself. Only when she realized that she had been involved in the cycle of domestic violence for so many years was she able to do something about it. When I walked away from our interview, I said to myself, “good for her.” Even though I didn’t know her very well, I was glad that she had been able to break free in such a swift and significant way from her abuser, and that she was safe from further abuse. It was apparent that she had taken the upper hand in the relationship, since her husband now had to come and ask her for permission to visit their children. When I asked her what led to all of these drastic changes in her life, she had no qualms about telling me that the Turning Point class had led her to undertake them. Luana had not only
undergone a journey through the Turning Point class, but had undertaken a parallel journey alongside that class with her personal life. Her story was by far the most illustrative example of the connections teachers hope to enable their students to make.

Identity and Role as Daughter

Many of the women I spoke to were mothers, but by biological necessity they were also daughters. However, only a very few mentioned this role as a significant portion of their identity. Perhaps this is because many of the interviewees did not live with their parents, but it is also possible that since they were adult learners, they did not acknowledge this relationship as a major component of their lives. Indeed, most of the participants wore many hats, certainly that of student, of mother, wife, worker, community member, among many others. What is significant about the following quotes is that the main reason the participants even mentioned their parents, was that the latter were often not being supportive of their educational goals. For example, Verna’s mother repeatedly told her to get a job and encouraged her to not pursue her teaching degree (Verna, 3). However, the more her mother told her to quit school, the more Verna wanted to stay. It is a testament to Verna’s stubbornness and thankfully to her drive and determination to pursue her degree that she decided to continue her education.

Lia’s experience with her parents was split along gender lines.

LT: Um, my dad is, he thinks it’s wonderful, supporting the effort. But my mother on the other hand, is totally against me becoming a doctor. She just doesn’t really understand that women can do stuff like that, but you know, ever since I’ve been away from home, been on my own, she’s seemed to come out of it. She’s coming around (Lia, 5).
Interestingly, her father was quite supportive of her educational goals, whereas her mother was reluctant to accept Lia’s idea of becoming a doctor. We know that Lia’s mother was a stay-at-home mother, thus it would stand to reason that she would be unsure of the possibility of Lia’s goal of becoming a doctor. However, it also seems that she would want the best for Lia, and if that meant her daughter becoming a doctor, then that would be it. It is possible that since Lia’s mother had not had the same educational opportunities as Lia, she might be afraid of Lia’s rejection or failure in this arena and was reluctant to embrace Lia’s goals as a form of protection. Lillian Rubin talks about a similar phenomenon in *Worlds of Pain*. She asserts that working class parents are ambivalent about their children’s educational achievements because they feel as if their children are leaving their world behind. While it is possible that this is the case in many instances, from what I understood of Lia’s childhood, she was raised in a decidedly middle class home. The reason why Lia’s mother had not attained the level of education her daughter had stemmed much more from her (very traditional) relationship with Lia’s father as they were married very young. Since I did not interview Lia’s mother, I will never be able to know the reasoning behind her lack of support. I can only be sure of Lia’s interpretation of them, and even those are subject to change. Indeed, it seemed as if the longer Lia was away from home, the more Lia’s mother was increasing her support of Lia’s goals. Whatever the reason, it was clear that Lia was working on her mother to enable her to come around to supporting Lia and her enrollment in a Women’s Studies class were instrumental in giving her the tools to be able to reason with her mother about educational and employment opportunities for women in non-traditional fields.
Luana’s relationship with her father changed as a result of her Turning Point class. When I asked her if it had affected any of her relationships, she replied:

LN: Oh, of course, cause he was used to having me there so he’s… Actually, it’s made him a lot more independent so he’s not like he’s so much like having a fourth child (laughter), he will actually get up and cook something in the microwave now. So yeah, I think it aided in his rehabilitation and stuff, because now, you know I wasn’t there for everything, you know, and for the time structure, for the time management you know. It’s so... even though I have a hectic life, it’s not so hectic as it was when I had to please everyone, you know, and now... now I’m included in that. You know, it’s like I have my time. It’s mom time, don’t talk to her don’t... you know (Luana, 5).

Luana’s class had enabled her to see that she should include herself in the list of those whom she needed to please and that this would necessarily take away time from the other people on that list. This attitude was quite similar to some of Carol Gilligan’s respondents who asserted the need to care for themselves before they could take care of their children (Gilligan 1982, 112). Awareness of this process is quite difficult. Indeed, Gilligan argues that women come to this realization through crisis and struggle and it is by no means an easy change to make. Although central to the idea of feminist consciousness, many of the respondents in this study might not have been aware of the process of coming to this crucial realization, nor of their Women’s Studies classes’ role in shaping that journey. Most of those who did follow this path, however, were at least certain of the end result. They were worthy of the attention they were starting to pay themselves. In Luana’s case, the first person who learned about this change was her father. He had been used to having her do his bidding in all arenas of his life. Now, he was forced to fend for himself a little more, so that Luana could be freer to pursue her own needs, whether it was school, or work, or leisure. Her children, as they became older, also saw a change in her and learned that she was going to stop attending to their
every need. This enabled them to learn to take care of themselves a little bit more, especially since they were now free of the threat of abuse at the hand of their father who was no longer a member of their household. It was unclear to me whether Luana and her children had moved in with her father after her separation from her husband, or whether they had been living together and her husband had moved out on his own. Regardless, Luana was not in a hurry to move away from her father’s house, and had no qualms about living there at all. This is very different from Martha, who had had a difficult time dealing with living with her mother after her divorce. It is possible that since Luana was taking care of her ailing father, at least some of the time, she felt that there was a reciprocal relationship at work, and that her family was not a burden on her father. Whereas Martha’s mother was still working herself, and even contributed to caring for Martha’s children when she was away at school or work. Thus, it stands to reason that Martha’s mother was contributing more to Martha’s family than vice versa, and that without Luana’s care, her father would have been in a (most likely very expensive) care facility. Thus, these two very different approaches to their respective identities as daughters show the wide range of daughter-experiences of the participants. We now turn to the interviewees’ perceptions of their roles as mothers as illustrations of another wide variety of insights.

Identity and Role as Mother

I have already addressed what I had hoped to hear from the participants about identity. However, the following quote was one of the most striking to me because it
served as a wake up call that the categories I was trying to “force” the narratives and their respective narrators into, were either too narrow, or simply too few in number. When I asked Ruby to give me a list of words she thought best described her, the following exchange took place:

RG: Um, fun-loving, um, positive, empathetic, um, full of life, um, (silence). I like to think of myself as a mother, a scientist, a lover, an artist, all of it in one, I just think that the possibilities are endless, you know.

I: Actually, out of the last ones that you just mentioned, what do you think is the most important part to you?

RG: Mother (laughter). It’s the one clearly, radically defining moment in my life. Up to this point (Ruby, 6).

There was no hesitation, not a single second in which Ruby could have mentioned something else that was quite as important to her than being a mother. When I reread the interviews with this in mind, it occurred to me that many of the women I had spoken to were going to school not only to make a better life for themselves, but for their families as well. Out of the fifteen women who had children whom I interviewed, twelve were single parents. This is important because it shows the necessity of so many women to return to education after a long hiatus, thereby becoming adult learners, because they are unable to make a living wage to support their families without a formal education (more on this topic in the next section). While these women were interested in bettering their situations, financial or otherwise, it became incumbent upon their families to support them as well. This took many different forms. For example, as stated above, Luana taught her children to take care of themselves, so that she would have time for herself, to go to school, do homework, etc. Luana mentioned that her instructor had warned the class that sometimes families are reluctant to support the returning students’ endeavors.
and that exact thing had occurred in her home. Her children "gave [her] a bunch of flak the first few weeks, but after a while they realized that 'mom's a lot happier.' So then they started pitching in, so yeah, it was like a whole lifestyle change...." (Luana, 5). And what an undeniable lifestyle change it was. Her children had to make some of their own meals, help out with cleaning the house and do yard work. Since they had been used to their mother doing all those things for them, as well as sheltering them from their abusive father, it was quite a shock for them. Luana was cognizant of the fact that she had to stop sheltering them so much, since now there was no longer any threat of abuse, but also because they had to learn to become their own persons. Luana thought that this was one of the most difficult things she had had to do as a mother. If she wanted her children to be more self-sufficient, she had to reward them with the freedom to do so. Coming from a lifestyle of constant fear, it must have been quite a change for all of them.

When I asked Marcia whether the class had affected her relationship with her children, she gave me two responses, dealing separately with each of them.

M: Well, I think that some of the discussions that we’ve had, actually we watched a video um, ... Killing Us Softly and that was just amazing to me, I mean I didn’t realize how impacted we are on a daily basis with these images. I mean I know, that, you know, as a woman, that I’m always constantly worrying about my weight, or my hair, or my appearance, and but it was... I always thought it was something... I didn’t realize that it was a media invoked kind of thought. That kind of thing is interesting, I mean it’s affected the way I talk to my daughter. You know, she’s sixteen, and we’ve talked about a lot of issues... And her appearance, and her sexuality, is something that we discuss and we have an open communication and I think that this is helping that too, because if I’m more comfortable with myself as a woman, I want her to feel the same way. I think some of the issues that we talk about are very important.

I: Since we’re talking about that now... You’re talking about how it affects your relationship with your daughter, what about with your son, or your husband? Is that changing at all because of some of the things that you’re learning in this class, or...?
M: It's changed so much with my son, um. As a single mother for five years, I guess I had him from like second grade until seventh, as a single parent. And I think there's a lot of foundation parts... I feel that his perception of women is pretty open. It's not a closed and narrow as for someone at that age who was maybe in a dual parent kind of thing. I think, he saw me work, he saw the struggles I was going through as a single parent and he saw... he has a lot of respect for women. We were very open about stuff. I'm a very open person about sex and protection, and how you feel about somebody before you have sex with them. I think because of that, I don't really see that it's made a difference as far as he and I. My husband ... not really (Marcia, 4-5).

Going with the societal standard of worrying about girls' sexuality more than boys', Marcia engaged in her role as a mother differently with her son than her daughter. She was more concerned about teaching her daughter about her body than she was her son. This could have stemmed from two factors. The first is that her son was younger than her daughter, so that issues about sexuality would not necessarily have been appropriate subjects for her to discuss with her son. The second is that body image issues are more closely associated with women's bodies than with men's, especially when it is a well known fact that many more women suffer from eating disorders than men, for example, or that the media is much more interested in peppering girls with ideas about how they should look, act, and dress than boys. Thus, these two reasons could have been central to Marcia's decision to broach different aspects of her Women's Studies class with her two children. Marcia talked to her daughter about feeling comfortable with herself and her body. She thought her newfound feminist knowledge was helpful in steering her daughter through this important teenage crossroads. She asserted that many teenagers were uncomfortable with themselves, and that this was probably due to a lack of parental involvement. More specifically, Marcia was concerned that other mothers didn't address this issue with their teenagers. She thought it was the proper role of mothers to explain to
their daughters the dangers of distorted body images and the host of other issues teenage
girls face in society today (Marcia, 10). Interestingly however, when we were speaking
about these issues, she separated them as "non-feminist" as contrasted to the issues she
discussed with her colleagues in the art department. She asserted that those had more of
a "feminist tone." It seems as if Marcia categorized issues as "feminist" and "not
feminist" along the lines of "serious" and "not so serious." This is quite unfortunate;
since it would mean that she thought the issues that she was discussing with her children
were not feminist and thereby not serious.

Another mothering story, in which Women's Studies course knowledge may have
had an impact on childrearing practices, is that of Pat. As we have seen, Pat was a rather
reluctant participant in her class, claiming that she could not relate to 90% of the issues
covered in her Women's Studies class. Whether her lack of involvement was quite that
extensive, it is difficult to guess. However, as we shall see in the quote below, Pat did
acknowledge that her class would probably enable her to educate her boys about gender
relations in a new way.

PF: Um (silence), I'm sure in some respects, on certain levels, things are
kind of going in you know, subconsciously, and it's gonna affect the way I
raise the boys as far as women and men are concerned, but even also being
um, their mom, a mother of three boys alone and having had a really rough
relationship with my husband who cheated on me and who treated me
miserably (laughter), um, you know, I really want them to be super
respectful of women and that sort of thing you know (Pat, 10).

Pat was hesitant to recognize that her Women's Studies class had much relevance in her
life, much less that it might be able to make a contribution to it. It is quite possible that
she would have raised her sons to be respectful of women regardless of whether she was
taking a Women's Studies class or not. This may have been due to her (and her sons')
experiences with an abusive husband and her desire that her sons not imitate this behavior later in life, but it is also possible that this may have stemmed from her liberal East Coast upbringing, where both her parents had been art professors. Nonetheless, her Women's Studies class cannot help but have reinforced the beliefs about respect for women that Pat was trying to impart to her sons.

When it came to identity, the role of mother came up quite frequently. Even if we were talking about another subject, mothering kept weaving itself into the conversation. Interestingly, I noticed this more often after I had become a mother myself. I questioned whether this had affected the path of the various interviews I conducted pre and post my own motherhood. After reviewing the interviews, however, I did not notice any specific comments that I had made that might have been different one way or another. Thus, it may simply have been coincidence that I interviewed more mothers after I had had my own child. Whatever the reason, it still struck me as remarkable that so many women of such a variety of backgrounds so strongly identified with their roles as mothers. Even for women who were fulfilling many other roles, motherhood was still at the top of their lists. For example, Marcia reinforced this in very clear terms.

M: Um, I think first I think of myself as a mom and conscientious. I want to be a good mother. Not really as a student, I mean, what I want out of school is what I’ll benefit from. I think that I’m a good student. Academically, up there, but the fact that I’m working, and I think that as far as getting my education and moving on to do the things that I want to, that’s more important (Marcia, 7).

It was important for Marcia to succeed, and do well in school, but it was even more important to her to get on with her life after school and be the mother that she didn’t have the time to be at the moment of our interview. She was so busy working and studying, she thought she was neglecting her family. Since she was having trouble in her marriage,
it comes as no surprise that she felt this way. It is possible that her husband may have convinced her of this by telling her that she was selfish to go to school and pursue her art degree instead of focusing on her family. Marcia hinted at this throughout the interview, however, she gave me no concrete indication that this was the case. However, it is also clear that regardless of her husband's words or intentions, her own objective was to finish school so that she could move on.

Martha exhibited some definitive thoughts about motherhood in her narrative. However, she seemed almost confused about their relationship with what she had been learning at school, or even with the fact that she was going to school in the first place.

Her narrative follows:

M: I think it goes back to my mom, like stuff I learned in the class. If there's anything I could choose over being a mother, I wouldn't. I like being independent [unintelligible] ... but I tried doing it on my own, barely surviving, so that's why we moved back in here with my mom and stuff. And it was like, whew! But like the mother thing? I really strongly believe that [unintelligible]. B.'s mom holds her doctorate, she's a doctor and she's at UH. I can't really relate to a lot of things that she says: like women can do this, or should do that... And a lot of things I say like, "Well, men do those things too." But she looks at women should be strong out there working moms, and I said, "Well for me, I'd rather not be out there with the struggle. I'd rather be at home taking care of my kids." To me that's a strong person. Why can't I be a strong person that way? I can. I can go to that PTA. You know (laughter), why do I have to go for a degree to show how successful I am. I can look back at my kids and see my success, like when she first started walking, or when he first started crawling. I feel I have a special bond with my kids. And the whole family is looking at me like "Who are you? Are you crazy?" Because B.'s brother just had a baby and I feel like why can't somebody take off a year to be with this baby? The whole motherhood thing, I feel like this is who I am. When I talk to them about it, I say I want to be there to help them with their schoolwork, and I can just work part-time, or just school and no work. But when I look at it from their point of view, they can't understand me. That's why you have a baby, to stay home and take care of it. So my views and the mother's view are definitely different. But the mother thing always helps me stay grounded. No matter if I'm falling
apart, no matter if I’m feeding them, I’m still mom. Whew, interesting answer, I don’t know what you got out of it, but... (chuckle) (Martha, 12).

