

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A WORKING PROFESSIONAL, MOTHER, STUDENT,  
PERSON OF COLOR/OTHER, FOREIGN-BORN NATIONAL: EXPLORING THE  
INTERSECTIONALITY OF MULTIPLE IDENTITY ROLES

by

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(Under the Direction of Christina Linder)

ABSTRACT

Persistence and integration of an individual depends on the individual's characteristics and motivation, available and accessible levels of support, and congruence with cultural values, behaviors, and expectations. This autoethnographic study reflects the analysis of the intersectionality of multiple identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, foreign-born national across the cultural environments of work, home, and school as I pursue an online doctoral program in education in the United States. Taken from a post-modernist, post-structuralist lens, this research examines the axiology of personal truths to reflect on systematic inequalities experienced as gender-based and racial discrimination and oppression in the context of culture. This research explores the theme of the influence of ethnic cultural roots and internalized values of families of origin on the contextual development and expression of multiple identities. Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM) serves as a starting point to problematize integration models based on dominant cultural characteristics that perpetuate White, male privilege. This research advocates for a more multi-culturally

inclusive integration processes that address marginalized group identity membership, challenges the model minority myth, and work-life balance. Theory-to-practice takeaways are offered for administrators for implementation to improve workplace environments.

INDEX WORDS: Autoethnography, Working Mother, Person of Color/Other, Foreign-born National, Intersectionality, Online Education, Doctoral Education, White Male Privilege, Discrimination, Oppression, Marginalization, Multi-Cultural, Model Minority Myth, Work-life Balance

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this autoethnographic study to Maya and Sebastien, my co-constructive sojourners in Life. You have been with me throughout this journey of a thousand miles. From all the weekday nights of doing our homework together, to moving into my study and sleeping there for two years straight just so we could squeeze in every minute of time together, you have been my constant companions every step of the way. Even though you ran away every time I tried to read my research articles to you, you both are every bit a part of this study of our lives. Thank you for blessing me with your love.

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To all the working professionals, all the mothers, all the students, all the persons of color/Others, foreign-born nationals, the women of color in academia no matter your status or rank, and all the Others whose identities leave them in the marginal fringes of society, embrace your place in the margin. Those traits that make you different can make you stronger. The world needs the voices of the outsiders. Together we can change this world.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” – Lao Tzu

This is a story of my own thousand mile journey as I sought awareness and validation of my multiple identities across the varied cultural landscapes of work, home, and school. In the musings generated across civilizations through the studies of science, mathematics, literature, and other expressive arts, we collectively and individually seek to achieve awareness and validation of our existence. This autoethnographic study reflects my musings as I expand my awareness and attempt to validate my own experiences with navigating multiple identities. This is my narrative.

In exploring my journey and describing my experiences in navigating the borders of multiple identities in varied cultural environments, I hope to illuminate this landscape for others who may find themselves on a similar journey of a thousand miles. Others—other professionals and workers, mothers, students, persons of color/Other, and foreign-born nationals who also engage in the pursuit of higher education, whether for personal or familial reasons. I hope that by taking these first steps in doing this study, future Others can see a few traces of my footsteps left behind and be encouraged in their own journey.

Through this autoethnographic study, I explored my experiences in navigating the challenges of multiple identity roles as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, foreign-born national while persisting in a hybrid online doctoral educational

program. I explored meanings ascribed to the intersectionality of my identities in the cultural environments of work, home, and school. My reflections on cultural environments included the psychological environment created by the nature of social interactions within those physical settings.

I used autoethnography as a research method to turn the lens of study inwardly towards an intimate, in-depth reflective examination of how I experienced interactions within cultural environments (Chang, 2008). The use of interviews with professional work colleagues and fellow doctoral student cohorts provided additional perspectives of how others observed the intersectionalities of my identities across the cultural environments of work, home, and school. Together, the stories provided an exploratory narration of my journey of a thousand steps.

### **Background**

The advent of and advances in online educational programs makes obtaining a college degree more accessible to a wider group of people. Online education can serve as a great equalizer. It provides access and flexibility to students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to pursue an education (Kenney, Dumont & Kenney, 2005). Because coursework and class engagement can happen synchronously or asynchronously, students can participate in class while balancing work and family obligations (Boston, Ice & Gibson, 2011).

While online educational options do not eliminate the weight of balancing other responsibilities, it does allow for greater flexibility and provide people with an opportunity to pursue a degree with the hopes to achieve more or higher social and financial capital (Kenney, Dumont & Kenney 2005; Kibelloh & Bao, 2014). Online

education allows people a chance to choose work, family, and education. Schedule flexibility with online education is a strong attraction to many students. Online education opens the doors of education to those who might otherwise have struggled to make education a reality.

### **Problem Statement**

For mothers who often attempt to balance multiple social obligations such as work and family, online education represents a degree of freedom (Müller, 2008). Pursuing opportunities for education while balancing family life represents a significant shift in the potential to increase the social capital of many mothers. A powerful social change occurs when a mother is able to pursue her education, rather than seeing it as a dream deferred.

Working mothers who are also students must balance the challenges that come with navigating those multiple identities in social environments where the culture may not understand how to simultaneously support their combined identities (Callahan, Kaiser, Erichsen & Miller, 2009; Grenier & Burke, 2008). They face various challenges in meeting expectations and obligations related to functional roles within the cultural environments of work, home, and school. Social inequalities exist within work, home, and school cultural environments that disadvantage those individuals who attempt to balance work, motherhood, and student responsibilities (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Kibelloh & Bao, 2014; Müller, 2008; Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009).

For some working mother students, navigating the concurrent and sometimes competing demands of social obligations and cultural expectations ascribed to their multiple roles can be extremely challenging. Often external demands of work,

motherhood, and school means women sacrifice personal well-being and personal priorities (Callahan, Kaiser, Erichsen & Miller, 2009; Kibelloh & Bao, 2014; Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009). Due to overwhelming expectations, working mother students often frustratingly find themselves falling short in one area in order to meet demands in another area.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine my experiences of navigating multiple identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national, particularly as I persisted in a hybrid online doctoral educational program. I explored what it meant to cross multiple cultural borders as my multiple identities intersected in the environments of work, home, and school. This autoethnographic study provided an opportunity to explore challenges of trying to integrate multiple identities within each of those environments.

### **Research Question**

This research study reflected upon the following question “What are the experiences of having to navigate the cultural expectations of work, family, and school obligations like for me as a full-time working professional, mother, student, and person of color as I persist in my hybrid online doctoral educational program? How is the intersectionality of multiple identities experienced as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national pursuing a hybrid online educational doctorate degree?”



### **Significance of the Study**

The experiences shared in this autoethnographic study could serve as a point of reference and contrast for other working mothers, whether they are persons of color/Other or foreign-born nationals, who want to pursue a higher education degree. The outcomes of this study could be used by professionals and administrators interested in recruiting and supporting individuals who identify as workers, mothers, students, persons of color/Other, and/or foreign-born nationals studying in hybrid, online programs in higher education.

This research may also provide insight into the factors that assist working professionals, mothers, students, persons of color/Other, and foreign-born nationals in their struggles to achieve some sense of affirmation, validation, and ownership of their life-balance challenges. Concepts brought up in this research paper could influence how administrators consider persistence and institutional retention efforts for students with marginalized identities. Educational program developers could implement support services that intentionally focus on the needs of these students in order to increase institutional retention.