Martha’s motherhood was obviously at the root of her identity. Indeed, it may be useful to think of identity as a tree, with many branches and with each individual person deciding what their roots are, as well as their trunk, and more peripherally, their branches. Of course, there are many different types of trees, ranging from pine trees, with very large trunks and root systems, and relatively small but numerous and evenly spaced branches. Not many of the women I interviewed seemed to have a strong single trunk/identity and a number of smaller peripheral, evenly spaced branches/equally weighted identity fringes. While this is certainly what I was hoping to find, since it would have reinforced my ill-conceived neat and tidy categories from Chapter One, as we have seen throughout the narrative analysis, this was not the case at all.

Another possible metaphor could be a large bramble tree, in which identities may be mixed up and interconnected in a variety of ways. There are many other types of plants in nature that have been usefully used as metaphors. One that particularly stands out is the rhizome. Deleuze originally wrote about rhizomes as a metaphor for a decentered subjectivity (Braidotti 2001, 178). Yes, they are nomadic. Yes, they are decentered. But while rhizomes can be a useful metaphor for identity, they can also lead to negating any other possibilities by virtue of their method of growth. Rhizomes have a tendency to choke out any new (other) plants, thus reproducing the imperialist/colonialist project by speeding their own (re)production along, and ensuring the non-existence of the other.

Fruit trees might be a more useful metaphor because fruit play an integral part of the trees’ life cycle, much as children do for many people. The mothers could be
interpreted as the trees living for their fruit (children), and for themselves (women returning to education to improve their lives). Fruit trees’ limbs are as strong and important as their trunk and roots. The number and types of combinations of are endless and the nature/plant metaphor could go on forever.

However, returning to Martha’s narrative, what is most significant was her identification of her motherhood as the most central aspect of her being. Indeed, she stated that being a mother helped her feel grounded at all times, no matter what the situation she found herself in. However, Martha’s actions in essence contradicted her words. She looked down upon her boyfriend’s brother and his wife for having a baby and going back to work soon after. But Martha herself was attending school and working outside the home. Granted, her children were quite a bit older than this newborn, but she was not following through with her desire to stay at home. As discussed earlier, Martha was a single parent, so it is possible that financial considerations might have had to overcome her desire to stay home with her children. She was quite adamant that she wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. However, she did not explain how she would be able to do that as a single parent without some kind of outside financial assistance. Thus, it was unclear whether Martha herself understood the contradiction between her views on the desirability of stay at home motherhood and her necessity to find work outside the home when she finished her degree. It is possible that she was gaining some insight into this problem when she acknowledged that she had given me an “interesting answer” (Martha, 12). Perhaps the luxury of judging the other couple was a stand-in for, a substitution, for judging herself.
Elizabeth, like Marcia, talked to her children about what she was learning in her Women's Studies courses. She had even taken her daughter to two of her classes so that the latter could become familiar with some of the issues her mother was interested in.

When I asked Elizabeth if she talked to anyone about what she was learning in her classes, she replied in the following way:

EC: Well, I am. I don’t talk so much about the feminist movement because they really... they kind of... some of them are intimidated, some of them are afraid, and some are like they don’t know the subject, cause they don’t talk about it. But with my kids, I try to teach them what I’ve learned so that they will have a more open of a mind when they’re in grade school and in high school and college. Cause I want them to know that. That that’s happening right now. It’s not something that is going to happen, it is happening. And to be aware of the things that are goin’ on and why people do what they do.

I: OK. Do you think that you... who else do you talk to about this class?

EC: Well, mainly my fifteen-year-old. She’s the one who understand a lot more, and I want her to see the women’s views and perspectives. In fact, I took that Women’s Studies class and I took her with me two times and she found out what they were talking about. And um...

I: You took that here or at LCC?

EC: Here, with Jennifer Gray. And my nine-year-old already came out of the class, you know learning some things and then... but with my fifteen-year-old, I really want to emphasize the feminist movement to her and what I’ve learned in the Third World countries because, you know so she can see a wider view of what we’ve done. What we have... where we came from, from being submissive, you know females, to the bold females and now to the professors, you know. I want her to see. By the way, I showed her the video. I got it from Jennifer Gray, and we were watching it about the women how they are exposed, you know exploited on television, and the media... (Elizabeth, 11).

The people Elizabeth is referring to in the beginning of the narrative are people from her church, whom she feels would not be receptive to listening to Elizabeth talk about feminism or feminist issues. However, it is clear that she herself had been deeply moved...
by her coursework in Women's Studies since she had felt it important that her daughter
attend some of the classes with her. The video to which Elizabeth is referring is the
ubiquitous Killing Us Softly, a staple of many Women's Studies courses. Not only did
Elizabeth think it was important for her daughter to learn about the material found in
Women's Studies courses, but she also wanted her daughter to find some role models in
her female professors. Since Elizabeth's children had led a rather nomadic life, she was
concerned that they had not had the opportunity to have good role models, whether male
or female. One way for her to remedy the situation was to take her daughter to school, so
that she could see that women can be successful, knowledgeable, educated, and enjoy
their work. From what I gathered from Elizabeth, this far in her life, she had had a series
of jobs that she used to make ends meet. They were not career choices. Rather, they
were jobs that would bring in a paycheck every two weeks, no matter how small. By
bringing her daughter to school, Elizabeth was trying to show her that there were other
options available to her, especially if she followed in Elizabeth's footsteps with regards to
her education. Elizabeth told me that her daughter was a "good kid" and she wanted to
make sure she stayed on the right track in school and didn't get involved with the "wrong
crowd." By taking her to school, Elizabeth was accomplishing three things: she could
keep a close eye on her daughter, she was exposing her to feminist material she would
not have otherwise have seen at a critical juncture in her adolescence, and she was
exposing her to strong female role models. Thus, for Elizabeth, as well as for many other
Women's Studies students, the feminist material gleaned from a Women's Studies class
was deemed to be so important, she felt it should have been made available to her sooner.
And by taking her daughter to her Women's Studies classes, she was once again taking
matters into her own hands, and letting her daughter know that this knowledge was available to her if she was interested in it. It is possible that it was simply in Elizabeth’s nature to do something like this. But it is also possible that Elizabeth’s Women’s Studies class led her to it. Regardless of what was the deciding factor in this action, the important thing is that it did occur and that Elizabeth told me that her daughter was really impressed not only with the film she watched, but with the class itself. Elizabeth hoped that by bringing her daughter to school with her, it would encourage the latter to strive for a college education herself, and who knows, maybe her daughter would become a Women’s Studies major herself?

Gardenia also shared her Women’s Studies knowledge with her daughter. In fact, she tried to share it with almost everyone she knew. Some people were more receptive than others, of course.

GL: Mmmm. Yeah, I would be able to say that a lot of what I learned... with my daughter, we were able to communicate on um, woman-to-woman level. That was neat. Um, and I shared a little bit of it with my mother, but she’s kind of closed on that, unfortunately. And my father, forget it. (laughter) And I shared some of it with other women that I know, yeah (Gardenia, 12).

Thus, Gardenia’s relationship with her college age daughter was slowly changing from that of a mother with a child to one of peer equality. Of course, Gardenia was still her daughter’s mother and would always be, but they found themselves in somewhat of an unusual situation. That is, they were both attending college at the same time, and thereby were able to share their experiences with each other in a different way than parents who went to college a long time before their children did. Of course, the daughter’s dorm experience and being away from home for the first time were not comparable, but the knowledge they were each gaining, as well as the different perspectives they were
exposed to since they were attending different colleges, were on a similar level. This made Gardenia able to relate to her daughter in a closer way than she had in the past. This may also have been due to Gardenia’s decision to stop drinking and attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. However, regardless of the reason, the result was that Gardenia was proud of what she termed her “woman to woman” relationship with her daughter and that it was apparent to her that her Turning Point class was instrumental in bringing it about, even though she had been reluctant to admit to its value in her earlier narratives.

Dee came from a completely different background than most of the other interviewees, with the possible exception of Katherine, who had also been a prostitute. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Dee, like Gardenia, had also been reluctant to acknowledge any type of benefits she had gained from her Turning Point class. However, in the exchange that follows, I was able to discover that it had affected many different parts of her life.

DF: I always talk to my kids, or you know my mom, to tell when and where this class is, and how things are going. So yeah, it was interesting, I... you know, I did research on... in English 100 a research paper on... it was um, single parenting. And I used a lot of the things that we learned in like the research. In the internet, I looked up what UH Manoa was offering and what KCC offers and all these things you know that can help a single parent going back into school.

I: Wow, that’s great. What did you find out? What kind of stuff did you find?

DF: You know most schools are offering some kind of single parent program. They were... and you know it doesn’t have to be only women, they help men in transition back into school.

I: Wow, interesting. Did anything in your non-school life changed since you’ve gone back to school, since you started here?
DF: Yeah, everything. I don’t do drugs and alcohol no more (laughter). No um, don’t do all that partying life no more, anything you know, just live a better lifestyle.

I: And um, did it... is your education sort of helping you um, maybe talk to your kids a different way, maybe the way you talked to them before as opposed to now, or raising them?

DF: Right, yeah. I don’t it aggressively no more, and I don’t do it physically. I can do it through um, you know I can voice my opinion and I don’t have to do it loudly, and um, be OK if it’s not OK with them. And I can walk away, I don’t have to stay and um, because um, a lot of the grief that I have given to my children still comes in a rebound because of the life that I led, and um, they still have a lot of fear in them and everything so, a lot of things I just let go and let it pass (Dee, 7).

Dee’s Turning Point class had influenced her choice in subject matter for another class, since she had decided to do research on the resources available to single parents for a paper. Significantly, the paper, in conjunction with the Turning Point course material she used as her sources, also helped her see that her experiences were valid in the sense that they had given her a base for her own knowledge creation. Another significant change the Turning Point class had brought to Dee and her family was her change in attitude towards her kids. From this excerpt, it seems apparent that previous to her KCC attendance, Dee had been physically abusive to her children, especially when she acknowledges that they “still have a lot of fear in them.” From her other narratives, we also know that her children had been removed from her custody since she had been involved with illegal drugs and engaged in prostitution to support her addictions. She was now clean and sober and going to school. Thus, it is clear that her education in general gave her enough of a sense of self-worth to be able to stop her “partying life.” She was trying to turn her life around in order to regain custody of her children. In addition, it is possible that her Turning Point class gave her the ability to disagree with
her children without resorting to physical violence. When she says that she is “OK if it’s not OK with them,” she expressing her newfound openness to other points of view than her own. Most Women’s Studies classes in college, although they are by no means the only ones that do so, focus on respect for other people’s ideas and empathy for viewpoints other than one’s own. Thus, learning about and through this framework helped Dee apply it to her family life. Presumably, everyone benefited from it.

Lesley was another mother facing tough single parenting issues. However, she was coming at them from a completely different perspective. She was afraid that because she was a single parent, her children would grow up too fast, like Dee’s had had to in their mother’s absence. When I asked her if her Women’s Studies class was changing the way she was parenting her children, she replied in the following way:

LR: Well, I always been... I never treated my daughter like a man or a woman. I just treated her like how I was brought up and I was a real tomboy. I always did what I wanted to do, no matter what my parents said, but I’m raising her to be open and always let me know what’s happening in her life, never be afraid, cause I was afraid. I try to make my daughters... I told her you know “I’m sorry, I know you’re seven years old and I need to be a little older and I don’t mean to do that but...” I was so tired, she had to watch my two year old, but you know I locked the door and I was half asleep, and I kinda felt bad when I woke up, you know “I’m sorry I’m doing this to you, but mommy’s real tired.” You know the door was locked, and they were safe, but I hope to, you know, not have to depend on her and I do and I’m sorry. I want her to still have her childhood, you know what I mean, so... (Lesley, 8).

Lesley’s main concern was to be there for her children, physically and emotionally. She was going to school, doing volunteer with an AIDS hospice organization, and raising two children single-handedly. It is no wonder she was tired. She was very concerned that her fatigue might be robbing her oldest daughter of her childhood. She was aware that a seven-year-old is not old enough to be a babysitter, especially to an active two-year-old,
and she was concerned for both her children's safety when she took her nap, making sure I understood that the door was locked and that they were safe inside the house. More importantly however, she was raising her daughter to “not be afraid.” That is, it was essential to her that her daughter not follow in her footsteps of being afraid as she was growing up. While she may have characterized herself as a tomboy, she still said that she had been afraid while growing up. It was unclear exactly what her fears consisted of. What is more significant is that she was raising her children to diverge from that path and be aware that the world was open to them. Interestingly, she was more adamant about letting me know this about her daughter than her young son. It is possible that she felt more strongly on this issue since she was a woman herself and was aware of gender discrimination that she may have encountered, or that her son was too young to already be facing these issues, but it is also possible that her Women's Studies class had encourage her to examine this question in her life. Certainly the class had proven to be cathartic in her viewing of the lack of a gender perspective in her other classes.

Another point worthy of mention is that Lesley's story picks up another recurring theme throughout many of these interviews with mothers, especially single mothers. Many of these women were extremely busy, with work, school, mothering, and a host of other commitments. There is more to this than meets the eye, however. The sources and consequences of this busy-ness are formative of their lives. The source is the endless set of demands on them, coupled with little ability to “delegate” those demands to others by, hiring help, for example; the consequences are, among others, that they cherish their education more, and that they have less opportunity to pursue it, or to pursue political involvements that might change the society and make it more supportive of their lives.
Indeed, this last aspect has been widely documented in a variety of studies, ranging from Political Science textbooks, to ethnographies of urban ghettos, for example. It is usually the people who need the political clout/intervention the most who pursue it the least. This does not occur because they are not able to see the necessity of political intervention in their lives, but rather that they feel so removed from the political process that they believe they have nothing to gain from it. This attitude is very similar to what I heard in these narratives about combining the demands of mothering, school, and work, among others.

Mothering seems to be, for many women, some sort of an “eye opener.” That is, in most cases, one is living life for oneself until one is faced with the prospect of caring for another human being for an extended period of time. That is when things seem to come into some sort of focus. One woman who spoke about this awakening was Ruby. She told me that she had always wanted to study nursing, but she had never had the drive to do so. When I asked why this had been the case, she was very clear in her response:

RG: I've always kind of, well being a waitress I made a lot of money and I didn't think about doing anything else. I sort of let life pass me instead of you know, being on the other end and having goals and what not. You know, I always had a distant dream or a goal but I never really took any steps to um, work towards it. And after becoming a parent, it really (laughter) it really opened my eyes, bright and wide to clarify things as to where I should go and what I should do. Yeah (Ruby, 3).

Ruby’s decision to go back to school as a single parent with an eight-month-old daughter cannot have been an easy one. She had been making enough money to get by. However, once she realized that this child would look to her for guidance she immediately sprang into action. She was part of the Single Parent Displaced Homemaker program at KCC and was busily pursuing her nursing degree. She had many interests, but as we saw
above, the most radically defining moment in her life came when she became a mother.

Identity then, can be described as a self-as-process or self-in-progress (not necessarily linear either). Sara Ruddick, in *Maternal Thinking*, writes about children this way, but it is also applicable to the women in this study, not because they are like children, but because similarly to children, many of them are undergoing tremendously rapid development(s), intellectual and otherwise. Through this development, we can see the chaotic struggles that the participants are going through. Similarly to Sara Ruddick who argues that “to identify a virtue is not to possess it but to identify a struggle” (Ruddick 1989, 101), I find that the narrative analysis process continues to shift/push the category boundaries I had initially set out. While I have already problematized them in an earlier discussion (see Chapter One), it is helpful to remember that they continue to be usefully disturbed as the interpretations go on.