### **Research Paradigm**

A paradigm establishes a fundamental framework and guides how we experience and interpret our world (Takacs, 2003). Paradigms can represent our worldviews within a professional discipline and help us define constructs of thought. Individuals can also use paradigms on a more intimate level to frame personal experiences.

Axiology is the philosophical study of value. How we individually and collectively define and determine our values shapes our paradigmatic framework. How

we interpret reality and knowledge is shaped by our value systems (Mertens, 2010). Thus we can say axiology colors both epistemology and ontology (Guido, Chavez & Lincoln, 2010).

Guido, Chavez, and Lincoln (2010) described epistemology and ontology as components of a paradigm. Epistemology relates to how we construct knowledge and come to know what we see and experience. It is, in essence, how we as observers make sense of the information we take in and process. Takacs (2003) posited that all knowledge, as we come to understand it, is constructed by people and therefore filtered through the lens of personal experiences.

Ontology refers to how we come to determine what reality is (Guido, Chavez & Lincoln, 2010). Based on one's paradigmatic framework, reality may be interpreted as universal for all. This interpretation of truth in essence is what is often labeled universal Truth with a capital *T*. Otherwise, reality may be individually defined and applied. This interpretation in essence is what is often labeled personal truth with a lower case *t* (Guido, Chavez & Lincoln, 2010).

Through this autoethnographic study I explored my perceptions of truth and how those served as filters for how I interpreted the meaning of my experiences. In this research study I used a postmodern, post-structural framework (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014). This framework allows for meaning making to be established within the context of socio-cultural frameworks perceived and experienced by the individual.

This approach acknowledges and challenges the impact of socio-cultural values and social inequalities inculcated by master narratives and social normative expectations. The principles of postmodern, post-structural frameworks embrace the coexistence and

co-mingling of multiple truths to reality (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). This chosen framework lends itself to the creative, critical evaluation of cognitive and affective expression central in autoethnography.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Researchers use intersectional theory to contribute to epistemological understanding of society while also advocating for improving social justice (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Shields, 2008). Intersectional theory grew out of social justice work in the 1970s and 1980s that sought to explore and change social constructs that continued to perpetuate social injustices and inequalities in the United States (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Shields, 2008). This theoretical framework focused on and challenged issues related to how and why certain individuals and groups experienced social oppression.

Central to the theory of intersectionality was the argument that people experience their lives through multiple identity roles rather than as singular, separate identities. Further, multiple identities are not experienced in a simple additive fashion, but through dynamic shifting contexts. It is within the complex mesh of multiple identities that people who are marginalized by society in the U.S. experience various levels of oppressions (Dill & Zambrana, 2009).

In theory and application, intersectionality was used to bridge scholarly intellectual examination of life with the actual experience of life in all its complexity and layers (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Shields, 2008). Intersectionality theory provides the researcher with a framework from which to specifically explore experiences of social inequalities as reinforced by social structures, perceptions, and behaviors (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). This theoretical framework coalesces well with autoethnography in

providing a forum and audience to give voice to my narrative outside the shadows of the marginal fringe.

Using the theoretical lens of intersectionality and an autoethnographic research design, I explored and examined how I navigated the interplay the multiple identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national. I selected to use a combined term of worker and professional in order to most authentically reflect where I felt my identity was along the continuum of a blue-collar laborer, i.e. worker, and a White-collar employee, i.e. professional. The identity of mother reflected my familial relationship to my two children. My identity of student spanned across various periods of my life when I pursued educational opportunities and enrolled in classes, and up to my pursuit of my doctorate degree. Person of color/Other referred to how my racial identity was labeled growing up in southern U.S. Foreign-born national was the term I decided to use to reflect my immigrant status in the U.S., rather than using the terms immigrant or first generation immigrant. I will expound upon each of these identities in greater detail in chapter four findings.

### **Operational Definitions**

#### **Culture**

Culture is both etic and emic (Chang, 2008). A researcher both influences and is influenced by the research experience. Researchers purport to make objective observations as an outsider to a cultural environment, i.e. etic observations. However, the study of culture also draws researchers into the environment and influences the researchers' experiences of the observations, i.e. emic observations.

Culture is reflective of the normative behaviors, values, and characteristics of a group. Selecting the characteristics that are reflective of a culture requires social interactions among and across members of that culture. Individuals also process their experiences of culture by adopting and adapting portions of cultural norms that suite their needs to guide their behavior, values, and characteristics. The individual is situated both in the role of shaping culture as well as being shaped by culture (Chang, 2008).

Different environments establish different normative guidelines for behaviors, values, and characteristics. There are far more categories of culture than those defined along the lines of ethnic, national, gender, or racial identities. Cultures are formed within any group environment wherever normative guidelines are established (Chang, 2008). Due to the rapid advancements in technology, the social interactions required for the creation of culture can be face-to-face or at-a-distance. Electronic and online communities using a wide variety of media to interact, communicate, and share across members can now create a multitude of online cultures and online cultural environments (Chang, 2008; Renn & Patton, 2011).

All environments have culture. I use the term cultural environment throughout this research in order to intentionally focus on the culture within an environment. Often individuals interact within an environment without being cognizant of the impact of culture. For the purposes of this study, I wanted to focus attention to the impact of culture within the environment, to be mindful of whose culture and what aspects of culture influence and impact how we experience one another.

In this autoethnographic research I explored my experiences of navigating various cultural environments in which I lived as a working professional, mother, student, person

of color/Other, foreign-born national pursuing a doctoral degree through a hybrid online educational program. The intersectionality of my identities involved the blending of different cultural environments of work, home, and school.

I use the term marginal fringe to express my experiences as a minority among minorities within my cultural environments. Specifically, my racial identification does not fit within the dominant social discourse in Southern U.S. that primarily recognizes minority identity as either African-American or Hispanic. As I am neither of those, I am pushed further outside to the fringes of marginalization. Therefore, I am often not even recognized in the social discourse that examines the impact of discrimination and oppression.

### **Identity**

In this study I used a definition of identity that relates to one's sense of self and self-awareness. One defines one's identity through identification, or membership, with a socially-ascribed category or group. Identity also relates to the meanings one attributes to membership within a group (Shields, 2008).

### **Hybrid/Online Educational Program**

For the purposes of this study a hybrid/online educational program was defined as one that uses a blended face-to-face and online format for content delivery and class discussion. Specifically, the focus was on my personal experiences related to being in a hybrid online educational doctorate program at the University of Georgia.

### **Persistence**

In this study, I used the definition of persistence as “the behavior of continuing despite the presence of obstacles” (Rovai, 2003, p.1). As research on persistence

evolved and the focus broadened to examine online education, findings often varied or conflicted with one another (Hart, 2012). Persistence is often impacted by the nature and quality of systems of support to which students have access. Sufficient positive social support, work balance, financial resources, and access to technology were all found to be significant factors impacting students' experiences with online educational programs (Holder, 2007). Accounting for deviations in research results, it became clear the attempts to define the construct of student persistence as a simple concept did not fit. Therefore, persistence is recognized as a multi-factored complex construct (Berge & Huang, 2004; Hart, 2012; Holder, 2007).