Not all the participants were as adamant as Ruby about their roles as mothers, although it is clear that many of the mothers I did interview were concerned with their children’s well being while they were attending school. Most of them thought that any hardships they might endure as a family now would be worth it once they had obtained their degrees. Like most undergraduates, the participants in this study were sure that they would be able to simply fall into a rewarding career, financially and otherwise. It is unfortunate that this is probably not the case for many of these women. In a tourist-based economy where flexible specialization in a service economy is the order of the day, generic Bachelor of Arts degrees, especially in the Social Sciences and Humanities, are unlikely to garner their recipients choice jobs. This may seem to be quite a cynical view of a university education with regards to its concrete and financial long-term benefits,
especially for a teacher at the university level. It is the case, however, that Bachelor of Arts degrees certainly do improve their recipients’ earning power in comparison to people with little or no college education. Furthermore, I do feel that education is central to a well-rounded, complete human being, although it is by no means the only way of achieving these goals. However, for the participants, it did seem to be an indispensable part of their lives. It was balanced however, with the many other roles with which they identified. When I asked Martha which role she identified with the most, she interrupted me as I was listing some of the choices from her previous narratives by telling me, before I had even gotten to it: “mother” (Martha, 9). Martha’s insistence on her role as a mother is also reflected in many of the other interviewees’ narratives, although they may not have been quite as blunt as Martha in their assertions. Their foci may or may not have been on their families during their time in college. However, it is clear that with the exception of three of the mothers I interviewed, most of them would agree that the reason they were going to school was to improve their families’ lives, including their own lives, in the process.

**Adult Learners**

All of the women I interviewed were over the age of twenty-five. Indeed, that was one of the reasons I undertook this study. This is a population whose needs are often ignored on college campuses, because they are relatively few in number. That is quickly changing, especially at the community college level. Thus, it is imperative that colleges and universities extend their services to meet adult learners’ special needs. For example,
there is an evident connection between the mother-students discussed in the previous section and the adult learners discussed below. Not only are they one and the same, but they would benefit from increased and affordable child care services on campus. As we know from Chapter One, women adult learners are currently outnumbering males in returning to education. They constitute approximately 64% of the adult learner population (Merriam 1988, 51). It is a commonly accepted fact, although not necessarily a pleasant one, that women shoulder more of the childcare burden than do men. Thus, they face the greatest need for adequate childcare assistance. Currently, only Honolulu Community College offers comprehensive child-care services, although they are not cheap by any standards (~$600/month for fulltime care). The other campuses, including the Manoa campus, offer limited childcare in a preschool setting. What of those mothers who have children younger than two years old? The Manoa program gives preference to students’ children over those of faculty and staff, but there are also a very limited number of openings each semester. Many people end up on waiting lists for an entire year. What happens to their children during that time? The university seems to be indifferent to that problem.

Another issue facing adult learners is their alienation from the rest of the student population. Most of the women I interviewed who were over thirty were acutely aware of their age in the classroom. For some, there were two sides to the problem. Pat perceived the age difference between herself and the other students as a bridge that could not be crossed. However, she was comfortable participating in class since she was almost the same age as her professors and thereby considered them almost her peers (Pat, 8). Similar experiences were voiced by Marcia and Jennifer, who were also comfortable
voicing their perspectives in class, but were disappointed that there was not more quality participation from the rest of the (much younger) class (Marcia, 8: Jennifer, 6). Of course, this was reflected in all their classes, not just the Women's Studies classes. It is not as if they got younger and older as they attended different classes. Therefore, much of the comments made about being an adult learner and facing special challenges because of it included all of their educational endeavors.

This points to a critical juncture in pedagogy. Whether teachers use the banking model of education or not, they can certainly no longer assume that their students are devoid of any knowledge and that their minds are empty receptacles waiting to be filled by the instructors’ wisdom. Some of these adult learners are older than their teachers, and while they may not have had the benefit of a formal education, their life education is certainly sure to factor into their opinions and perspectives. Thus, for teachers teaching a class with a combination of adult learners and traditional students, special consideration must be given to their various ways of knowing and learning. That is not to say that all adult learners learn the same way. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, it is clear that many of them do use their life experiences as their learning tools in making sense of the material to which they are being exposed.

Lastly, Martha articulated something very different from many of the other women I interviewed with regards to the validity of Women's Studies classes for younger women. She thought that younger women would not benefit at all from a Women's Studies class. The narrative below reflects this particular belief.

M: ...And this semester, or last semester when I went, the first day I was clueless and after a couple of classes and the speakers, it was just so heavy. Like if you’re not mature, in the sense that you know where you want to go and who you want to be, then I don’t think you get anything
out of the class. And I think you have to have lived. I really don’t think that teenagers would get anything out of the class (Martha, 6-7).

In her view, the experience that came with being an adult learner was crucial to one’s success in her Women in Transition class. Indeed, she asserted that maturity was a necessary component of the learning experience. This is a very different viewpoint from Elizabeth’s who brought her young daughters to her Women’s Studies class so that they could be exposed to knowledge that they would otherwise not have been, or to Marcia’s who showed her daughter the *Killing Us Softly* video. The idea was that some of the course content could guide them in the choices they made as adolescents navigating through the uncharted waters of a new school in a new and very different environment.

Martha’s statement reflects an opposing point of view. This is particularly interesting because Martha also had a young daughter. Though she was still in elementary school, it is possible that she would also have benefited from seeing the film *Killing Us Softly*, for example. However, Martha was adamant that life experience was a necessary prerequisite for a Women's Studies class. It is possible that her Women's Studies class, as many do, placed a higher value on life experience, than some of the other classes Martha had taken until then. Therefore, she might have been keen to advocate and/or replicate the experience. Nonetheless, even if Martha was adamant that younger women would not necessarily benefit from a Women's Studies class, she did place a premium on experience as a tool for learning.

Life experience is used in feminist pedagogy as a starting point for discussion and for making connections with larger theoretical issues in feminism. In the passage below, we can see that Elizabeth was aware of these connections.
EC: I think it is, because I'm older than most of the girls in the class and I have experienced a lot of things, plus my dad was in the military. We traveled all over the world. I mean I saw things that happened in other countries and everything. And I learned a lot just from living there in one year, versus them living here for all their lifetime. You know and a lot of people have not gone to other places and I feel that somebody who did can learn a lot from the experience of being there (Elizabeth, 10).

The knowledge of other parts of the world was particularly useful to Elizabeth in her Third World Women class. She could visualize many of the places discussed in the class. This was an extremely helpful advantage for Elizabeth who was having a difficult time in the class. As we shall see in the next chapter, Elizabeth was a very eager Women's Studies student, however, she was not exactly the best student. She admitted that she needed a lot of extra assistance in her classes. Indeed, this was one of the reasons she was doing the interview. She was hoping to garner some extra credit. Certainly, Elizabeth had stretched herself very thin, raising two children by herself, volunteering at their school, being active in her church, as well as being a full time student. It is no wonder that she was having difficulty in her classes. But her story is not unfamiliar to many of the participants in this project. Indeed, many of them were accomplishing the same amount if not more than Elizabeth. Not all of their grades suffered. Some of them were excellent students, but it serves to remind us, as Elizabeth did above, that whether it is having lived abroad, raising children, working, or whatever, life experience does set adult learners apart in their own category. Thus, it should result in their recognition by the university system as well as individual teachers, not only as wonderful resources for the classroom community, but as people with special needs who could do with special services. I have already mentioned improved childcare services as a necessity for adult
learners, especially women, but there are other things that would improve the university climate for them.

For example, online and evening classes have only recently started increasing in number. These are perfect opportunities for the university to reach out to an underserviced population. That is, by offering more night and online classes, more adult learners could gain access to university degrees. One can currently obtain a Bachelor’s degree in several majors through the University of Hawai‘i’s Outreach Program. However, that number remains severely limited and its variety of majors is quite lackluster. These are only a couple of examples of additional services the University of Hawai‘i could provide to its adult learners. They are already juggling so many tasks and roles that having to think about fitting in their course schedule to their work and family schedule should not be one of them. Women's Studies is the perfect place for these opportunities to be created. Extending services to adult learners might increase the number of majors and thereby increase the size of the program in a cycle that would be mutually beneficial for all.

CONCLUSION

This chapter on the respondents’ identities has been peppered with narrative ambiguities. However, uncovering the meaning behind them has proven to be extremely fruitful to the furthering of the understanding of the meaning Women’s Studies classes have in women adult learners’ lives. These identity narratives run a gamut of variety and serve to increase the complexity of the picture created by the previous chapters of the
participants' lives, whether in an educational context or outside of it. What is most significant in the narrative analyses within this chapter is the connection between identity and consciousness that highlights the importance of agency and self-determination as important benefits of Women's Studies classes. When talking about Black women's feminism, Patricia Hill Collins argues that "self-valuation addresses the content of Black women's self-definitions - namely, replacing externally-derived images with authentic Black female images" (Hill Collins 1991, 38). The same goes for the women in this study. At the very least, the opportunity to learn that many women/feminists have undertaken journeys similar to theirs enables them to visualize their paths more clearly. In more holistic terms, this process can start in a Women's Studies class, and it can lead to feminist consciousness, empowerment, a sense of identity, to self-determination, agency, and (hopefully) to more Women's Studies classes, continuing the cycle. Even without this last development though, for anyone within it, the process is still quite powerful. I should mention however, that the process does not necessarily start with a Women's Studies course. Sometimes, the students are self-selected because they are already somewhere along their journey and sense the need for learning more about feminist issues for example. The process is not linear. It does not necessarily follow the order I have outlined, or does it necessarily include all of the aforementioned variables. In terms of this study, even shifts in perspective, or some acquired critical thinking skills, with or without feminist content, make for a Women's Studies/interviewee success story.

In keeping with the idea of building a theory stemming from the participants' narratives then, what the respondents thought was important to them ended up leading the way for the various roles and categories used in this chapter. Some of the respondents
had trouble finding terms to describe themselves, and others talked on and on about the subject. There are some common threads between them, however. Many of the interviewees identified first and foremost with their families or significant others, as opposed to their own selves as primary in their constructions (or reconstructions in many cases) of their subjectivities. Most were cognizant that changes in identity or identity formation were possible, and in some cases, even desirable. Thereby, their consciousness of identity also meant a consciousness of the possibilities of change.

There were some cultural differences in the understanding of identity conceptions, especially as related to race and ethnicity. The lack of recognition of haoleness served as a particularly salient barrier to the possibilities of the usefulness of these differences as they were reflected in identity. Indeed, some of the respondents’ conceptions of their roles as wives, girlfriends, mothers, and/or adult learners were changed in many cases, as a result of their enrollment in their respective Women's Studies classes. All of these roles however, regardless of how they were narrated, changed or unchanged, did indicate and reflect a wide variety of understandings of their conceptualizations.

These connected threads represent a tapestry of change manifesting itself throughout the narratives discussed in this chapter. The respondents were aware of it, embraced it, and in most cases were striving for it. That is why they were returning to education in the first place. Women’s Studies were a stepping-stone to implementing those changes with regards to many of their lives’ gendered roles. As the epigraph and following quote from Amina Mama serve to remind us, keeping in mind the complexity of the respondents’ identities serves to build “on work that begins to explore the complex resonances and dissonances that occur between subjectivities and politics, between the
individual and the collective. It offers a powerful rethinking of ... identity, and opens up the possibilities for imagining radically different communities” (Mama 2002, 14).

Therefore, it would be useful to ask here whether the individual senses of agency, of identities, of empowerment witnessed throughout the stories discussed in this and previous chapters can add up to some sort of collective agency. Amina Mama is not referring to Women's Studies communities, but it would also be useful to think here exactly what it is about Women's Studies that leads to these types of imaginings, of changes. How can Women's Studies courses and programs channel that agency, whether individual or collective, to advance itself as a site of resistance? One way to find this out from all of our students, not just adult learners, would simply be to ask them. Perhaps including a question about it on our end of semester evaluations might serve as a useful tool for teachers to steer our curricula towards the most effective avenues of learning.

For the time being, we can now turn to the particular aspects of Women's Studies that the respondents found most helpful in their respective journeys towards change in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX: WOMEN’S STUDIES’ SPECIFIC IMPACTS

Thus far, we have examined how Women's Studies classes have affected women adult learners, in multiple ways and in a variety of contexts. However, these impacts have also been discussed as being the result of an amorphous idea called Women's Studies. In this chapter, we will examine some of the more specific aspects of Women's Studies and see exactly what it is about the field that leads women adult learners to rethink their lives from a different perspective. We will also examine the specific impacts Women's Studies courses may have had on the participants in this study with regards to their future endeavors, educational or otherwise. Of course, not all students gain these types of outlooks, nor did all the respondents in this study. But by asking them what they had gained from the class specifically, I was able to garner a wide range of responses. These ranged from the reasons the students took the class, to some films or specific curricular instances in the class that were particularly striking to participants, to the influence the class may have had on their goals and aspirations. Some of the respondents had taken several Women's Studies courses and this was reflected, in many instances, in their choices of subject matter for papers in other classes. Others had only been enrolled in the Turning Point class and had focused on career goals to a greater extent than any radical shifts in perspective. Still others had taken the classes a long time ago, but were still happy to share their Women's Studies experiences with me. However, regardless of the type, number, or time frame of their respective Women's Studies classes, most participants had ready answers to my questions about their specifics.
Why take the class?

Oftentimes without my prompting, many of the interviewees were eager to let me know how and why they came to take their Women's Studies classes. For the Turning Point students, the class was a requirement if they wanted to be afforded the services of KCC's Single Parent Displaced Homemaker program. These services included special intensive career and educational counseling, as well as information about affordable childcare programs and transition issues that the students may have been facing. Thus, the Turning Point students were somewhat of a captive audience.

The Women's Studies students were more self-selected. They had elected to take Women's Studies classes. While Introduction to Women's Studies is a core course choice for all undergraduates, the upper division Women's Studies courses at UH Manoa are for majors and all other interested students. Since at last count the Women's Studies program only had 10 certificate students and 9 majors (August 2002), they do not constitute an overwhelming number of students who would be required to take Women's Studies classes. Thus, students from other majors either take cross-listed courses with their own majors and Women's Studies, or are interested enough in the subject matter to take the class as an elective. This relatively low number of students enrolled in the Women's Studies program should prompt us to wonder how we can attract more students to the (interdisciplinary) discipline. Looking at the following comments is a good place to start that process.

Many of the Turning Point students, were trying to navigate through intersections in their lives (thereby the name). Nikki, as we have already seen, was no exception. She
was looking for some direction in her life and was hoping the teachers’ experience in
talking to people who were going through the same thing might be useful in helping her
steer her way through the crossroads. Nikki was aware that the women in her class might
be coming from different places in life. Indeed, she acknowledged in the following
narratives that the reasons behind her lack of happiness might be rooted in a different
place than that of her fellow students.

NO: Just it was offered and it was available, and I was lookin’ for answers, I was lookin’ for some help, I was looking for some input. Cause I didn’t know where else to go, I didn’t know what other programs there were, so they said “oh you should take this turning point” cause it’s for middle aged ... I’m 43 and kinda middle aged. And you know a lot of people they get to that age and they have a great job, great house, great family, but they want to change their career, or they want something more, or there’s something missing in their life, even though they feel, especially women, they all feel guilty, cause it’s like “I have a great husband, these great kids, I’ve got this great job, but how come I’m just not happy?” kind of thing (Nikki, 8).

Nikki was excited to go to the class each week, and she was ardent in her desire to learn
and gain more perspective on her situation. She was glad that she had been encouraged
to take the class, and she asserted that the other women in the class probably felt the same
way, even though they may have been enrolled for different reasons. Nikki didn’t have
any children, no “great job,” no “great house,” and if her problems with her husband were
any indication, no “great family” either. But she was convinced that many of the other
women in the class did. This is particularly interesting since I interviewed two other
women from her class and they had both been victims of domestic violence. Thus,
Nikki’s perception of the others, at least some of them, was quite at odds with their own
self-understanding. Another interesting point in the above passage is Nikki’s evocation
of guilt. It is possible that Nikki was reflecting her own feelings of guilt and unhappiness
with her situation onto her classmates. Nonetheless, similarly to some of the other
students, Nikki found some assistance, especially with the career-counseling portion of
the class.

A related experience with the Women's Studies class enrollment was that of
Martha. She was also adamant that she had greatly gained from the experience.

M: What I really regret is not taking it my first semester. I took it my last
semester and I had all my credits, and my last semester was all my
electives. It was just a matter that I needed four credits, 15, the odd
number thing. So I was like “OK, I guess I can take this.” But I thought
about it, I never really listened to it. And, oh my goodness, after I took it,
I just couldn’t believe it. I sat there, I never missed a class, I went to every
class and it was just every female who’s been out of school for number of
years or that has been through something it should be required to take it
first. I mean, I got that much out of it. I mean... (Martha, 4)

Martha had taken the Women in Transition course at Leeward Community College.
Unfortunately, she had taken it after she had already completed most of her coursework
in order to transfer to UH West O‘ahu. The Women in Transition teacher had
couraged her to take the class earlier in her educational career, but Martha had not seen
is as necessary. She realized in retrospect that this had been a mistake and that she would
probably have had an easier time navigating through the intricacies of transferring to a
four-year institution had she taken the class earlier. This was not the only benefit she
recognized, however. As we know, Martha had emerged as a leader in her class. This
had led to a great increase in her confidence and self-esteem. For Martha, who had been
plagued with feelings of insecurity after her divorce, this was a boost she definitely
needed. The process of the course had awakened her to her own life journey and as such,
she was able to recognize its value. This was so evident to her that she insisted that the
course should be a requirement for all women adult learners. I have since met several
women intending to go back to school, especially at Leeward Community College, and
have strongly encouraged them to look up the class and its teacher.

Jodi K., the counselor at KCC, had seen this transformation take place in many of
the students who came to her office in the Single Parent Displaced Homemaker program.

JK: ... Um, what happens in the class is um, usually they start off not
knowing, you know too much, and not having the confidence. And after
you know, 9 weeks um, a certain transformation takes place for them,
where confidence is built and they’re able to say “OK, I’ve got the
resources required to do this.” And it gives them confidence and then they
can remember some of the experiences and the sharing that’s done in the
group and go from there (Jodi, 1).

Her perspective is particularly salient because it constitutes a more expansive view of the
class itself and its effect(s) on a broad range of students. From her point of view, the
Turning Point course succeeded in building confidence and community. The “sharing”
she was recalling suggests both the encouragement of learning through discussion in the
class, as well as its resulting understanding that one’s experiences are valid starting points
for meaning making and knowledge creation. Seeing the class from a larger perspective,
we can understand that it really did have a positive impact a relatively high number of its
participants. Indeed, as an example, Luana told me that she was glad she took the course.
It had enabled her to uncover what she considered were previously “hidden foundations”
(Luana, 12). Jodi had been quite sure of her success. She had even told Luana that she
knew the latter would consent to be interviewed. Of course it is possible that Jodi was
simply trying to “plug” her program by talking to me and therefore would have been
prone to suggesting that a transformation was occurring when it really wasn’t. However,
I think Jodi would have understood that this project’s eventual dissemination as a
dissertation was likely to be quite small and thus would not have engaged in the aggrandizement of the benefits of her program.

The individual respondents were not the only ones who would have benefited from taking a Women's Studies course. As an example, we can now return to another narrative of Martha's experiences with the Women in Transition course.

M: Oh my gosh, it was just... I mean I felt like I was a good influence on the other... just being there, I mean most of them couldn't even read or write and a good thing was that Ann was really um, she'd make us do all kinds of things, but she wasn't really critical about how you did it. You know, a lot of it was just your writing, was probably the best thing for people. A lot of the students, I'd say 90% was out of school for so long, and just writing a paper... You know she kind of made it like, "OK, well, you know, we'll work on it." The main thing that you come here, you understand... I think by the end of the semester, everyone was ready, "OK, we're ready to face it." The class was like ready to start a support group. Well, we did it like halfway through, and I never really went, cause the time for me... I said "if I need to I'll come, but..." Fridays is good for me, and I've filled my cup for the week and I'll be back, but a lot of them needed an extra day to talk and to just find them... She had great, great speakers. Like the psychologist came in, we had like sexual abuse counselors, just really, really excellent speakers. Really powerful women that were balancing their husbands and their own writing and they came in to class, and it was like you can do it. I loved it. If I felt down again and I needed... I would definitely go and take the class again. I think my sister would get so much out of it. And then my journals, and even myself I look from the beginning at my journals, from the beginning to the end, and there really... it just blows me away. But I kept everything. I haven't looked at my papers and stuff, but I know whenever I'm in a state I just need to go in and look... (Martha, 4-5)

Martha had already acknowledged that she would have benefited from taking the class when she had first come to Leeward. I argue that there are three reasons for this.

Perhaps the help the teacher was willing to provide with writing papers would have been a decisive factor in that assessment. Also, Martha was adamant that the guest speakers in her class were not only inspirational because of the material they were presenting, but also because their own lives served as role models for the women in the class. This
echoes what some of the other respondents, like Elizabeth and Marcia, stated in Chapter Five with regards to role models. And lastly, Martha was so convinced about the eventual benefits of the class, she would have liked her sister to be exposed to similar course material. This is significant because Martha’s sister is not enrolled in school and has no inclination to do so. I do not believe Martha was remotely suggesting that her sister go back to school full time. Rather, she thought that this particular class would give her sister a better outlook on dealing with her children and her emotionally abusive husband. Indeed, even Martha herself admitted, in another portion of the interview, that she walked all over her sister because the latter let her. Martha made decisions for her sister, and the latter followed through with them because she did not have enough confidence in her own ability to make good decisions based on her own judgment.

Martha also asserted that she had benefited from the class’s encouragement to “at least slow down and look all the way around instead of straight ahead” (Martha, 11). It is quite significant that Martha was verbalizing the insight that the class had enabled her to see different perspectives. This is probably the most important thing Martha would have wanted for her sister and it is the most substantial thing she got out of the class for herself. Martha was so enthusiastic about the class’s benefits for herself and for others, that she still kept in touch with her teacher, who took the time to help her find good teachers and good classes, even after she had transferred to UH West O’ahu (Martha 6). Thus, the teacher’s impact had gone further than simply that one class. Martha told me that she had not been able to have that close of a connection with any of her other teachers at Leeward. Only when she had been exposed to the smaller class sizes at UH
West O'ahu had she been able to recreate some semblance of a community and continue her confidence building.

Specific Impacts

One of the strongest impacts of Women's Studies classes cited by the interviewees was that the knowledge gained and/or created in those classes leaked into other classes and subject matters. We have already seen that many of the respondents changed their perspectives with regards to some of the other classes that they had taken, having to do with the lack of women in the curriculum. One woman who was explicit in her characterization of Women's Studies as being a significant harbinger of change in her viewpoints was Rita. Since the Women's Studies course she had taken had been structured with a different topic for each week of the class, she had been cognizant of the various issues they had studied. This is significant because they had not only read material that related to the women's issues they were studying, but the issues had also been written down in the syllabus. Thus, the connection had been made explicit for Rita. This is particularly important since Rita was a non-native English speaker and needed some extra help in recognizing those associations. They had covered issues about homophobia, some issues regarding race, specifically African-Americans, and most importantly for Rita, gender differences. They had had the opportunity to engage in a debate as well as some other class activities on some of these issues, and she had found the exercises quite revealing. Indeed, she stated that this had been the defining moment for her, when she had started to think about "many questions, including like um, gender
difference" (Rita, 7). It seems as if Rita had never thought about gender differences, or gender anything for that matter, until she had been exposed to her Women's Studies course. The class enabled her to reflect on some of the other classes she had taken, both at UH Manoa and at KCC, and rethink some of her assumptions, at least those related to gender and race. These significant shifts in thinking about other knowledge, as well as the intersections between gender, race, and class oppression at the very least, are indicative of the profound impact Women's Studies classes can have on their students.

Toni had also been glad to engage her subjectivity in her Women's Studies classes as well as outside of them. As the oldest woman I interviewed, Toni had a wealth of life experiences to make meaning from in all her classes, but specifically in her Women's Studies classes. Indeed, she held them to a higher standard than her other classes. She said:

TM: (silence) Like in all classes, my main concern is getting through them (Laughter). Being able to take the tests, being able to do the reading, being able to get my papers done, getting a good grade. I mean I'm just like everybody else when it comes to that. I really don't get that involved in it. I expect the women's studies classes to (silence)... make me stronger and ... and give me more dignity as a woman. Um, and (silence) (Toni, 5).

Giving someone more dignity as a woman is quite a high order for any class, but I think that Women's Studies classes can, and often do, rise to that challenge. Exposing women to knowledge that had previously been denied to them is quite a powerful tool for learning and for changing someone's life. As Alice Walker was so proud to learn about Zora Neale Hurston coming before her as a writer, a folklorist, and an anthropologist, she was particularly proud that Zora Neale Hurston had been a black woman (Walker 1983, 35). Alice Walker had had to do some intensive independent research to even find out about her predecessor's life and contributions. Students in Women's Studies are offered
this knowledge in the concise, if quite often complex, format of a semester long class. They might have to do some of their own research on topics of their specific interests, but they are afforded the bulk of the knowledge in the class as a way to make their own connections between their own lives and the material covered. As there is a book that calls for teaching democracy by being democratic in the classroom (Becker and Couto, eds 1996), Women's Studies classes often take several steps beyond that. Teachers can give students a sense of ownership in the direction of the class by practicing feminist pedagogy and thereby encouraging students to make those connections we have already ascertained to be so meaningful. Often times, this manifests itself not only in the Women's Studies class, but in other classes as well. For example, Toni found it difficult to suppress her opinion in a variety of different contexts.

TM: It already has. I think differently, um, I have different goals, I have different issues, and I have a hard time not speaking my opinion, and I have a hard time keeping my mouth shut if I hear someone say something stupid. I can't look the other way too much anymore. I'm more involved (Toni, 10).

Toni's involvement was not only evident in her Women's Studies class, where she told me that she was one of the key speakers in the class, but it was also coming out in her other classes as well as her daily life outside of school. She saw her involvement grow and was proud of its increase. The class had afforded her the site to become more active in her own resistance to what she understood as injustices around her. She had had some troubles with an old roommate who had started harassing her and Toni was glad to credit her Women's Studies class for giving her the tools to be able to fight back. She had an increased awareness of her rights as a citizen, but also as a woman, since the roommate had been a male and was threatening her with sexual violence. Her location as a mature
student no longer stood in her way. In fact, the class had cleared the path for a voice that Toni herself had felt had always been present in her life. It had just been suppressed by circumstance. Interestingly, Toni’s response was to a question about specific highlights of her Women’s Studies class that she might have wanted to share with me. Thus, for Toni, it wasn’t a specific event in the class that led to her voice. The class was indivisible into smaller parts to her. It was indispensable to her daily life. Toni may have been producing a voice in relation with her situation, tapping potential and energizing it through some of the new insights she had been exposed to in her Women’s Studies class.

As we saw in the last chapter, Jean Kilbourne’s film Killing Us Softly is a fundamental tool used in many Women’s Studies classes, especially at the introductory level. The film seems to touch many students because it addresses insidious media issues to which we are all exposed. Indeed, the film enabled Marcia to think about her art in those terms outlined in the film.

M: Well, I think that video, Killing Us Softly, and she said something about an artist making visual the silent word. And as an artist, I kept looking at my work a little bit differently and saying, what am I trying to say here. So that was an interesting part of it. And then like I said before, the video... more consciously, ... when I do watch TV, cause I don’t watch a lot of it, when I do look at media, I started looking for those things that she showed in the video and what are they trying to say? What are the little hidden things? And I think I’m looking at it in other ways, like when I read something about history, when I read it over and over again, I see these things in oceanic art. And there’s a lot of gender issues in oceanic art, so I’m looking at, I’m starting to look more into the gender issues and what defines a woman. You know, like what I grew up in and my questions about it. So I think that those are the things that have affected me or are the highlights (Marcia, 8).

Not only had the film prompted Marcia to question her own art-making, but it was also pushing her to ask questions about other artistic endeavors in general, her own and that of others. She had become conscious of the pervasiveness of the media and its far-reaching
impacts on people from all walks of life. The class itself had also prompted her to think about the sources of history making and writing. She had started asking herself: Whose perspective is given primacy? Who is the writer of this piece of history? What makes him or her "right" over someone else who might have written about the same event from a different perspective? These questions all stemmed from Marcia's understanding of subjectivity in any knowledge creation endeavor. She had come to realize that the location of the writers really made them interpreters of events, rather than reporters of facts. Indeed, she had also started to question her conception of womanhood and all of its attendant baggage throughout academic literature. This seems to be quite a striking realization to achieve, because it in turn calls into question all of the knowledge one has been "handed" previous to the Women's Studies class which made her question all these things in the first place. As with the initial feeling of disempowerment that can occur in a Women's Studies class (see Chapter Four), a similar disheartening feeling can occur when one starts to understand that objectivity can only be partial and that, like feminism, subjectivity is not a dirty word.

*Killing Us Softly* has been shown to have a dramatic impact on its viewers. The film *Dreamworlds* also seems to be quite influential. For example, Elizabeth told me herself that the film had affected her relationship with her daughter. Initially, I thought she was describing Jean Kilbourne's film, but she corrected me.

EC: No, not that one, the other one um... (silence) *Dreams*, something about dreams. Anyway, and I showed her that, and she was like. It impacted her so much that I told her, "That's why I want you to dress in a certain way." Not that you don't have the freedom, but I want you to dress in a certain way so you won't attract that kind of attention, so you won't be exploited or hurt, or not send the wrong message. So now, that movie really impacted my life (Elizabeth, 12).
As we saw in the last chapter, Elizabeth was clearly concerned about her daughter’s future. Having her watch Dreamworlds seems to have been another of Elizabeth’s ways of exposing her daughter to feminist knowledge that she would never have seen at her high school, for example. Elizabeth was quite hungry for knowledge; she even told me that she wanted to take more Women’s Studies classes. “Whatever they offer,” she said (Elizabeth, 6). Therefore, it seems apparent that she was expecting her daughter to be as eager to learn as she was. And if that meant adding to her daughter’s curriculum herself that was not something Elizabeth was afraid of doing. This would not only have been a broadening of her perceived role as a mother, but also an extension of her role as an active advocate of her children’s rights in terms of their education. Elizabeth’s goals for her children were such that she felt they needed the extra education besides what they were receiving in school, and she took it upon herself to engage her own knowledge to fulfill that purpose.

Chai’s experience throughout Turning Point was quite dissimilar to Elizabeth’s Women’s Studies experiences, but the end result of the course was similar. It ended up validating her goals. She told me that she didn’t know whether the class had affected her personally. She skirted around the issue when I asked her that very question, but her last sentence indicated that “in some ways it did concern a lot of things that [she was] doing right” (Chai, 5). Chai had undergone what she termed a long period of “self-probe” and “self-empowerment” through independent reading, but her Turning Point class enabled her to see the validity of what she had been doing, as well as led her to see all that knowledge from a variety of perspectives which she would otherwise have missed.
Chai had been divorced for a long time and her children, who were almost grown, were living with their father in California. This was a very difficult separation for Chai, and she attributed her lack of agency to her identity as a Malaysian woman with a Malaysian ex-husband. She told me that she had not had a choice as to whether her children would stay with her or go to the mainland with their father. In fact, just the opposite was true. As soon as she had decided to separate from her husband (the reasons behind this decision were never revealed to me in the interview) he had convinced her and the children that she was “crazy” and left her to fend for herself. It was not clear whether Chai had ever been made aware of her rights. There was a question whether she was a legal resident of this country at the time. Therefore, she might have been afraid to fight for her rights in a courtroom for fear of being deported. Nonetheless, after her husband and their children had left, she had undergone a long period trying to convince herself that she was not crazy. That is when she had started her “self-probe” period. The Turning Point class happened along about two years after that. Thus, it enabled her to validate her “self-probe” and take it one step further, by offering her career advice. Chai had decided to turn her considerable energy towards becoming a physical therapist.