### **Assumptions and Delimitations of the Study**

From the methodological framework of autoethnography, what data is gathered and how it is interpreted through analysis presumes the validity of personal truth (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). This research represents my experiences as a working mother student and person of color/Other on the bases of my interactions within the cultural environments of work, home, and school. This autoethnographic study represents my experiences and is not universally representative of all individuals who share the same identity labels as those I use; therefore this study is not generalizable. In providing insight into my personal experiences, I seek to provide myself and others with an opportunity to widen the discourse around the complexities of navigating multiple identities across cultural environments. This study examines the impact of social inequalities in my experiences with the challenges of achieving work-life balance at the chaotic center of intersectionality. The theoretical framework of intersectionality helps

bring to light some of the social inequalities perpetuated by pressures to meet socio-cultural normative standards related to my identities.



## **Chapter 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This autoethnographic study explored a number of constructs examining the navigation of multiple identities across different cultural environmental settings. My participation in a hybrid online doctoral program as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, foreign-born national served as the impetus to explore the intersectionality of multiple identities across the cultural environments of work, home, and school. As such, a review of the literature related to the rise of online education enrollment, particular characteristics of online students, and factors that impact the persistence of online students set the stage and provided necessary context for this story. The construct of identity and the intersectionality of identities were examined for this autoethnographic study. A review of ethnographic studies exploring the challenges of women navigating the intersectionality of their roles as working professionals, mothers, students, and persons of color/Others served as a foundation for this autoethnographic study.

#### **Model of Student Persistence and Integration**

Based on an extensive review of research literature from the level of individual institutions, state, and national research on education, Tinto and Cullen (1973) proposed a theoretical model to address concerns related to student persistence and institutional retention. The authors proposed student persistence was influenced by a complex interaction involving the individual's skill and motivation, their prior exposure and access

to educational resources, and the level of congruence between the individual and institutional cultural climate. Whether or not individuals persisted in their environments was heavily influenced by whether or not they perceived the benefits of cultural integration to outweigh the costs of cultural segregation (Tinto & Cullen, 1973).

Beyond intellectual capacity and commitment to intellectual development, individuals needed consistent and rewarding interactions with others in their social and cultural environments in order to feel integrated (Tinto & Cullen, 1973). How well individuals felt integrated and supported within their cultural environments significantly impacted their level of motivation, commitment, and ultimate achievement. Positive and supportive advice, praise, and interest bolstered individual's integration and success (Tinto & Cullen, 1973).

### **Criticism of Tinto's Student Integration Model**

Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM) became one of the most studied theoretical models in retention research in U.S. higher education. Its principles of student academic and social integration were widely studied. Tinto's SIM model profoundly influenced institutional policies and programs since the 1970's. Tinto's 1975 Student Integration Model (SIM) became one of the foundational theories underpinning student retention research conducted in the United States (Metz, 2002, Museus & Quayle, 2009; Thompson, 2015).

The SIM's central precept of students' integration into the academic and social culture of an institution greatly influenced the development and implementation of retention initiatives and programming across decades. Tinto based his observations on homogenous, traditionally aged college students. Over the years, student populations in

higher educational institutions (IHE) became far more heterogeneous. This diversity represented challenges in the application of the SIM and generated strong criticisms about the cultural biases and limitations of the model (Museus & Quaye, 2009).

### **Cultural Dissonance**

Tinto's SIM outlined three critical stages in students' introduction and transition to institutional culture: separation, transition, and incorporation (Museus & Quaye, 2009, Thompson, 2015). For students who identify within minority or marginalized groups, institutional cultural environments are often perceived as unwelcoming, inhospitable, and isolating (Wei, Ku & Liao, 2011). Passage through the three stages may create cultural dissonance for those students whose cultural backgrounds represent values, behaviors, and expectations different from those of their educational institution's dominant culture.

The precepts of Tinto's SIM requires students to blend into and adopt the dominant culture of the institutional community rather than for institutions to affirm the benefits those alternate cultural values bring to the community (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Students either need to acclimate or find individuals who can serve as guides to help them navigate the divide between the cultural landscapes of their communities of origin and adopted institutional communities. Integration that requires students to give up characteristics of their culture of origin forces them to diminish or altogether lose those alternate identities in an effort to adopt dominant cultural normative values and behaviors. Rather, Museus and Quaye (2009) countered that validation of students' multiple cultural identities is critical to student persistence.

## **Online Education**

Modern advances in electronic and online technologies continue to support the democratization of access to higher education (Kenney, Dumont & Kenney, 2005). Students' perceptions of their online learning experiences and perceived barriers were shown to play a significant role in their decisions to persist (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Given the significant number of students participating in online education, higher education administrators need to examine the characteristics of this population of students. As online education enrollment continues to grow and expand, researchers and members of the higher education community need to expand their understanding of how access to education and challenges online students face impacts institutions' abilities to support student persistence and retention (Berge & Huang, 2004; Willging & Johnson, 2009).

Expansive growth of online education brought greater diversity into the educational environment along with a greater influx of non-traditional students (Heyman, 2010; Holder, 2007; Rovai, 2003). Previously underserved, underrepresented populations of single parents and adult learners are increasing online enrollment numbers. Flexibility; convenience; ability to balance work, family, and school responsibilities; and easier access to education were the main reasons cited that drew large numbers of adult students to online education (Holder, 2007; Willging & Johnson, 2009).

These older students looked to college education to provide them with greater upward social mobility (Kenney, Dumont & Kenney, 2005). Researchers often used Tinto's model to drive the discussion of student persistence around the dual concepts of student integration—both from an academic and social perspective— and student-

institutional fit (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007; Heyman, 2010; Rovai, 2003; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Later research examined how this foundational model applied to online students, online education experiences, and online learning environments.

Online students tended to be individuals who were already working, have family obligations, be more non-traditional in age, and pursue education for a number of reasons including degree attainment and professional advancement (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007; Rovai, 2003; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Therefore they faced challenges on a number of fronts in balancing multiple roles and obligations. Online students' challenges, sometimes conceived as obstacles or barriers, generally fell into three areas: personal, academic, and circumstantial (Berge & Huang, 2004). Each student's story is different and represents the presence of these factors, usually in some combination, at varying levels, and at different times of their online educational experience.

### **Persistence in Online Education**

A major difficulty in evaluating educational research in the area of student persistence was the multitude of definitions for the construct of persistence. In the 1980's, researchers primarily used a definition that was simply the opposite of attrition (Hart, 2012). Other researchers specifically defined persistence in relation to the education process, sometimes referring to students' goal completion (Berge & Huang, 2004; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005), while others focused on degree or program completion (Berge & Huang, 2004; Hart, 2012).

The use of different definitions of persistence, the complexity of the construct, and the diversity of educational programs made comparison studies extremely difficult to

conduct (Willging & Johnson, 2009). Researchers speculated institutions demonstrated a reluctance to study the patterns of persistence in online education fearing low results could negatively impact recruitment, retention, and funding efforts. Driven by serious funding and economic concerns, institutions sometimes utilized retention and persistence measurements that covered up more accurate attrition data (Willging & Johnson, 2009).

Researchers often cited lower persistence rates in online education compared to traditional, face-to-face education (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007; Berge & Huang, 2004; Heyman, 2010; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Dropout rates for online students were reported as much as 10-20% higher than face-to-face (Angelino, Williams, & Natvig, 2007; Berge & Huang, 2004; Holder, 2007). However, national statistical data was not provided to support these comparisons. Most of the evidence used to support these claims were anecdotal statements reflecting perceptions of higher drop-out rates for online students rather than actual statistical, analytical data (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007; Berge & Huang, 2004; Willging & Johnson, 2009).

There should be no significant differences between online education and face-to-face courses or programs (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Yet, as perceptions sometimes taint realities and sometimes speak to truths, it remains necessary to continue to apply the critical lens of research in order to examine the lived experiences of students in online education programs to examine their patterns of persistence.