The evolution of specific goals is a wonderful consequence of a Women’s Studies class. Marcia related to me that many of her artist friends who were women were producing artwork related to gender. For example, one woman had decided to focus on the stress of PMS. Now that may be an essentialist take on what it means to be a woman, but it is interesting that many of the women artists Marcia referred to were turning to “issues that affect women” (Marcia, 10). There was no such reference to male artists doing gendered work in her department. She told me that she and her friends often talked
about their respective "artwork in that space, so that kind of comes from the ideas in the class" (Marcia, 10). Not only did the Women's Studies knowledge steer Marcia towards producing gender-related artwork, but the knowledge seeped from her work into that of others after they had discussed some the issues she had learned about in her class. Thus, in a reinforcement of what we have seen in previous chapters, feminist knowledge has the tendency to affect other disciplines as well as other areas of women's lives.

One of these areas is the growing understanding of gender-based discrimination as well as its related effects, especially with regards to health care. Lesley, who was already volunteering at an AIDS hospice, was thrilled that her Women's Studies teacher focused on health care as an area where women are subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) discriminated against.

LR: Hmmm (affirmative). Well, I've learned um, about some resources out there, and about women's health and AIDS, and how it's invisible and how um, if we don't get the right, and how men's health is so much more important. As a single person, [I learned] about the resources that we do have and about other issues as well. She also talks about women's history. But a lot about women's health and reproductive rights, and how many women don't find out they're infected with AIDS until they get pregnant, and then it's all about the baby. Or when she gets a pap smear once a year, but she doesn't know how she got infected (Lesley, 6).

Lesley was obviously focused on AIDS since that is the area she was working in at the time. She wanted to be an advocate for Native Hawaiian health care, especially as it related to HIV/AIDS. It seemed as if every time her teacher had mentioned health care in the course, Lesley's ears had perked up. I had seen the syllabus, and while there was certainly material relating to women's health issues, it was by no means the only topic of discussion in the course. However, Lesley was able to appropriate the knowledge from the class that was most useful to her and to her career aspirations. This is another way
Women's Studies courses enable their students to make connections. This is particularly true of introductory courses, which offer a wide variety of topics and thus have the potential to fascinate people with different interests.

Another woman who mentioned discrimination, albeit in a very different context, was Kathy C. She was enrolled in a feminist philosophy class and she was just learning about female philosophers she had never heard mentioned in any of her other courses as a graduating philosophy major. She described the course to me in the following way:

KC: It's um, kind of a feminist perspectives in philosophy, I think is the title. Let's see... um, you know right now we're just looking at seventeenth century women philosophers. Um, and it's kind of offering a really neat perspective, because I never knew that in the seventeenth century, I guess women were not supposed to think, right. And just to hear that, I never knew that women were so, you know, heavily discriminated against, um I never knew that they weren't included in the encyclopedia of philosophers. It doesn't have any women in there, so it's kind of really opening up my eyes to what and how women have been discriminated against throughout, you know the years, which I was never really aware of (Kathy C., 4).

When I mentioned in the first chapter that Women's Studies courses were a place that women could finally learn about their history; knowledge that had been denied to them throughout their educational careers, this is exactly what I had in mind. Kathy C. had gone through nine philosophy classes without having heard of any women philosophers. This feminist philosophy class had provided her with the first opportunity to learn about women thinkers throughout history. She was shocked to hear that women had not been included in the encyclopedia of philosophers simply because they were women. Kathy was very outspoken and had told me in a different part of the interview that she hadn't experienced any "real" discrimination. Thus, for her to hear about women philosophers being discriminated against was an eye opening experience for her. It was clear that she
respected their thinking and that the teacher was presenting the knowledge in a way that was interesting and thought provoking because Kathy told me that she had been thinking about the issue at home. She even asked me why I thought that there had to be a feminist philosophy class, when it was clear that women philosophers should be included in the regular curriculum. I thought to myself that this was an example of a student who really got the point about the lack of women in the general curriculum.

Two other participants also gave me unambiguous examples of the impact of Women's Studies on their lives. Katherine, like many of the other interviewees, chose to include gender related issues into her papers for other classes. When I asked her why she did this, she replied to me in no uncertain terms: “'Cause that’s what I’m interested in” (Katherine, 6). Her Women's Studies class had engendered an interest in women's issues that had proven to be a fertile ground for research topics for other classes.

Vema also explained that she was using the knowledge from her Women's Studies class to affect her life outside of school. When I asked her for specifics, she told me that the section of the course relating to model mugging, when someone who is trained in self-defense comes to the class and shows women how to defend themselves in case of an attack, was of real value to her because she felt that if she was put in a situation where her safety was being threatened, she would be able to defend herself. She also appreciated the section on job opportunities in non-traditional fields for women, but the most important aspect of the course, in her view, was related to women in education. She said: “I don’t feel like, as dumb as I feel” (Vema, 9). Vema had found a safe space where she could make her voice heard and not be afraid that she would be ridiculed for speaking out. While some of Vema’s assertions may have been a little strange, indeed,
our interview could certainly have been called that, she was thankful that her Women's
Studies class encouraged respect for other people's perspectives. Because her mother's
negative attitude towards her education had the potential to be quite detrimental to her,
Verna was appreciative of her Women's Studies class where she could share her opinions
about a variety of issues without fear of recrimination. This is another indicative factor
of the desirability, indeed, the necessity of a safe Women's Studies class community for
many students.

In an effort to be as inclusive as possible, Women's Studies is necessarily
interdisciplinary. However, this interdisciplinarity can also come as a cost to the major
itself. Because Shu was compelled to take classes in different disciplines as she was
completing the coursework for her major in Women's Studies, she took an art class.
Before having finished up her major in Women's Studies, she switched to art, and started
her coursework over, her goal now being a Bachelor's of Fine Arts in ceramics (Shu, 7).
Shu was a talented artist, as well as a dedicated Women's Studies student, but pursuing
both majors and working full time outside of school was too much for her. Therefore,
she decided to finish the Women's Studies coursework after she had finished her BFA.
Unfortunately, when I spoke to her, she vaguely told me that she was thinking about
going back to school, but it was unlikely, as she had taken on new responsibilities at work
and did not have the time to keep going to school. Thus, in this case, Shu’s journey
exemplifies two things. The first is that interdisciplinarity is a positive characteristic of
Women's Studies. It enables students to gain a feminist perspective in conjunction with
other disciplines and oftentimes, the students are able to view those disciplines from a
different and exciting perspective. The second, however, is that Women's Studies’
interdisciplinarity also may cause it to suffer the loss of students whose interest is taken by some of the other disciplines they are exposed to, as it did in Shu's case. There is no way to know exactly how many times this scenario takes place in one year, if it does at all. But it is certain that if it happened in Shu's case, it can certainly happen again. One thing we can be sure of, however, is that regardless of whether Shu was a Women's Studies major or not, she was clear that the impact Women's Studies had had in her life was that it was certainly at the "fulcrum of [her] life changes" (Shu, 13). She readily recognized this impact and was happy to partake in the interview so that she could share it with me. She even told me that she hoped that this project would reflect other students' positive experiences with Women's Studies. I told her that I certainly hoped so as well.

Another way to approach this story would be to urge Women's Studies programs to be aware that their influence is not accurately measured solely in terms of their numbers of majors and certificate students. While university institutions often put pressure on them to have more majors, their assessment of their service to students requires casting a wider net. In light of this possibility, Women's Studies could have been offering Shu critical knowledge and opportunity. In turn, she put it to use while obtaining her art degree. This could be construed as a negative aspect of Women's Studies programs' inherent interdisciplinarity, if the point of Women's Studies was to have a high number of majors. However, as we have seen throughout this project, the focus of Women's Studies is rather aimed at affecting many lives instead.

There have been a multitude of other studies examining Women's Studies as a field of study\(^1\). However, only a very few examine the role Women's Studies play in

\(^1\) For a very complete bibliography, see Michael Flood's website at http://www.xyonline.net/mensbiblio/mensstudies.html#heading223.
adult learners’ lives. One that does stand out as particularly significant is *Changing Our Lives: Doing Women’s Studies*, edited by Gabriele Griffin. One of the most appealing parts of the book is the section written by adult women learners themselves with respect to a variety of issues they had encountered in their respective Women’s Studies classes. Many of the women in the study experienced similar life changes to the participants in this project. The book argues that most students who had taken Women’s Studies classes believed the class had changed them in some way. Griffin states that:

Sometimes [the students] simply discover that they do not want to or need change; doing the course then makes them reaffirm the choices they have made in their lives. Sometimes it makes them rethink these choices, both professional and personal ones... They can become more assertive and confident in how they argue... In their personal lives, [some students] ask of their partners that they engage with them in different ways, or leave or change their partners. This can be both traumatic and stressful. It is also not specific to Women’s Studies but a phenomenon commonly observed among “mature” students entering courses. Such a student frequently seeks change and will herself change so much during her course attendance that if her partner is not flexible enough to grow with her or accommodate the change a break is inevitable... The problems that may lead to the breakup of a relationship are often latently manifested, or even overtly so, before a woman begins a course; doing a course may simply help her to implement changes she has been wanting to make for a while (Griffin ed. 1994, 41).

These observations are quite similar to those of the participants in this study. When thinking about this process, Annie and Luana come to mind. They were both unhappy in their relationships, and both had made changes in their relationships during their respective Women’s Studies courses. However, it was possible that the changes had been coming for a while and had simply been implemented coincidentally during the time of their Women’s Studies classes. It is certainly true, however, that the feminist content of the course would have been an encouragement to instigate those changes. Learning about the cycle of domestic violence would have been instrumental in Luana’s understanding.
that her husband was never going to stop abusing her unless she made some drastic changes in her living situation. Asking him to move out was that radical change.

One significant methodological difference between this project and Changing Our Lives was that in the latter, the Women's Studies students were the writers themselves, while the participants' voices in this study have been mediated by my own voice and interpretation. This is exemplified in the previous paragraph. Had Annie and Luana been writing, we might have been privileged to know what their thinking process might have been during these changes. This is not to imply that they might have some kernel of truth that they might have been hiding, either from me or from themselves. However, it does reinforce the suggestion that there are a variety of possible interpretations for each of these narratives. Both methods offer value to the participants and I believe that it would be beneficial for Women's Studies programs in Hawai‘i to consider editing a similar project of its own students' voices.

There have been several more recent studies of Women's Studies' impact on its students. Again, however, none of them focusing on adult learners, and certainly not on Hawai‘i. The three most prominent are found in the psychological literature and focus quite heavily on the murky marker of self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (1965). Two of the studies acknowledge problems with the scale itself as well as their respondents' measurements of their own self-esteem during adolescence. Again, this is quite different from the participants in this study who were well out of adolescence and had significant life experiences that helped to guide their notions of self-esteem. This is not to say that all the participants had high self-esteem as compared to the younger students who participated in the other studies. In many cases, exactly the
opposite is true. There are similarities, however, in their perceptions of the impact of Women's Studies classes on their lives. Two of the most important, cited in the Harris et al. study are the “more progressive gender role orientation and an increased locus of control” (Harris, Melaas, Rodacker 1999, 969). The latter of the two is quite similar to the increased sense of agency discussed by the participants in this study.

The second study, conducted by Heather Macalister, reviews the literature that asserts that Women's Studies classes profoundly influence the students who take them (e.g. Musil, 1992a). The paper examines the existing literature on this influence, including “changes in self-expression, sense of commitment and responsibility, critical thinking, empowerment, and acknowledgement of diversity” (Macalister 1999, 283). Again, these are quite similar to the changes that the interviewees displayed in their narratives. The study does indicate that there needs to be more research done on the impact of Women's Studies classes. However, the author asserts that the self-selection of participants in qualitative research is too large of a problem to overcome. Therefore, she suggests that the best way to study the impact of Women's Studies classes is to undertake statistical surveys with large samples. While I agree that there is value to these types of studies (see Chapter Seven), I disagree that qualitative research methods should be viewed as completely invalid and invaluable as a contribution to the field of Women's Studies because a survey does not allow for the careful interactions offered by an interview. On the one hand, there is no way to get as much detail from a survey as there is from interviews. On the other hand, using a survey instrument is certainly one quick, relatively cheap and easy way to get a high number of respondents.
Lastly, the third study examined the success of feminist pedagogy. Jayne Stake and Frances Hoffman, report that their study provides “empirical evidence of the process of Women's Studies teaching... Contrary to Women's Studies critics, Women's Studies faculty and students reported strong emphases on critical thinking/open-mindedness and participatory learning and relatively weaker emphases on personal experience and political understanding/activism” (Stake and Hoffman 2000, 30). While I did encompass feminist pedagogy within the parameter of what makes a Women's Studies class successful, I did not separate it from the content of the Women's Studies classes. This study does exactly that, and in doing so, their findings are quite different than mine. Of course, their statistical analysis was based on a very large sample of 111 teachers and 789 students from 32 campuses across the United States, and used survey research to determine the success of feminist pedagogy in Women's Studies classes. However, while my sample was limited to 29 women, I did find that the emphasis of the Women's Studies class’ connection to the participants’ personal lives and experiences was quite strong. Of course, this could stem from the questions I asked, the responses I got, or a variety of other factors. One of the methodological problems with the Stake and Hoffman study, and one the authors acknowledge, is that they measured ratings of pedagogy from the faculty standpoint only (Stake and Hoffman 2000, 31). Conversely, all of my research was conducted from the students’ perspectives. In addition, I did not separate feminist content from feminist pedagogy.

I found that women adult learners are usually ignored, not only in the literature, but in the academic context as well. This is the case for several reasons. The first is that although their numbers are growing, they only constitute a small minority of students at
the University of Hawai‘i. The second is that they are usually so busy with their non-academic lives and responsibilities that they have little time to contribute to forums where their input might be valuable, such as discussion groups, group projects, or campus wide activities. This echoes the argument made in Chapter Six, that these women’s busy lives put them at a political disadvantage since they are unlikely to get needed resources unless they spend time and energy asking for them. Thus, this project seeks to broadcast some of the issues facing this particular population of students, as well as underscore the Hawai‘i context as one where Women’s Studies can and should continue to grow and serve its community.

What to do Now?

With many of the interviewees undergoing tremendous life changes, it is worthwhile to ask ourselves what this all would mean for their future. Many of the interviewees were working at the time of the interview, although only a few were working in their chosen professions. Many others were working to make ends meet in jobs they did not really like, and in some cases, in jobs that they really hated. Many women had faced discrimination, and had been made conscious of it through their Women’s Studies classes. Still others had had the opportunity to rethink their career goals after having taken a Women’s Studies class.

Shu was one of the women who did have a chosen career. Some of the things she told me were quite reflective of her awareness of gender discrimination. For example, she acknowledged that commercial real estate is a “such a macho, male dominated
profession" (Shu, 4), but she had been dealing with it throughout her entire life, therefore, she was used to it and knew how to navigate through it. She told me that her Women's Studies class was instrumental in helping her “externalize certain the kinds of discrimination that [were] happening to [her] at work ... And an awareness that that was not necessarily related to [her] performance. That it was also related to [her] position in society as a woman” (Shu, 9). Her office was itself quite liberal, in that it had flextime that allowed her to go to school, and also allowed working mothers to have flexible schedules so that they could coordinate childcare at convenient times. Shu stated that short of bringing children to work, her office was very understanding with “women’s issues.” Of course, this is related to the fact that women are expected to, and often do, spend more time taking care of their children than their significant others. However, a workplace allowing flextime certainly conveys an atmosphere that is friendly to female workers, especially to working mothers.

Shu was more concerned with the discrimination she had encountered in the profession of commercial real estate as a whole. For example, when clients came into her office, they automatically assumed that she would do their bidding and fetch them coffee. Since Shu was not a secretary, she was doubly offended. First, that the (most-often) male clients would assume that a female secretary should be waiting on them, and second that they assumed that she was a secretary because she was a female. Regardless, the feminist consciousness that had arisen in her when she had taken her Women's Studies classes had enabled her to see that this type of behavior could readily be called discrimination and she had become quite proficient, not only at spotting it, but also at refuting it. Shu
acquainted me with a few biting one-liners she had shared with the offending parties and, had I been a guilty party, I would have definitely stopped dead in my tracks.

While Shu was an activist of sorts on her own behalf, Katherine was an activist in every sense of the word. When we spoke about what kind of work she was doing now, the following exchange took place:

KP: I’m also a political activist, so I do a lot of work on my own. I tutor in a homeless shelter.

I: Oh, wow. Political activist in what?

KP: Women’s rights, welfare reform and I do a TV show called *Employees Today*. I work on the show all the time. I don’t tape every one, actually the last six months I don’t think… maybe four in the last six months because of school and everything. Four of them… We’re making a labor party for Hawai‘i (Katherine, 2).

When I asked her what she would like to do when she finished her degree, she replied with the following statements:

KP: I mean I used to make $100 an hour (laughter)

I: Right. OK. And what do you plan to do when you finish?

KP: I want a career in research. I want to work on women’s issues. And I’m interested in homelessness and prostitution. And prostitution on a larger scale, like um, white slavery. Because it’s a lot more common than people think. I was sold myself. You know…

I: Oh, OK. Here?

KP: Yeah. In the islands. So what interests me is the social issue (Katherine, 5).

It is clear that Katherine’s current work having to do with the creation of a Labor Party in Hawai‘i was related to her life as a working class mother of two, but her current and future aspirations were also informed by her former work as a prostitute and sexual slave. Indeed, Katherine wanted to get a Ph.D. in Women’s Studies. When I told her that this
was not currently an option here, she seemed a bit disappointed, but quickly bounced back to tell me that she would find another educational avenue for her energy. As with some of the other interviewees who had set their aims high, I had no doubt that this would be the case. Katherine was quite enthusiastic about researching women’s issues in her current educational setting, as we have seen above. Thus, she chose to focus her sights on continuing to do something she liked to do, but all the while make a living at it. She was already doing that to a certain extent with the Olelo television show Hawai‘i Employees Today, but since she had taken her Women’s Studies class, she had become more interested in issues particularly relevant to women. That is not to say that women are not represented in relatively high numbers in Hawai‘i’s labor force, but rather that Katherine had shifted her interests to issues relating mostly to women, as witnessed by her continued interest in prostitution and its legalization.

Erin, one of the most reticent participants, was eager to tell me that she wanted to put her psychology degree to use in working with victims of domestic violence, especially with children (Erin, 3). I had thought that she was relating at least some of her Women’s Studies knowledge to her future career choices, but just as fast as it had come, the connection disappeared when she told me that she would also be interested in working with people who had learning disabilities. That is not to say that women and girls do not have learning disabilities, nor that working with people with disabilities is not a worthy feminist goal. Rather, I had thought she was basing some of her career decisions on her Psychology of Women class, when really she was just tossing around ideas about any career possibilities she might have been exposed to during her time as a Psychology major.
Annie was in the same class as Erin, but as we have seen in previous chapters, she was quite involved in the class and it had affected her in a number of ways. The most explicit way the class had touched her was that she was truly interested in creating a Women's Studies class for teenagers at the high school level.

AS: Definitely. Like I already, I mean, I don’t know if it’ll be possible, but I think that some of the stuff that I’ve learned in this class, I would really love to teach a girls’ class in high school about things to help them succeed. Cause it’s needed, you know. If they can be aware of factors that tend to their success, at least they know what they’re walking in... the path they’re walking down when they’re doin’ it. I think that would be a really important step in improving... society (laughter) (Annie, 8).

As we have already seen, this has been a desire exhibited by many students, those participating in this study, as well as others in various Women's Studies classes. However, Annie’s desire to create her own Women's Studies class is significant for two reasons. First, Annie was on her way to becoming a schoolteacher. Therefore, the reality that her idea for a high school Women's Studies class might come to fruition was a possibility. Second, Annie believed that this prospective Women's Studies class would be a significant step in improving society. She laughed after she said this, not because she was joking around, but because she realized that the goal was quite ambitious. It was almost as if she had realized the enormity of the task ahead of her, but was still interested in going forward with it.

In all of the interviewee’s narratives, no one was quite as stark in her decision as Yuki, who had overcome great odds to be in the United States studying Women's Studies.

Y: Yes, I finished the requirements. I studied mathematics, English and things like that, and then I started to study Women's Studies because I came here to study Women's Studies. When I was very young, when I was ten years old I wanted to study in this country, it was my dream, but the dream didn’t come true at first. I couldn’t do that because of my
parents... well, then I got married, so but I married and then I worked, and last year the dream came true.

I: What would you like to do when you finish?

Y: Mainly, I want to expand the Women's Studies thing in Japan (Yuki, 3).

In four sentences, Yuki was able to convey the immense obstacles she had encountered and prevailed over to come here and pursue her dream. As we know, she had been in an arranged marriage, had been the only woman executive working for a heavy equipment company in Japan, and had left both of those situations to come to the University of Hawai‘i to be a Women's Studies major. Her assurance in telling me that she wanted to start a Women's Studies program in Japan is quite indicative of her determination to accomplish her dreams. As with Martha's decision to become a teacher and Katherine's resolve to do research relating to women, I have no doubt that Yuki's determination to introduce and/or expand Women's Studies in Japan would eventually become a reality.

Yuki's tenacity was also rooted in her own life experiences. In the following narrative, she clearly traces the path that led her to her decision.

Y: Because, I work for ten years right, and um always in work, women, in the machinery industry, I mean the company I guess, I'm only one who work in sales. And it was a problem. I was discriminated by male not only men, but also Japanese women... with my way of dealing with others. Because I refused to... you know in small or middle-sized companies in Japan, women serve tea wearing the uniforms that women wear. And when I joined that company, I said I would not wear the uniform or serve tea. I said I want to sell, because I love selling something.

I: And somehow they said OK?

Y: Yeah, because uh when they first hired me, I said “OK, watch me for three months. If in three months time you are not happy with my sales, you can fire me.” And he said OK. But most women in the office did not like my way because I don’t know why... Because they feel that the
women must serve tea and something like that and I did not. I was the first person who was not like them. But there are many companies like my company, so I think in Japan, economically they don’t advance. But it’s because the traditional culture between men and women. How women behave is dictated by men. So I think there is a big gap between men and women and so I’d like to study that and learn more. I’d like to tell women what the reality of Japanese women in Japan is, and tell them “do you think it’s OK?” (Yuki, 4-5)

The last question Yuki asks was inflected with healthy dose of irony. She was quite clear that she thought that the way Japanese women were treated by Japanese and non-Japanese men alike was very discriminatory and she thought making Women's Studies/feminist knowledge available to Japanese women would be a way to remedy the situation. Interestingly, from Yuki’s narrative, we can see that she had already had a difficult time with other Japanese women who disliked her assertiveness. It is not clear whether introducing Women's Studies in an academic setting would alleviate that automatic distrust. What is clear, however, is that Yuki had enjoyed taking on the role of rogue saleswoman and was eager to share her experiences with other women through the venue of Women's Studies. She said that Women's Studies was not very well known in Japan, but because of Japanese women’s position in society, they needed its benefits more than Western women did, for example. I ventured that women needed it regardless of where they happened to live, and she agreed with a chuckle. The conversation I had with Yuki was one of the most enjoyable times I had with a participant throughout the entire interview process. Not only was she extremely bright, but her story was also fascinating. When we parted, I wanted to learn more about her wonderful experiences and respected her assertiveness in the face of incredible odds, first with her husband and then with her prospective employers. Like some of the other interviewees whom I am sure will succeed in their endeavors, I am certain that Yuki will not only meet her own
expectations, but will most likely exceed them. Also as with many of the other interviewees, I am quite grateful to have had the opportunity to know such a wonderful woman, even if it was for such a short time.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to delineate some of the specific impacts of Women's Studies courses in order to see exactly what it is about Women's Studies that is beneficial for its students. The participants in this study indicated a variety of reasons for taking their respective Women's Studies classes. This is particularly helpful to understand because I believe there is a need for expanding Women's Studies and increasing its enrollment.

One of the central ways Women's Studies affected the interviewees was by offering different perspectives on their life experiences, thereby encouraging them to build confidence not only in the value of their experiences, but in their own selves as well. Some of the other ways in which Women's Studies was helpful to the respondents were that it often provided resources for assistance with writing assignments. Whether the teachers referring the students to outside writing workshops or whether the teachers took it upon themselves to guide their students is not the question. Neither is it an issue of feminist pedagogy. I think this is simply indicative of a good approach to teaching that is oftentimes associated with feminist teachers. Another useful aspect of Women's Studies classes, especially at the community college level, is that the teachers themselves, as well as the guest speakers they might introduce to their classes, are good role models.
for Women's Studies students who are just starting out their educational careers. This is especially relevant to women adult learners who can see that their teachers are just like them, in that they most often have families and are successfully juggling careers and motherhood. This is not to say that this is an easy task. Rather, it does show the students that it can be accomplished.

Another valuable asset Women's Studies provides to its students is the ability to incorporate feminist knowledge into other subject matters and classes. One way to do this is exposing women to knowledge about women that they had previously been left without. They can then take it upon themselves to delve further into the knowledge by conducting their own research on gender-related issues for other classes. Films also seem to be quite successful at visually illustrating the knowledge being shared in the Women's Studies classroom. Along with clear syllabi and feminist pedagogy, they help increase the visual representation of discrimination in a variety of areas, for example. These issues range from Lesley's health care aspirations, to Kathy C.'s lack of women philosophers in the "regular" philosophy classes, to awareness of discrimination in the workplace. This wide variety of issues covered in Women's Studies classes indicates Women's Studies' necessary interdisciplinarity. As we saw in Shu's case, this can have a variety of effects.

Finally, one of the most palpable impacts of Women's Studies is for women in education. That is, Women's Studies gives a space for women to feel that their experiences are valid and thereby that their realities are valid. It is understandable then, that at least two of the participants in this study, Yuki and Annie, were seriously considering starting Women's Studies classes and/or programs of their own at their
respective educational institutions. Many of the other respondents in this project thought this would be a wonderful idea, but only these two had concrete plans to follow through with it, thus perpetuating the cycle of feminist knowledge creation.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

In this chapter I would like to forgo the standard summary of the project, as I have provided smaller summaries at the end of each of the chapters, and instead look at some of the implications of this study along general lines, as well as offer some suggestions for the future course of Women's Studies. That is not to say that I am implying that these suggestions entail telling teachers of Women's Studies how to practice their craft. Rather, by listening to women adult learners speaking about Women's Studies, I have been able to provide some insights as to their specific needs and I would like to use this chapter to highlight some of those needs as they apply to a larger population of Women's Studies students.

I believe that this study has shown promising results. I also believe it would be useful to undertake at least one other study, if not more, with a different methodology to see whether it would reinforce this study's conclusions. Perhaps a survey-type of instrument, including questions regarding some of the topics covered in this project, could be included in the standardized end of semester evaluation forms (discussed in Chapter Five). This might be useful in pinpointing other factors that influence students of Women's Studies and also confirm my findings in a larger sample population. This would also serve two additional purposes. The first is that the students would determine the analytic categories whereby their answers could guide further research. The students could be asked, as part of the course evaluation process, to determine some of the areas of their lives that the course had affected. Oftentimes, students have very clear perceptions of what their education means to them, just at the interviewees in this study did. It might
also be useful to conduct the survey after a certain period of time had elapsed after the
students had taken their Women's Studies classes in order to assess the long-term
influence of the classes on the students' lives. The second purpose would be that this
would necessarily expand those categories beyond feminist consciousness, voice,
empowerment, and identity. Simply because I think that these factors are important, does
not at all mean that they are the only ones worthy of consideration. I initially focused on
these indicators of Women's Studies' impact, not only because they were grounded in the
relevant education and feminist literature, but also because they had greatly changed for
me when I was an undergraduate student taking Women's Studies classes. Even as a
graduate student, my conceptions of feminism, feminist consciousness, voice,
empowerment, as well as my own identity have continued to evolve, albeit sometimes
radically differently than those of the participants in this study. This should serve as a
reminder then, that there is no linear trajectory in any Women's Studies class, any of its
students' lives, and particularly of those of the interviewees who participated in this
project. The maze of complexity that I highlighted at the end of the first chapter is still
there. I have not completely untangled it, nor did it warrant that treatment because that
would have entailed privileging my own interpretation of the narratives discussed in this
project to the exclusion of any other interpretation. Rather, I have chosen to focus on that
complexity as a reminder that people's lives and experiences are complex, that the
participants navigate their lives through an intersectionality and a multiplicity of
locations, and that while they may be worthy of scrutiny, especially with regards to the
impact Women's Studies has had on them, they cannot be productively simplified.
The methodology for this project was continually revised and revisited, both as the interview process went on, as well as during the narrative analysis. It is useful then, in this concluding chapter, to examine some of the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology to think about how to better craft future studies on this topic. I believe that one of the weaknesses of this study was the relatively low number of participants. Twenty-nine participants and their respective interviews constitute quite a task for a one woman research team (me), but if there were more people conducting interviews the project would certainly have acquired more breadth. However, this is counterbalanced by one of the strengths of this project which is the fact that because I was the only one doing the interviews, I was able to learn new interviewing techniques particular to this project, that I could use in the next interview. I was also able to continually locate myself throughout the interview and interpretation process, which would be much more difficult if there had been more than one interviewer. Another weakness of this study is the lack of longitudinal possibilities. By that, I mean that it would have beneficial for the study if I been able to interview the participants several times over the course of several years, in order to indicate several things: 1) was the feminist content of their Women's Studies course(s) still staying with them as they went on with their lives? 2) How did their feminist consciousness, voice, and empowerment and their resulting agency and self determination manifest themselves in their daily lives one, two, three or ten years after the initial Women's Studies class had been taken, if at all? And to satisfy my curiosity, 3) for those women who were at critical junctures in their lives, how did the rest of their stories play themselves out? I believe that qualitative research methods were beneficial for this project because I was able to gain much more detail in each interview than I
would have had if I used some type of detailed survey instrument, for example. While those types of research methods certainly have their place, I don’t believe they would have been able to do justice to the richness and complexities of the stories I elicited for this project.

I have been able to trace some connections and patterns in this intricately woven tapestry of Women's Studies journeys. I would like to offer, then, some suggestions for Women's Studies, as well as reflect on some of this study’s implications.

- Classroom community building exercises/activities are interrelated to, and promote, voice and empowerment. This can range from simple introductions on the first day of class to lengthy group projects.

- Feminist consciousness, while not necessarily always called as such, is an integral part of what students come away with after having taken a Women's Studies class. That is not to say that all former Women's Studies are activists, or even that they call themselves feminists. Rather, they have gained an awareness of gender issues, even if only at the most basic level.

- Teachers (and guest speakers) can serve as role models for students, especially women adult learners, by allowing them to see that women can be (sometimes with ease and sometimes with great difficulty) professionals as well as members of families.

- Feminist pedagogy is an integral part of Women's Studies classes and should be promoted for all Women's Studies classes. The respect that teachers showed to the respondents and their experiences were significant in the latter’s appreciation of the class and its impact on them.