Students who perceived greater barriers and lower levels of support while participating in online educational programs had lower rates of persistence and institutional retention (Heyman, 2010; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Primary major challenges online students cited were: family issues, time management, time constraints,

the need for financial support, and the nature of external and institutional support (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007; Hart, 2012; Holder, 2007; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Interestingly, students with no online course experience anticipated the greatest barriers in online education (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Conversely, students who actually had the most experience with online education perceived the fewest barriers (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005).

As students gained increasing exposure and experience with online education they reported increased confidence, motivation, persistence, and retention related to their online learning experiences (Hart, 2012; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). The completion of the first few classes and even the first year of online education were found to be critical benchmarks for student persistence. Often once online students made it past the first courses or first year, their continuation and completion rates for online courses increased dramatically (Berge & Huang, 2004; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005; Willging & Johnson, 2009).

The more students expressed confidence, comfort, and satisfaction with their online education experiences, the greater their motivation and persistence in online courses and programs (Holder, 2007; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005; Rovai, 2003; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Online students with the strongest persistence were those who associated completion of their online educational goals with career, professional, and/or financial advancement (Hart, 2012). When completion was most closely tied to the achievement of clearly identified personal goals, online students experienced increased motivation and persistence.

Support systems for online students should fit their personal, external, and institutional goals. Hart (2012) cited that online students who reported the most positive emotional support among family, friends, peers, and faculty had higher commitment to personal educational goals and persistence. Higher education administrators looking to develop or enhance online education programs would do well to explore ways to maximize the integration and utilization of positive social networks to bolster student persistence. Institutions need to ensure they provide support in multiple areas that are comparable to what is provided to face-to-face students (Heyman, 2010) at individual, course, program, and institutional levels (Berge & Huang, 2004).

Clear and timely communication from faculty and staff positively impacted online students' progress and persistence (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007; Hart, 2012; Rovai, 2003; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Effective communication was critical to helping online students to feel connected to faculty, their peers, and the institution. Institutions whose outreach includes positive communications to their online students are perceived as demonstrating and providing positive emotional support. Access to support services needs to be user friendly and conveniently accessible (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007). In research that showed when online students did not utilize support services provided by the institution, those students often reported less satisfaction with the institution and increased use of outside resources for support (Hart, 2012).

### **Outcomes for Online Students**

Positive support from online students' internal and external environments can help mitigate poorer academic skills to boost individual persistence and institutional retention (Holder, 2007). Research based on Tinto's integration model established the



need for institutions to implement proactive strategies to integrate students into the academic and social life of the institution (Rovai, 2003). That same principle may hold true for online students who seek ways to feel connected throughout the online educational process. Some researchers proposed women fared better in online education courses and programs versus men perhaps due to the particular nature of social connection, communication, and interaction established in online environments (Berge & Huang, 2004; Rovai, 2003; Willging & Johnson, 2009).

However, other researchers failed to identify any significant demographic factors that predicted the persistence of online students (Holder, 2007; Muilenburg & Berge 2005; Willging & Johnson, 2009). The lack of conclusive research data lends support to the conclusion that online student persistence is indeed a multi-faceted, complex construct. Therefore on-going study and research is necessary to help us better understand student persistence and possible factors that influence it.

### **Intersectionality**

A basic tenet of intersectionality acknowledges each person has multiple social identities that exist simultaneously (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). Because of this complexity, it is difficult—perhaps impossible or even inappropriate—to try to understand an individual from a single identity perspective. Intersectionality allows us to see an individual from the crossroads of their multiple identities. Stemming from its roots in feminist theory, intersectionality focuses on exploring social inequalities that are persistent and pervasive in cultures (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Shields, 2008).

Intersectionality sometimes explores and challenges normative definitions and biases of gender-based identities (Shields, 2008). Culturally prescribed normative

expectations have a profound impact on the psyche, opportunities, and experiences of individuals, and to a larger extent individuals' social positioning. Whether or not an individual experiences oppression or privilege based on a specific social identity sometimes depends upon the context of the combination and environment in which intersectionality occurs.

Privilege versus oppression is generally associated with whether or not an identity category is valued by the dominant class. Intersectionality specifically argues that the impact of social identities is more than merely additive, but rather there is a complex interaction that occurs at the intersection of an individual's multiple social identities (Shields, 2008). A person may experience both privilege and oppression, based on their relative social positioning (Shields, 2008), for example a White female may experience privileges based on her racial identity while still experience oppressions based on gender.

### **Women in Higher Education**

While more women and mothers have entered the work force, work environments still reflect gender-based socio-cultural normative expectations (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). The cultural environment of higher education is presently still steeped in traditional gender-based perspectives. Women experience gender-based biases in how they are treated and evaluated, whether as working professionals or as students. "Old norms" grounded in gender-based traditions espoused the standard that men belonged in public, professional spheres while women belonged in the personal, private sphere as homemakers and caretakers (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). This binary expectation created an expectation that there are definitive boundaries separating public, professional lives from personal, private lives (Raddon, 2002).

As more and more women enter into the various ranks in academia it may be possible for them to reach enough critical mass to make a wider political impact. More women in academia in various levels of power and authority could influence institutions to give more credence and systematic support to women's concerns regarding achieving a healthier balance between professional and parental obligations (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2006). Social structures in institutions of higher education continue to reinforce standards that disadvantage women (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Raddon, 2002). Women are disproportionately represented among the lower ranks of faculty status in academia (Evans, 2007; Turner, 2002). Women, in particular women of color, often face subtle discrimination when others suggest their hire was only a result of affirmative action or their institution's desire to demonstrate diversity in their workforce (Turner, 2002; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011; Wall, 2008).

Women faculty are more often challenged by colleagues and students who question their credentials and right to be among the faculty ranks despite their accomplishments (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Turner, 2002). Even the accomplishments of their academic research is marginalized and criticized (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). Women faculty often express having difficulties with the tenure and promotion process (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011). They expressed a double-bind of the pressures to protect their professional time to produce research yet uphold socio-cultural expectations to be nurturers and caretaker to their own families and/or other minority colleagues and students to whom they serve as mentors and role models (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011).

Increased global competition for prestige—driven by recognition of research, profit, funding, and student enrollments—have redefined professionals in academia as workers and students as consumers. (Acker & Armenti, 2004). This trend has also fueled on-going increased pressures to strive for a higher level of productivity, work commitment, and achievement in order to compete. Higher education administrators are seen as a reluctant to change policies and practices to increase support for work-life balance in the work environment (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2006).

Despite some improvements and policy changes to create more family-friendly environments, for example adoption of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), employees with families continue to struggle and push the need for more changes. As older White male leadership begin to retire from institutions, the socio-economically driven need to recruit and retain younger, more diverse faculty may help continue to push the discussions for appropriate work-life balance for both men and women (Acker & Armenti, 2004).

### **Mothers in Academia**

Motherhood impacts women in academia in a number of ways with regards to their professional and parental obligations. Motherhood requires women to wrestle with consequences and conflicts presently still inherent in bridging professional and parental aspirations. Women spoke of conflicting messages about how having children would impact their professional careers (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Those who did decide to choose to become mothers addressed concerns of timing pregnancies to minimize negative impact on tenure and promotion timelines and even to avoid conflicts of having a baby during the academic year. Mothers in academia—

whether at research, comprehensive, liberal arts, or community college—made choices to compromise the amount, type, and quality of their research. They compromised how they managed their time in order to create a sense of work-life balance (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2006).