- Relating material to students’ lives would encourage them to make connections with their experiences as well as validate them.

- Encouraging (or requiring) the students to keep a journal analyzing how the class impacts their daily lives from the beginning of the class until the end is often a useful assessment tool for teachers.

- Encouraging students to trace their shifting identity boundaries (perhaps in a section on identity) would enable them to delineate their paths along the class’ journey and assist them in the journal assignment mentioned above.
• Using films as a visual representation of the issues covered in class can lead students to make the connections mentioned in the previous point, especially for those students who learn visually.

• Adding a question about the course's impact on the students might be a useful assessment tool for Women's Studies teachers, enabling them to see what has struck a chord with their students, as well as what the students did not relate to.

These are by no means the only possibilities for the improvement of teaching and learning in a Women's Studies class. Rather, these are teaching and learning methods that have served the interviewees in good stead. Thus, it would stand to reason that they might also be useful for future Women's Studies students, whether they are adult learners or not.

There is certainly room for improvement in Women's Studies classes as well. One aspect of the Women's Studies curriculum seems to reify the preconceived dualism students come to class with: that of radical and liberal feminists. The first is perceived as vile and the second seems to be acceptable across the board. Most of the participants in this study attempted to distance themselves from what they perceived to be radical feminists. Perhaps moving away from a language that has been overused by the backlash media against feminism would reduce the reproduction of the misconceptions about radical feminists. Perhaps it would be useful for Women's Studies teachers to explain that feminism is not just a theory, but that one can use feminism to navigate through, and understand, one's life experiences. Like a seller at a farmer's market, Women's Studies teachers should display their feminist wares by constructing feminism as a path, as freedom. Throughout this project, I have demonstrated that the more current the Women's Studies course, the more specific the references to feminism were. If the Women's Studies classes had been taken in the past, the references to feminism became
more general in nature. How can feminist teachers ensure that both the specificity and the pervasiveness of feminism endure over time? Perhaps facilitating the articulation of feminist consciousness, not only as awareness, but also as processes of multiple becomings, a somewhat intangible concept to be sure, for our students, would enable the conception of their own sense of agency, of self-determination. Of course, these processes are different for each student. Therefore, teachers and researchers should not try to impose any kind of structure on them simply to facilitate research or pursue our feminist goals. Of course, feminist consciousness has been mediated in this project through the context of each narrative, but I consider this one of its strengths because it serves as a reminder that feminist consciousness also entails the uncertainty of those multiple becomings.

It is possible that voice is the manifestation of a new (feminist) language students are learning in Women's Studies. It could also be the by-product of increased participation. Of course, the reverse could also be true. This highlights the interlocking relationships voice, language, participation, and community, have within the space of Women's Studies classes. There is more to this subjectivity, however. Voice can also be the expression of acts of transgression, of resistance, of agency. Feminist consciousness reinforces the notion of the process of becoming through voice because it can be collective, cooperative, relational. It can also represent the embeddedness some of the participants exhibited within their Women's Studies classes. This might seem to be an odd choice of words, but again, it highlights the connection between voice creation and use, and a sense of community that is so important to many Women's Studies students' growth. Thus, nurturing those communities and their development should be of primary
importance to Women's Studies teachers. As this project shows, these communities are vital links to the nascent sense of agency the participants developed.

All of these connections are related to the empowerment I deciphered in many of the participants’ narratives. Empowerment was often equated with knowledge and the ability to name. Perhaps as Women's Studies teachers, we should explain to our students that feminist teaching and learning is a reciprocal sharing of knowledge. This would serve two purposes. First, our students would know what to expect from us and from the class. Second, that they could/should consciously make an effort to recognize and engage in this co-learning practice. This is not limited to Women's Studies, and often the participants did not make that separation. Indeed, the reverse was often true. They chose to embrace the leakage of feminist knowledge creation into other classes. This is a by-product of empowerment and its relationship to feminist knowledge. Women's Studies students, more specifically the participants in this study, often take what they learn in their Women's Studies classes and use it for other classes. The empowerment part comes in when they can see that this feminist knowledge creation is a worthwhile undertaking. It also come in when they realize that they have the agency and the self-determination to make choices with regards to what they count as epistemologically valuable knowledge.

Feminist consciousness and empowerment are also related to identities; or, more specifically, the intersectionality of the respondents’ subjectivities. The consciousness of the participants’ identities highlights their understanding of the significance of their respective journeys, whether it was the Women's Studies journey, the journey of coming to feminist consciousness, creating a voice, putting newfound empowerment to good use, and/or thinking about identity. One of the most significant failures of the Women's
Studies classes I came across was rooted in the lack of encouragement for students to engage with(in), or recognize their ethnicity as it was connected to their gender. The haole interviewees in this study were reluctant to examine and resist their own ethnocentric views. Of course, because whiteness is so pervasive as the norm in our society, even in such an ethnically diverse place as Hawai‘i (indeed it is disturbingly persistent in Hawai‘i), it is most difficult for those who are in the oppressor’s position to recognize that location, and examine its significance and its attending privileges. The women of color in this study most readily saw the connection between race and gender, whereas the haole respondents were less likely to articulate it. The latter still subscribed to the idea that whiteness does not have a color whereas the former often constructed their narratives against the background of ethnicity. This points to the continuing work that Women's Studies teachers must do with regards to encouraging our students to confront the intersectionality of multiple locations, both as oppressors and as oppressed. Conversely, this can also be understood as a Women's Studies success in this area, because the respondents (again, mostly those of color) were aware of the leakages between the two, as well as the connections between those and other analytic categories. There were other Women's Studies successes as well. They include: respondents crediting the classes, at least partly, for reframing their views about marriage and domestic violence; students disseminating feminist knowledge outside of their Women's Studies classrooms, even outside the university; participants using their feminist teachers who are practicing feminism in their own lives as role models for themselves and their daughters. These represent a sense of agency on behalf of the respondents, because they took it upon themselves to engage in these acts of transgression against what society
traditionally views as acceptable behavior for women adult learners. Learning through a feminist framework may make it easier for the participants to apply feminist knowledge to their lives outside of school because it is already rooted in their own experiences through feminist pedagogy. The interviewees articulated that it was easier for them to make connections, and subsequently act on them in their relations with their families, friends, co-workers, etc., after a Women's Studies class, than after a general curriculum class, for example. Of course, I did not do a comparative study between Women's Studies classes and general curriculum classes. However, it does serve as a reminder that there is more research to be done in this area and that this could certainly be a direction for future research. Regardless, the connections made by the respondents were by no means linear, but they did highlight identity formation and its attendant epistemological framework, and constructed it as a process. Like feminist consciousness, voice, and empowerment, here is yet another process.

Even after an in-depth analysis of the issues regarding Women's Studies' effects on women adult learners, there are still questions. How can we improve Women's Studies courses' impact on students' lives? How can we increase enrollment in Women's Studies classes? How can we increase the number of Women's Studies majors? How can Women's Studies reach out to women adult learners specifically? How do we prevent, in an era of constant budget cuts, further cuts in Women's Studies programs? Perhaps by showing that Women's Studies courses and programs really do have an impact (besides the number of majors), as has been shown in this study, we can ensure the continuation of their existence for future students.
I would like to use the following example to reinforce the notion that there is no "one size fits all" approach to the Women's Studies curriculum, nor should there be. For some students breaking the class down into specific topics and using the syllabus to clearly spell out the different sections of the course was very helpful. For others, the class' impact was so pervasive that breaking it down this way would have been counterproductive to analyzing how important/salient the class was in their lives. This example reminds us that for me to make recommendations one way or another is quite hypocritical, because it means negating some participants' experiences, and privileging others'. Of course, this is highly problematic, not only because of the aforementioned reason, but also because the sample of respondents for this study was quite small. This project then, should serve as an exploratory venture into the world of Women's Studies in Hawai'i.

There are a number of ways in which we could further pursue the goals of this study. One of them is to value the fact that feminist knowledge from Women's Studies classes tends to leak into students' other classes. We should ask ourselves why that is and try to reinforce it, so that Women's Studies' influence is not only limited to Women's Studies classes. Another way to do this would be to edit a volume of Women's Studies students' journals so that there would be a wide dissemination of their voices with respect to the effects Women's Studies might have had on their lives. This would enable us to offer other students, who had not previously been exposed to Women's Studies, encouragement from their peers to try a Women's Studies class (or two, or three). Not only would this increase the visibility of Women's Studies, and thereby its possible influence(s), but it would also serve to keep us in the administration-imposed race for
majors. This would also necessarily increase the Women's Studies community on the University of Hawai‘i campuses, creating better programs for our students.

The tapestry metaphor has been woven into the fabric of this dissertation, but having completed its journey, it might be useful to think of the end result as a quilt rather than a tapestry. Each of the narratives offered by the respondents would represent their own individual piece of the quilt. Stepping back and looking at it from a distance, however, we can see that the quilt’s pieces are sewn together in the shape of a tree. Each narrative needs the others to form a more complete image of the tree. It is as if at the end of each interview, I was given a piece of the quilt and it has been my role to put the pieces together, to be the backing for the quilt. Thus, we can now revisit the tree metaphor first discussed in Chapter Five, since my interpretation of the different pieces has now provided the guidance for the shape of the tree.

It is not an accident that I have chosen to represent a mango tree. The tree can grow to be quite large, as Women's Studies can, if given room and water. Mango trees are not native to Hawai‘i, although they certainly constitute a large presence in Hawai‘i’s backyards. Many of the women I interviewed were not native to Hawai‘i, or native Hawaiians for that matter, but they, or their families before them, had made their way here and for the most part, were here to stay. Some of them were embedded in Hawai‘i’s plantation life and labor history. Others were here from foreign countries for a short while. Still others were native Hawaiians.

Mango trees bear fruit almost every year and feed many people just as feminist knowledge feeds the minds of its students. The trees are sometimes so prolific that they can become a nuisance because there are too many rotten mangoes on the ground to pick
up. However, those rotten mangos can, and often do, become mango tree keiki, thus completing the circle. In a twist on this abundance, mango trees often become flash points of altercation between the mango fruit haves and have-nots during mango season. One can look at the flashpoint as a positive event. Who wants to be friends or neighbors with someone who does not want to share their mangoes anyway? This is similar to Women's Studies providing a space for critical thinking about one's life situation, as it did for many of the respondents in this study. Thus, in thinking about the shape of the quilt’s tree, the mango tree seemed ideal. In the spirit of Donna Haraway’s insistence on the historicization of the metaphors she uses, I will undertake a similar, albeit shortened journey of the mango tree because a chronicle of the mango tree metaphor can provide useful, if unusual ideas, for its uses as a tool.

The mango tree’s origins are relatively obscure. Fossil research has placed some of the earliest mango trees in Southeast Asia, but because of the large number of cultivars, it is unclear where exactly the first mango tree would have originated. Because the mango tree has a large seed, it is thought that it can only be carried long distances by humans. The earliest mango fossils were discovered in East India, Burma and the Andaman Islands bordering the Bay of Bengal. Around the 5th century B.C., Buddhist monks are believed to have introduced the mango to Malaysia and eastern Asia - legend has it that Buddha found tranquility and repose in a mango grove. Persian traders took the mango into the Middle East and Africa, from there the Portuguese brought it to Brazil and the West Indies. Mango cultivars arrived in Florida in the 1830's and in California in the 1880's (www.crfg.org/pubs/ff/mango.html). In 1824, the first mango tree brought to Hawai’i was recorded. It continues to be a prominent tree in our island landscape.
The mangifera species is distantly related to the cashew, pistachio, poison ivy, and poison oak. The name 'mango' is derived from the Tamil word “mangkay” or “man-gay.” When the Portuguese traders settled in Western India they adopted the name as “manga.”

The growth habit of the mango tree varies from place to place. In Hawai‘i, the tree can grow to be quite large and can keep fruiting for many years. Indeed, the Sri Ekambaranathar Hindu temple is built around a large 3,500-year-old mango tree that bears four different types of fruits on a single tree. Ancient Indian sages prescribed planting of the mango for the salvation of the souls, fourteen generations past and future, so that it is cultivated extensively for providing ready nutrition, medicine, fuel, shade and pollution control. The mango plays an important role in Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, and Animism of the tribal people of India (Budhwar 2002, jacket).

One of the most important factors in the spread of the mango tree was the spread of Buddhism. The mango tree, because of its sweet fruit and stately stature, is often used in Buddhist stories to symbolize immortality, karma, and rebirth. For example, there is the story of Buddha who had been a king in a previous life. He was atop his elephant going from one side of his province to another when he saw a grove of mango trees. He could not stop then, as he had a large following, but he resolved to come back later that evening to partake in the delicious fruit. Unbeknownst to him, his ministers traveling behind him denuded the trees of their fruit by beating the trees with long poles and sticks, wasting some of the fruit that fell to the ground, and shredding the remaining leaves and branches. When the king came back to the grove that evening, he saw what had
happened and was thoroughly disappointed. He then saw that there was one untouched tree in the grove. He could not understand why, until he realized that this small tree had had no fruit. It had not been seen as a lucrative undertaking for the greedy ministers. When he returned to his palace, he could not sleep because of what his ministers had done. It would seem that a fitting end to this story would be that all the ministers got allergic reactions to the mango sap, learned a karmic lesson, and were really sorry for their wasteful and greedy actions. However, the story goes on to great lengths about the responsibility of the king, who was reborn as a Buddha, to provide for his subjects (Johari 1998, 37). For the purposes of this project, this story would seem to reify the patriarchal notions of the king being the teacher and teaching his students a lesson in a painful way. However, we could also look at the violence that the mango trees underwent at the hands of the ministers and see many of the participants in this study. We could also interpret the king as the caretaker of the trees, vowing to provide them a safe space to continue growing just as Women's Studies intends to do the same for its students.

The mango tree is used in the Buddhist religious literature and in architecture as well. Many of the Buddhist monasteries incorporate mango tree designs into their architecture because the tree represents immortality, hope, spirituality, life sustenance, resilience, and beauty. These are all qualities that exist in the narratives found in this study. Except for immortality, the participants exhibited many of these and others. They served to reinforce the value methodological decisions I made early on in this project. In-depth, open-ended interviews allow for those qualities to come through where other methods might not. I am aware that the tree of knowledge metaphor has been overused, but I still find the representation of the mango tree appealing because of the large variety
of uses it tends to have. Just to name a few: not only is the fruit edible, but the blossoms have religious significance for several religions, some people make furniture out of its wood, and its sap can be used to make yellow dye. The knowledge gained in Women's Studies courses is of many uses as well. As we have seen throughout this project, many of participants tended to use their feminist knowledge outside of academia.

Just as mango trees dropping their fruit can be a source of irritation, feminists are often considered a nuisance in academia as well, always questioning the patriarchal status quo. But out of our work come new queries, new knowledge, and new interpretations into what is commonly called the “truth.” It is my hope that the quilt I have constructed through the piecing together of the deconstructions of the participants’ narratives can be used to shelter Women's Studies teachers and students from the sometimes-cold reality of a patriarchal academia. It is also not a coincidence that I have chosen to end this project with a metaphor about a mango tree quilt, since women traditionally make them, but they can also continually metamorphose as new pieces are created and added on. Indeed, there is much new literature being generated by feminist scholars with regards to the various uses of quilts in conjunction with women’s roles in resistance movements. Women’s Studies is also continually undergoing a metamorphosis, encouraging new feminist knowledge creation, adding new classes, and changing old ones. Women’s Studies in Hawai’i is a wonderful and supportive environment for teachers and learners to go through these processes together. We need to reach the next level by making more people aware of the opportunities it can offer. This dissertation is a step in that direction.
WORKS CITED


Kane, Kathleen O. ed. 1992. *In Celebration of Students: Reflections on Learning at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa*. Center for Teaching Excellence and Office of Faculty Development and Academic Support: University of Hawai‘i at Manoa.


www.crfg.org/pubs/ff/mango.html

www.hawaiiag.org/hitory.html

**Other Sources**


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

I'm keeping this interview completely confidential, so would you like to choose your own pseudonym?