Mothers in academia continue to face double-standards of competing in a man's world for promotion, professional prestige, and publication. All the while they simultaneously uphold the weight of socio-cultural normative gender expectations as primary caregivers and caretakers of their children (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Raddon, 2002; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Women are left primarily to themselves to figure out how to navigate the intersectional demands of being both a good academic and a good mother. The cultural environment of academia often provides no room for mothers to express their private lives. The structure of academics maintained a social pressure to segregate their professional aspirations from their parental aspirations. Women often chose silence rather be judged as less than competent in either aspiration, thus leading to a sense of isolation and room for self-doubt (Wall, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

The ideal academic—characterized as married to work, tirelessly dedicated to requirements for tenure, and unfettered by other outside or competing obligations—fits more socially prescribed male-gendered identities than mothers working in academia (Raddon, 2002; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2006). This put mothers in academia in a double-bind. They compete as faculty in a cultural environment that is still predominantly male and balance socio-cultural demands of motherhood in addition to professional pressures. Pressures from those combined identities put mothers on the clock—tenure and professional promotion clock, biological (pregnancy) clock, and self-management clock

to try to negotiate both competing demands for time and attention (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Mothers in academia discussed their experiences as being a contradiction of both privilege and oppression (Raddon, 2002; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

Life in academia does come with a distinct set of privileges: flexibility, autonomy, academic freedom, and prestige being among them (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). However, those privileges come at the price of seemingly never-ending expectations for research, publication, teaching, and service at the institution. Mothers in academia are expected to accept and internalize the institutions' ambiguous criteria and judgement to prove their professional self-worth through the endless pursuit of quality work (Acker & Armenti, 2004). This further enforces a master narrative. Mothers in academia are workers, controlled by their institutions, required to continue to produce work in order to increase the value of the institution, regardless of the personal cost to their personal health and well-being.

Mothers in academia, despite their levels of privilege, still experienced significant levels of tension and stress (Acker & Armenti, 2004). The women spoke of making physical sacrifices as an attempt to accommodate their professional and familial obligations. Health issues and lack of sleep were common complaints among mothers in academia as they juggled professional and parental responsibilities that simultaneously demanded their time and attention (Acker & Armenti, 2004). Often the women internalized socio-cultural expectations to be able to manage the ever changing, ever demanding needs of both. Some of the women spoke on how responsibilities for academia and motherhood provided respite from the other. Having both a professional

and family identity provided and reinforced a source of a sense of self-worth (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Raddon, 2002; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

Those mothers who were able to establish themselves in academia felt there was an obligation to help others navigate the complexities of their dual marginalized identities, as women and as mothers, in order to find ways of coping (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Wall, 2008). Mothers in academia exercised different ways of coping and navigating the conflicts and complexities of their dual identities. As mothers, female academics carried an unequal weight of expectations as nurturers and caregivers in their professional spheres as well. They were expected to be mentors for younger female faculty, as well as graduate students, especially those who were mothers themselves or considering that option (Allen, 1995; Turner, 2002).

### **Mothers in Pursuit of Doctoral Education**

More and more women are entering doctoral programs, generally at an age that coincides with childbearing and childrearing age (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009). A multilevel approach to supporting doctoral students was seen as critical to their persistence and success. These students may turn to family, school peers, and faculty and staff from their department discipline for social support in order to complete their programs (Wall, 2008). They, like mothers who are faculty in academia, struggled with feeling the need to meet gender-based socio-cultural expectations as women, as mothers, and as professional scholars (Wall, 2008).

Their choices of doctoral programs were often tied to family decisions such as where their partner was studying or employed or the geographic location of their families, rather than solely based on the quality or characteristics of the institution (Wall, 2008).

They felt their family and communities sometimes questioned their need or desire to pursue a doctoral education at all. Some felt pressure from their families and communities to prioritize the fulfillment of their familial duties first, ahead of their professional career aspirations. Women were still expected to be primary caretakers of their families while balancing the professional load of their doctoral program pursuits (Wall, 2008).

Just as mothers in academia faced challenges related to socio-cultural expectations related to their work and family identities, mothers in doctoral programs faced similar challenges and conflicts in balancing their lives across the cultural environments of school and home (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009; Wall, 2008). Mothers who were doctorate students faced dual expectations of being an ideal academic-in-the-making and an ideal mother. These demands took a toll on these mothers' time and physical health. Doctorate students often contended with additional stressors related to their relationships with their doctoral advisors. They also faced financial constraints and insecurities associated with being a doctoral student (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009).

Graduate students balancing motherhood often are not privy to the same privileges that faculty who are also mothers use to buffer the strain of navigating professional and parental obligations. Paid or unpaid parental leave or the ability to stop the clock on program deadlines generally does not exist for doctoral students who are also mothers. Policy changes incorporated by institutions of higher education to address work-life balance concerns for faculty often do not extend to those who do not hold faculty status. This lack of systemic support creates significant disadvantages that may



influence students who are mothers to opt out of doctoral programs. Instances of support were mostly on an individual case-by-case basis at the department level therefore limiting the impact of positive benefits across the institution (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009).

### **Women of Color in Academia**

Institutes of higher education (IHE) in the U.S. continue to perpetuate a cultural climate that favors Eurocentric standards privileging White males in the academy (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011). While there is no monolithic narrative that describes what experiences in academia are for all women or all women of color, there is significant research that illuminates the experiences of many women of color in academia. As a group, their experiences paint a picture of complex, cumulative disadvantages (Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011).

Despite social discourse and policy changes to include a wider range of diversity in colleges and universities in the U.S., women of color in academia continue to express frustration and disappointment that the cultural environments have not changed to be more inclusive (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011). Faculty women of color help recruit, advocate, and support the professional development of students of color (Turner, 2002). Racial diversity in higher education is argued to be a positive factor in the educational experience of students in the U.S., therefore institutions need to do more to recruit and retain woman faculty of color who can serve as role models, mentors, and advocates for greater diversity and inclusivity (Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011). However, the paucity of women of color within academia reflects only token attempts to achieve such diversity within faculty ranks.

Across all faculty ranks in academia, women of color are still woefully underrepresented (Evans, 2007; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011). As a collective group, women of color comprised approximately two percent of all tenured full professors in IHE in the U.S. as of the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Evans, 2007). Such underrepresentation in academia creates a culture where women of color are required to fulfill roles their male colleagues or even White female counterparts would not be expected to do. Often, women of color were called, either by their institutions or their own sense of social responsibility, to be representatives of their identity groups—either for women, for people of color collectively, or specifically for their own racial-ethnic group (Allen, 1995; Turner, 2002).

For women of color in the academy, their low numerical representation reinforced their feelings of marginalization and isolation (Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011). They are seen and treated as tokens, i.e. token representatives, by their colleagues in many ways (Turner 2002; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011; Wall, 2008). Minorities in a dominant cultural environment experienced tokenism on many levels.

They felt they were on display as minority representatives for their institutions (Turner 2002; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011). They felt greater pressure to conform to fit in with socio-cultural normative standards. They spoke of feeling pressured to become socially invisible. Women of color in the academy felt the need to work harder than others to establish and prove their professional credibility. Because there were so few of them represented in IHE and due to tokenism they felt isolated and excluded from social networking opportunities. Being isolated had the consequence of limiting their access to power alliances. Faculty women of color experienced being defined by others'

stereotypical expectations, and facing more personal stress due to minority group membership (Turner 2002; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011).