Where are you from?
Where did you go to high school?
How old are you?
Do you work? If so, where?
Do you have children? If so, how many?
Are you single or do you have a partner?
How long have you been out of high school?
What did you do during that time?
How long have you been going to school?
What kind of classes have you been/are you taking?
Do you have a major or an idea about what you might want to focus on in education?
How far do you plan to go in your education?
What do you plan to do when you finish?
Why are you taking this class?
What are you hoping to get out of the course?
What do you think happened to you as a learner in this class?
Do you know many people in this class? Have you met many people in this class? Made any friends?
Is this course a challenge? How?
How do you think this course has affected your personal life?
How do you think it affected your intellectual life?

If you were describing yourself to someone you don't know or doesn't know you, what kind of words would you use?

Do those terms ever change? How?

Can you give me some of the highlights of what you learned in this class?

How did you like the way the class was structured?

Did you talk a lot in class?

At the beginning? At the end?

What do you think feminism means now?

What does it mean to you personally?

Has anything in your non-school life changed since the beginning of the semester?

What? How?

How often do you discuss what you're learning in class outside the classroom?

If so, with whom?

Do you feel that you'll apply what you've learned in this class to your work, your further education, or your life outside of school?

Did you change any of your political beliefs? If so, how?

Some of these questions were borrowed from The Courage to Question: a study on Women's Studies and student learning undertaken by the Association of American Colleges and the National Women's Studies Association in 1992. Theirs was more of a questionnaire/survey/assessment-type of study, but some of their questions were adaptable to this project.
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my dissertation project, "Feminist Consciousness, Voice, and Empowerment: Women's Studies in Hawai'i." Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. These interviews are being carried out as part of my research project.

Your responses to the interview questions may be tape recorded or handwritten whichever you feel most comfortable with. Your responses to the questions will form an integral part of the project. However, your identity will remain confidential and all information will be destroyed upon completion of the project. Should you wish to view the written responses to the questions or listen to your tape-recorded responses, you are welcome to do so. Having done this you may wish to request that some information you have given be altered or not used.

The interviews will take no longer than 1 hour of your time and I will work with you in every way possible to make sure you experience no disruption of your work, school, or family life.

After having read this letter, would you please sign the "Consent to be Interviewed." Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this, please feel free to contact me at (808) 638-5916 or email me at mironesc@hawaii.edu.

Yours sincerely,

Monique Mironesco
Ph.D. candidate
University of Hawai'i at Manoa
Department of Political Science

Consent to be Interviewed

I have read the above letter and agree to be interviewed.

Signed: ____________________________ (signature)
Name: _______________________________ (please print)
Date: _______________________________
APPENDIX C

The following are descriptions of the respondents in this study. I prefer not to use labels, as not only can they be derogatory, or misleading, but I might also have gotten them completely wrong. Unless participants specified their ethnicity, I refer to them as “local.” I tried to give these descriptions some texture so as to enable the reader to (re)locate them throughout the text. I wrote these descriptions right after each interview so that they would be fresh in my mind and as reflective as possible.

Interview with Aiko T. February 29, 2000 at the UH Manoa library.

Aiko was a very well-dressed, and very young looking Japanese woman. By no means old at 25, she was nonetheless so young looking that we were both waiting in the lobby of the library standing not 20 feet away from each other for about 10 minutes when I finally asked her if she was Aiko. I figured there was no way this woman was over 25, but it was in fact her, and since I hadn’t given her any descriptors of myself, we almost missed the interview entirely because of a lack of communication. After profuse apologies on each side, we sat to the interview. Aiko didn’t speak English very well, so some of her phrasing was a little off.

Interview with Pat F. Monday October 4, 1999 at the beach at Gas Chambers, North Shore, O’ahu.

I got there at about 5:30 and Pat was surfing. I waited for a half-hour for her to get out of the water. We talked on the beach and were surrounded by her kids and their friends a couple of times. We walked away, as she told them, “I have to talk to Monique, this is really important.” We also got rained on and finally finished the interview long past dark. After the interview was over, we kept talking on the beach for a while. She told me in more detail, about the situation with her ex-husband and how he treats her and their children. She was telling me that she felt really weak and vulnerable right now. She apologized profusely for “unloading” on me after the interview. I told her it was fine. She explained how the most important thing to her were her sons and spending time with them and raising them well, and that she felt unable to cope at the moment with all of the things that were happening to her. Pat is a beautiful woman, very athletic and stylish. From the outside, she looks as if she’s leading the perfect life, but looks can be deceiving.

Interview with Barbara B. 10/29/98 at the Barnes and Noble bookstore at Kahala Mall.

Brenda was a well-dressed local woman (part-Japanese). She had just gotten off work and brought her young son with her, and told him to browse in the bookstore for a while. She was working in the cashier’s office at the Kahala Mandarin Oriental hotel. She had been working there for 24 years. She has three children: two teenage daughters and one 12-year-old son. She has been divorced for several years. She lives in Kaneohe and is a Christian. At the end of the interview, when she saw the Darwin fish on my car, she mistook it for a Jesus fish and asked me in a wondrous voice if I was a Christian. It was
my impression that this would have made a difference for her. Brenda was really nervous about being interviewed and was nervous about having said the “right” thing, or giving the “right” answer. I kept telling her that there was no right or wrong, but she said that two years ago she would have never done this interview, she would have just said no. And I asked her what she thought had made her change and she said that she didn’t know. She was very shy and described herself that way.

Interview with Lia T. March 4, 1999.

Lia was a beautiful Samoan woman, not tall, but definitely large boned, with beautiful hair and eyes. She was very shy at first, but when she got more comfortable, she got to be more talkative. Her instructor in the UH Women’s Studies class I recruited her from was going to give her extra credit, so she was eager to know how long the interview would take and how much credit she would get. We met in my office, but for some reason the sounds were still really muffled, so I’m not sure I got everything down verbatim in the transcription. Her educational ambitions are high. She is pre-med and intends to be a doctor.

Interview with Chai M. 11/5/98 KCC library.

Chai was a small Malaysian woman with a slight accent. When we spoke over the phone, she described herself as having muscular legs. I came to find out later, it is because she keeps herself busy by doing all kinds of sports, but especially swimming and dancing. She sounded like she really enjoyed school and was really focused on her goals. Chai was really hard to get in touch with, but once we set an appointment, she was early and willing to talk. Chai was a short dynamic woman, quick to smile, with black curly hair, and a little bit of an accent. She was really a strong-looking person and talked about healing herself after her divorce, but she didn’t really look like she needed it. Divorced, mother of two, the family is on the mainland. One son is in college in Baltimore. The other son is in high school in California with his dad, who is also in California.

Interview with Annie S. April 17, 2000 at her home in Sunset Beach.

We sat in her kitchen while I _, her daughter, watched a video in the living room nearby. Annie is a beautiful, tall woman with long auburn hair and strikingly blue eyes. She’s tall that when I stand next to her I feel like a diminutive shrimp. I don’t know why. We have been friends for a couple of years. We are not close friends, but we do know each other through mutual friends.

Interview with Katherine P. At the KCC library on March 2, 2000.

Katherine was a large white woman with long blond hair. When we spoke over the phone about how to recognize each other when we met for the interview she told me that I couldn’t miss her because of her tatoos. And she was right. She was a loud woman before the interview started, but as the microphone came on, she became really soft-
spoken until she got excited about her subject matter. Then, she loosened up a bit, and started to get into the interview process.

Interview with Dee F. March 2, 2000 at Kapiolani Community College Library.

Dee was a small, dark Hawaiian woman with a raspy voice, long wavy hair who looked as if she had weathered a lot of storms. She spoke in a heavy pidgin accent, but as I am not proficient in writing pidgin, I chose to translate into standard English all the while keeping some of the pidgin expressions as much as I could. Her pidgin accent got stronger and stronger as the interview wore on (perhaps as she began to feel more comfortable?) She wore shaded vision glasses throughout our interview, so it was difficult to tell what she thought of the whole process. She was nice and friendly, but in some way I felt she was a bit reserved.

Interview with Elizabeth C. on February 17, 2000 outside of Saunders Hall.

Elizabeth was a woman in her early forties. She was a Mexican/African-American woman with three children. She had a very interesting and eventful, if sad life. She called me at home the afternoon after the interview. When I returned her call, she explained to me that she had forgotten to tell me that she was in the process of writing three books; two about her life and one she insisted was pro-choice. When I asked her what she meant, she told me that she thought women shouldn’t have abortions and should carry their pregnancies to term, then her church could help them if they needed it. She also told me that her church was sponsoring her writing. She is a born again Christian and she said her church is really important to her. She said her church gave her bikes for her children. She was a really nice woman, very outspoken.

Interview with Gardenia L. 10/29/98 2:30 pm at a park in Hawaii Kai.

Gardenia is very “well put together.” She is a tall, blond woman, with easy grace and seemingly easy confidence. The coffee shop where we had decided to meet was too noisy, so we decided to go to a park on the beach in Hawaii Kai. (We tried the local library first, but they wouldn’t let her in with the cup of coffee I had bought her.) When we first met, she remarked on how young I was, and when I told her I was 26 she looked at me with skeptical eyes. I drove us both over to the park. At the beginning, she spoke with her hands in front of her mouth which made it difficult to understand her. Also, the conversation was sort of stilted in the beginning, until we both got more comfortable.

Interview with Ruby G. February 17, 2000 at KCC, on the lawn outside the library.

We sat in the grass and realized, too late, that it was completely wet. We decided to stay anyway and had what I would call a pleasant chat. She had a 13-month-old daughter and we talked about parenting issues as well as nursing, sleepless nights, etc. She was a single mother, so her issues were a lot different than mine. Ruby was tall, haole woman, with long sandy brown hair, and a funky outfit. She was a little overweight, but she told me she was still carrying weight from her pregnancy when she had gained 60 pounds.
Interview with Shu R. in my office at UH on Tuesday October 5th, 1999.

Shu met me in the Social Sciences Building after work, and before one of her art classes. She was very animated and apologized profusely for being late. She was a short haole woman with dark hair, an athletic build and lots of energy. She was practically running out of the elevator when I saw her.

Interview with Jodi K. Counselor at KCC for the Turning Point Program.

She sees displaced homemakers and single parents. She is the one who referred me to many of the Turning Point interviewees. I spoke with her in her office right after I spoke with Nikki.

Interview with Kathy X. on February 15, 2000 at Manoa Gardens.

Kathy was a local Chinese lesbian from Honolulu. She was dressed in a man’s shirt and pants and had a quick way of talking. She was very sarcastic and cynical but also funny. She invited me to a screening of her movie a couple of weeks from our interview date and then emailed me to remind me to attend. I wasn’t able to go, but it was nice that she remembered.

Interview with Kathy C. September 27 1999, 11:30am on the phone.

We did this interview over the phone since Kathy lives on the East side and was very busy with school and two jobs. When I did meet her, after the Feminism and philosophy class, she was a short, energetic Italian woman, from the mainland, quick to laugh and respond with jokes.

Interview with Erin O. April 18, 2000 at the lanai at UH West O’ahu.

Erin was a really soft-spoken local Japanese woman. She seemed very shy and unsure of herself throughout the whole interview and it was hard to get answers out of her. I had to repeat myself many times as well as repeat her answers back to her in order to get her to expand on them.

Interview with Nelia A. February 22, 2000 at UH Manoa Hamilton Library.

Kristin was very soft spoken so it was difficult to understand everything she said. I recruited her out of Kathy Ferguson’s feminist theory class which I guest lectured for one week while Kathy was out of town. Nelia was very ... cute, with hip glasses and a cute outfit. She had small features and everything about her suggested petite, but she wasn’t short.
Interview with Lesley R. October 7th, 1999 at 1:30 pm at Starbucks coffee house in Manoa.

Lesley was gregarious woman, of Samoan-Hawaiian descent. She was a big woman, with a booming voice, a strong pidgin, and a loud laugh. When we spoke over the phone several times about setting up the interview, she told me that she was looking forward to it. She brought a friend with her from her Political Science class. After the interview, they commiserated with each other and with me and about their instructor at HCC and how they couldn’t understand what he wanted from them. They were very funny together. We met in Manoa because her ex-in-laws live there, and if she cannot pick her daughter up, they can do it for her. She insisted I keep her name as it was, even though I asked her if she wanted to choose a pseudonym.

Interview with Rita L. April 6, 2000 in my office in Saunders Hall.

Rita was referred to me by her friend Aiko. They were in the same Women's Studies class together. She is also a fashion design major and hopes to become a fashion designer in Taiwan. She was dressed very stylishly with long black hair and a tiny little backpack. I wondered how she could fit any books or papers in there.

Interview with Mimi H. 11/10/98 at KCC library.

Mimi was a small local woman, single mother of a young daughter. Born and raised in Kailua, she dropped out of Kalaheo High School in the 10th grade along with her twin sister. Mimi lives in Chinatown in a building her father owns. She works at a bar, and has had a problem with alcohol. When I gave her a ride home she told me that she had been in a treatment program.

Interview with Marsha on September 16, 1999 in the art building.

Marsha had a southern accent. She was a little overweight, with long blonde hair. We met in the art building where she spends most of her time. She was smart, witty and extremely nice and open minded. With a life having taken a tortuous road, she was trying to make sense of it all through her art and her education.

Interview with Martha, February 13, 2000 at her home in Sunset Beach.

Martha is a beautiful Hawaiian woman. She dresses very stylishly, and doesn’t look like she has had two children at all. Incidentally, her boyfriend and my husband are friends, although we didn’t know that at the time she agreed to do the interview.

Interview with Yuki I. January 25, 2000 at Manoa Gardens.

Yuki was really beautiful, well put together Japanese woman. She was very nice, very ashamed of her language skills, even though she spoke perfectly fine English.
She was a really interesting woman. I would have never put it together that she worked for a tractor company for ten years. But her stories about how she was discriminated against but she wasn’t even aware of it until she came to school, really made a lot sense and were very significant.

**Interview with Nikki O. 10/27/98 at KCC library.**

Nikki, chose her dog’s name as her pseudonym. She is a very energetic, friendly, and enthusiastic person. She is an artist. She does paintings, sculpture, and also little boxes with beach scenes in order to spread an environmental message. Not very tall, with blond hair, she described herself as a “bleached blond.” She didn’t seem nervous, and she had a lot to say.

**Interview with Luana N. November 2, 1998 at the KCC library.**

Luana described herself as a “typical local woman” over the phone with a small silver nose ring. We met outside the library. She laughed a lot and talked a lot on the way up the stairs. She seemed to have a bubbly personality. With long brown wavy hair, and dark skin, she did look like a local woman, although she sounded a lot younger over the phone due to the kind of language (teenage slang) that she was using. She was really energetic, local lady. She described herself as “Portaguee.”

**Interview with Toni M. Tuesday, April 27, 1999. In my office in Saunders Hall.**

Toni was a small haole woman, super tan, and even by the way she walked into the room, you could tell she was full of fire. She is sixty-six years old; a petite woman, in great shape with a raspy voice I came to find out later was due to a lifetime smoking habit. She was really friendly and quick to laugh.

**Interview with Jennifer D. September 24, 2000 in my office in Saunders Hall.**

Jennifer was taking a feminist philosophy course, but is also a student in my Political Science 110 class. She is a short haole woman who is very friendly and outgoing. From her behavior in my class, she seems like a student who likes her classes, but struggles a little bit in school. I know that she is a very hard worker though, and quite concerned about how she’s doing in school.

**Interview with Verna T. April 11, 2000 at UH West O’ahu on a picnic bench between two buildings.**

Verna is a short local woman with long black hair. She was very concerned whether the recorder was working properly and when a plane made some noise over head, she motioned up and looked at me asking whether she should pause in her answer.