Many women of color in academia face challenges due to their marginalized identities based on gender and race (Allen, 1995; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). They experience their institutional campus climates at predominantly White institutions (PWI) as alienating and isolating (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011, Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001, Turner, Gonzalez, & Wong, 2011). Women of color report having less positive experiences at their institutions, e.g. more perceived organizational barriers, less professional support, lack of respect for their scholarship from their colleagues, and less access to mentors (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001).

Others in the academy impose pre-defined identity expectations on women of color (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011). The women felt judged based on administrators' and colleagues' stereotypical expectations. These pre-defined expectations did not take into account who they were as scholars and professionals, nor their contributions to their communities. Disregard for their credentials and for their research interests made them feel invisible (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). The oppression experienced by women of color in the academy was likened to having their identities erased and their voices muted (Marbley et al, 2011).

Some women of color felt their presence at their institutions provided their administration with a way to claim diversity in their hiring practices, without having to make any deeper, substantive cultural changes. This left the women of color feeling more like check-boxes than as respected and valued scholars (Turner, 2002). Women of

color felt like they were used by their institutions as representative tokens for diversity. Statistical representation did not necessarily translate into social inclusion.

Asian women of color found themselves held up to socio-cultural stereotypes as “model minorities” (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011). The perceived successes of their identity group meant others ignored their need for recognition and support which left them feeling more invisible. They were not counted or represented within the discussions of minorities or minority women of color. Sometimes women of color felt punished when they excelled. The dominant culture of academia expected them not to draw attention to themselves and to accept their invisibility (Marbley et al, 2011).

However, some women of color reclaimed their empowerment by embracing their token representation and redefining themselves as perfectly poised to be agents for social change (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). In the patriarchal world of IHE in the U.S., women of color came to embrace the power of their gendered identities as matriarchs (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011). Women of color turned to a collectivist, peer approach to combat the marginalization, isolation, and discrimination they faced in the academy (Allen, 1995; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001).

Finding themselves muted in institutions that perpetuated the superiority of White maleness and having their identities defined as inferior, women of color found their voice in other arenas (Turner, 2002). They used their place in the margins as grounds in which to plant themselves firmly and nurture their independent voices to claim their power within the academy (Allen, 1995). In using their own narratives, women of color redefined their identities as powerful.

From their marginal vantage point, women of color in academia could serve as change agents and role models for other minorities in their identity groups (Allen, 1995; Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011; Turner, 2002). Feeling called to be agents for social justice and change, women of color in academia often found themselves in nurturing, role model positions. They are sought after by students of color to mentor, advise, and guide. They were called to consult, speak on behalf of, and serve on committees related to issues of gender and/or race despite their area of academic discipline (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Allen, 1995).

By creating cultural environments in IHE in the U.S. that integrate and celebrate the multiple identities of women of color, institutions can more truly embrace the philosophical ideal that education promotes critical social change (Turner, 2002). The collective narratives of women of color reflecting on their experiences of marginalization, isolation, discrimination, and devaluation raise a call to IHE. Women of color are voicing their experiences and challenging IHE to reflect upon their role in upholding that ideal. If IHE are able to create healthier, more inclusive, and more supportive cultural environments, individuals with marginalized minority identities could more easily embrace cultural integration within the academy (Turner, 2002).

### **Mother Student Identity Ethnographies**

There is a growing compendium of ethnographies focused on the challenges working mothers face in navigating their multiple identities while pursuing their educational degrees. In many fields, the completion of a degree represents a necessary ticket in order to move forwards with professional and career aspirations (Kenney, Dumont & Kenney 2005; Kibelloh & Bao, 2013). This body of ethnographic research

reflects the pressures women experience due to socio-cultural normative expectations related to their multiple identities as working mothers who are also students.

Studies primarily focused on mothers facing the struggles of navigating their faculty responsibilities in academe in the United States (Callahan, Kaiser, Erichsen & Miller, 2009; Grenier & Burke, 2008). Other researchers looked at experiences of mothers balancing graduate student work, as different from faculty experiences, in the U. S. (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009). Kibelloh and Bao (2014) examined the intersectionality of the identities of working mothers pursuing their online master's business degrees in China. Mannay and Morgan (2013) examined the intersectionality of identities of working-class mothers returning to school as adult students in England.

The collection of these ethnographic studies, across professional fields and across national cultures, identified common issues that working mother students face in navigating their multiple identities. Socio-cultural normative expectations that dictate roles for women as workers, mothers, and students are often idealized (Kibelloh & Bao, 2013; Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009). The enforcement of social expectations to be an ideal worker, mother, or student created pressures that made it impossible for women to simultaneously and successfully navigate their multiple identities (Callahan, Kaiser, Erichsen & Miller, 2009; Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009).

Ethnographers overwhelmingly found patterns of socio-cultural pressures in work, home, and school environments that required and expected women to dedicate themselves exclusively to the one environment over another (Kibelloh & Bao, 2013; Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009). Professional success for many working mother students meant denying or minimizing outside obligations lest they be branded as less

than committed in their identity roles (Kibelloh & Bao, 2014; Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009). The same focus on a singular identity was found of socio-cultural expectations for the roles of mothers and for students.

These social pressures generally resulted in disadvantages in professional and personal development opportunities for working mother students who, either by choice or circumstance, opted out of full-time work options and more prestigious positions (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009). The patterns of pressure from normative social expectations were identified across the studies conducted in different countries and across different demographic participants.

### **Summary**

Tinto's and Cullen's model of student persistence (1973) laid a foundation of understanding how students' motivation, commitment, and success in school depended on their perception of integration and support at school. The relationship between support and success can be said to be true of individuals in other social and cultural environments in general. Even back then the authors argued that as enrollment in higher education becomes more increasingly diverse, the focus on student persistence becomes more relevant. Higher education administrators need to consider the characteristics and values students bring with them in order to determine what institutions can do, with limited resources, to create environments that help students feel supported and integrated (Tinto & Cullen, 1973).

With greater access and flexibility than traditional, on-campus educational programs, online program administrators are able to recruit more individuals with diverse needs who want to pursue a degree (Angelino, Williams, & Natvig, 2007). Adult learners

in particular a drawn to the opportunity to obtain a degree while attempting to balance their other responsibilities to their families and their employers.

This same benefit of flexibility also posed challenges for working mother students who still faced socio-cultural pressures to meet the idealized expectations of each of those roles (Mannay & Morgan, 2013). For working mother students', their choices were impacted by the challenges of navigating the intersectionality of their multiple identities. How working mother students managed those intersectionalities impacted their commitment, persistence, and success (Callahan, Kaiser, Erichsen & Miller, 2009).

Ethnographic research exists that examines the challenges working mother students face in navigating the intersectionalities of their multiple identities. In creating cultural environments where there is room to support the expression of multiple identities, cultural communities can begin to address social inequalities that create pressures to focus only on singular identities (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Mannay & Morgan, 2013).



### Chapter 3

#### METHODOLOGY

In this research, I used autoethnography as a way to intimately explore the challenges related to navigating the intersectionality of my multiple identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national while persisting in a hybrid online doctoral educational program. Autoethnography explores three root constructs: auto, ethno, and graphy. At the core of autoethnography, the researcher is empowered to explore, confront, and challenge exploitations engendered by social inequities reinforced by social normative expectations (Spry, 2001).

Auto refers to the notion of *self*, in this case the researcher herself/himself. In autoethnography the researcher plays multiple roles through the research process (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). The researcher serves as an observer exploring how one experiences cultural environments. Research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes are all filtered through the researcher's perceptions and perspectives. In interpreting and ascribing meaning to the data, researcher arrives at truths in the data from a post-modernist perspective.

A researcher using autoethnography rejects a positivist notion of objective neutrality and presents an intimately personalized analysis of the research phenomenon (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). The researcher is part of the process by being engaged and enmeshed in experiencing the research phenomenon. Therefore, the researcher is impacted and changed by the research experience by essentially situating the self in the

center of those experiences. As such, the researcher is both a producer of the research as well as product of the research experience, serving both an insider and outsider role.

Ethno refers to the culture in which the research experience is happening (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). The internal culture of the researcher is filtered through her/his own epistemology, ontology, and axiology. The external culture serves as the focus of critical study and is the one in which the researcher, as a participant, is immersed. Ethnography examines cultural practices, behaviors, and values and seeks to provide outsiders a clearer understanding of the insiders' point of view (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

Cultural and environmental systems are multilayered. Cultural identities and systems are dynamic, rather than static. Therefore, cultures and environmental systems are always changing and shifting (Spry, 2001). Socio-cultural values of normative standards change across time and history, and across different cultural environments. Autoethnography presents the researcher's experience of these shifting cultural dynamics.

Graphy refers to the study of the research topic (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography, much like most research methodologies, includes the following processes: observation, experience, analysis, and explanation. Autoethnography critically explores the relationships among the researcher, participants, cultural environments, and creative processes used to convey the research product (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

### **Study Boundaries**

Jones, Torres, and Arminio, (2014) argued researchers must be clear in stating their research topic and purpose. Participants should understand the purpose of the study, what they are being asked to experience, and provide knowing consent to participate.

Researchers need to provide participants with the opportunity to stop participation at any time in the research. The statement of purpose necessarily implies a particular approach to methodology. The chosen methodology defines the parameters of the relationship between the researcher and others involved in the study (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014).

I was mindful of the possibility of feeling the need to self-censor or to present the stories in a more positive light than the data might reveal. In reviewing and presenting the data, I was intentional to avoid presenting a sterilized, edited version of the experiences. I attempted to be mindful of potential audiences so the language and tone of this work invited the readers to engage in the exploration process without feeling marginalized (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014).

Due to the reflective nature and level of intimate expression involved in autoethnography, trust was an extremely critical value in the research experience. Since this research represented an intimate self-reflective exploration, I needed to create a safe space for my interview participants as well as for myself to encourage genuine expression and evaluation of the research experiences (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014). I was careful to focus on care and respect in order to honor the authenticity of the interview participants and myself. As the researcher and instrument in this autoethnographic study, I needed to exercise an acceptance of myself as I was. It was important to validate where I was in my processes without judgment in order to avoid inflicting additional emotional or psychological pain or further feelings of marginalization.

### **Trustworthiness**

The paradigmatic philosophy, methodology, methods of data collection, and analysis must all align and remain true to the chosen framework of the study (Jones,

Torres & Arminio, 2014). In a sense, the paradigm, methodology, and method triangulate to each other. Based on the principles of autoethnography, validation comes from embracing and allowing critical, creative expression of one's experiences of the cultural phenomenon of interest (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Validation is based on a post-modernist acceptance of multiple, personal truths. The presentation of the research experience validates the perspectives and meanings ascribed by those involved.

Trustworthiness comes from the researcher presenting an honest and openly critical perspective of their worldview. The reliability and trustworthiness depends upon the personal, intimate reflection and self-reflection of the participants (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2014). In autoethnography the researcher is the instrument through which truth is filtered, expressed, and evaluated. External trustworthiness of autoethnographies comes from other peoples' ability to use the reflections to explore, validate, and embrace their own experiences and truths (Chang, 2008).

The nature of autoethnography draws from the researcher as the primary source of data (Chang, 2008). In doing so, the researcher must ensure that reflection involves scholarly evaluation and analysis of the data. Analysis must be scholarly in order to avoid criticism that autoethnographic research is merely narcissistic self-reflection. Chang (2008) argued autoethnography contributes to scholarly knowledge by expanding society's understanding about cultural environments from the perspective of the researcher as a primary source of data. Research validity is ensured through the evaluation of collected data from the framework of cultural analysis and theory (Chang, 2008).

## **Procedures**

### **Data Collection Methods**

Personal memories provide rich data for the exploration of culture an individual's reflection in autoethnography (Chang, 2008). In this autoethnographic study I used four different mediums: self-reflective journaling, self-visualization, free drawing, and interviews with significant others in my life to reflect on my experiences. This data was a reflection of my experiences as both the researcher (etic) and the subject of study (emic).

I served as a primary source rather than a secondary source presenting an interpretation of someone else's experiences. The data I collected reflected personal memories, both past and present, as I examined experiences of navigating the intersectionality of my multiple identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national within the cultural environments of work, home, and school while persisting in my hybrid online doctoral educational program. I used reflective research prompts to guide my processes across the four mediums.

I explored how I navigated the intersectionality of my multiple identities across work, home, and school while reflecting on the influence and impact of culture in those environments. My personal reflections were examined alongside the reflections of how some of my colleagues and student cohorts also experienced my identities within the cultural contexts of our interactions. Appendix D are the specific initial reflective prompts I used.

I journaled frequently for four months. For the purposes of this study, I compiled journal entries as a single Word document with dated entries. Handwritten reflections were entered onto the single Word document journal. Journal entries were unedited so as to reflect the authenticity of what was experienced at the time. My self-reflective writing included formats such as reflections and musings, short narratives, illustrated texts, and song lyrics and poems of other artists that I felt spoke to my experiences as I explored the intersectionality of my multiple identities across cultural environments.

Chang (2008) referred to a process of *visualizing self* as a method of producing data that reflects a visual representation of an ethnographic experience. Sometimes using visual imagery can make statements and communicate an experience more succinctly and more powerfully than words. This method of visualizing self allowed me to create tangible data that represented my multiple identities and how those were experienced across work, home, and school cultural environments.

Chang (2008) describes free drawing as an exercise that involves drawing a physical space of cultural relevance and meaning to the research topic. In this autoethnographic research I used a definition of space that represented a landscape broader than a narrow construct of a physical environment. I produced free drawing that also incorporated how I felt in my cultural environments, how culture impacted my experiences in those environments. The images were visual representations of my emotions when I evaluated and processed my navigation of the intersectionality of my multiple identities in the different cultural environments. Those images represented past memories and present recollections (Chang, 2008).

For this autoethnographic research, I created and collected journal observations, illustrations, photos, drawings, and other visual artifacts that reflected experiences of how I navigated the intersections of my multiple identities within my cultural environments. I provided narrative explanations of what these visual pieces meant to me culturally. The examination of ascribed cultural meanings brought to light the axiology of values that shaped my identities.

In autoethnographic studies, interviews with others serve to provide additional context, validate, and triangulate the self-reflective data (Chang, 2008). Interviews are often used in ethnographic studies and cover a broad range from structured, formal to looser, informal formats (Chang, 2008). Interview protocols included both broad opening questions and more specific detailed questions. Broad opening questions are often used to begin interviews in order to create a sense of safety for the interviewee and draw them into the conversation.

Subsequent, more detailed questions can lead the conversation towards an exploration of topics in greater detail, depth, and breadth (Chang, 2008). Interviews conducted with single individuals can help to preserve confidentiality and create an environment where the interviewee is ideally free from peer pressure to respond a certain way. Group interviews may generate data that is enriched by interactions of the interviewees (Chang, 2008). The interviews I collected reflected how others experienced my multiple identities and provided their interpretations of my values.

In this ethnographic study I involved work colleagues, student cohorts, and myself in the data collection method to solicit perspectives of how I navigated my multiple identities. Members of my immediate family were not familiar with my

professional and academic work; therefore I did not solicit their participation to contribute data for this autoethnographic study.

I sent out an email request to work colleagues, student cohorts in my doctoral program, and an extended family member soliciting their voluntary participation in this autoethnographic study (Appendix A). Four former colleagues agreed to participate and completed the interview process. Four student members in my cohort program initially agreed to participate. Ultimately, only two felt they knew me well enough to participate and completed the interview process. Multiple scheduling conflicts precluded the participation of my extended family member; therefore, I do not have any data representing members of my family circle.

I used a loose, conversational interview format in order to honor my interviewees' authentic expression of their perspectives. I used broad open-ended questions to begin the conversations and reflections, "How did I present to you in your experiences with me?" related to the cultural environments of work, school, or home respectively. I used reflective questions to solicit perspectives in the form of interviews, stories, photos, drawings, or artifacts of meaning.

I started the interviews with the interview protocol I submitted for Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval, see Appendix B and C; however, also honored the flow of the conversation based on how the individuals responded. I followed up with questions to elicit more detailed feedback as necessary such as, "What does that mean (to you)?" I asked myself and my interviewees these same reflective questions in order to gather data about the meanings of our experiences related to the intersectionality of my multiple identities.



### **Interviewees' Identity Profiles**

Aside from my personal reflections, I invited other individuals who knew me to contribute their reflections on how they experienced my multiple identities in the cultural environments of work, home, and school. As most of my time was spent in these three environments, the people who volunteered to participate came from either work or school environments. The length of my relationships with my interviewees at the time the data was collected ranged from two and a half years to fifteen years.

### **Demographics of the Interviewees**

The additional reflective ethnographic data included in this study consisted of six interviews. I knew all the interviewees in combined roles from my work, family, and/or school cultural environments. They were either work colleagues and social friends, or student cohorts and social friends. Only one interviewee knew me from all three combined cultural environments of school, home, and work and identities as a professional colleague, mother, student, and person of color/Other.

Of my interviewees, four were cis-gender women. All four women worked in higher education. Three of the women were professional colleagues of mine from work. Three of the four women were also students pursuing higher education degrees, either online or hybrid online programs, while balancing full-time careers. Two of them were students in the same hybrid online doctoral program as me. Three of the women were mothers, either with their own children or step-children. Only one of the women was single; however, she spent a great deal of time taking care of the children of extended family members and therefore had a great deal of experiences as a caretaker. Three of the women identified as African-American and one White.

The remaining two interviewees were White, cis-gender men. Both were working professionals in higher education and my colleagues. One was a father with his own child and a step-child. The other was in a committed relationship with no children or child-rearing experiences. This man was also a student pursuing a higher education degree through an online program while balancing a full-time career.

Table 1 presents an overview of the demographic identifiers of the interviewees. Each interviewee selected a pseudonym in order to provide a level of confidentiality in this study. The column on Relationship indicates the nature of the relationship between the interviewee and myself. The gender identity of each interviewer is given. Each interviewee's own identifiers are given for three of the anticipated intersectional identities in this autoethnographic study: parent, student, and person of color.

Table 1

Summary of Interviewees' Demographic Identifiers

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Gender Identity</b>	<b>Professional Identity</b>	<b>Parenting Identity</b>	<b>Student Identity</b>	<b>Racial Identity</b>
Jim Swarthow	Professional colleague and friend	Cis-male	Works in higher education	Father-blended family	Not a student	White
Meg Dolly	Professional colleague and friend	Cis-female	Works in higher education	Mother-biological family	Not a student	African-American
Fiercely Driven	Professional colleague and friend	Cis-female	Works in higher education	Single-caretaker of extended family	Online student	African-American
Taylor B.	Professional colleague, friend, student cohort	Cis-female	Works in higher education	Step mother	Hybrid online student	African-American
C.J.	Student cohort and friend	Cis-female	Works in higher education	Mother-blended family	Hybrid online student	White
Rufus Berlin	Professional colleague and friend	Cis-male	Works in higher education	Partner in committed relationship-no children	Online student	White

## **Interview Sessions**

Each of the interviews was conducted one-on-one in a public setting. Interviews were scheduled during times to accommodate work schedule constraints of all the interviewees. Three individuals were interviewed in restaurants or eating establishments on weekend days. Two individuals were interviewed in on-campus study rooms during weekdays in between meetings on their schedules. One individual was interviewed in a hotel on a weekday evening as we were both preparing to be in class on campus the following day. Interviews ranged in length from thirty minutes to an hour and thirty minutes in length. All interviews were recorded, with the interviewees' permission, using the audio recording function on my cell phone.

All audio recordings were transferred from my cell phone to my online Google Drive account as audio files to facilitate transcription. I used the audio files and Microsoft Word to create the written transcripts of all six interviews. Once the written transcripts were created, copies of the audio file, written transcripts, and signed IRB contracts were sent electronically via email to each respective interviewee. Each interviewee was invited to review the transcripts and provide feedback if desired. Only one interviewee provided editorial feedback on the transcript where this person felt the meaning on the written transcript did not quite accurately reflect the intention of their sentiments. This interviewee offered a different, clarifying interpretation.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for qualitative research such as autoethnography involves multiple stages of data collection, review, and evaluation (Chang, 2008; Creswell, 2014). Chang (2008) suggested autoethnographic researchers use the reflective process to

identify the relevance of the collected data along the lines of personal interest, professional significance, and ethical considerations. The review was continuously conducted while simultaneously collecting additional data. Continuous evaluation of the data helps the researcher to refine the research process and begin identifying thematic categories that are culturally relevant (Chang, 2008).

In autoethnography, the researcher uses the data to expose a larger picture of cultural values and overall social relations (Chang, 2008). I examined how I, as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national, experienced navigating my multiple identities in the cultural environments of work, home, and school. I explored the meanings of experiences from the theoretical framework of intersectionality from a post-modernist perspective. Themes sometimes bridge past and present experiences, demonstrating continuity and development of cultural frames (Chang, 2008).

### **Coding and Themes**

Coding of qualitative research is an iterative process that requires the researcher to repeatedly review and analyze the data in order to establish meaningful and relevant codes (Chang, 2008; DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011). Coding is a necessary and integral part of the research process. The process allows researchers to examine the data on multiple levels – to reduce raw data down to the most significant content, to explore and make new connections with the data content, and challenge and transform theories for future research (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011).

From my own first review of all the raw data collected from my journal observations, artwork, and interviews, three identities—mother/parent/motherhood,

professional/working professional/worker, and student—were consistently present across all the data. As all of my interviewees knew me from either work or school, I expected that the most salient, primary identities would be of me as a working professional and/or as a student. My own self-identification as a mother came through strongly in both cultural environments of work and school. Therefore, mother/parent/motherhood presented as a third salient, primary identity. Additionally, my identity as a person of color/Other/minority was identified heavily in my self-reflective journaling and artwork as well as salient to some of my interviewees. While my identity as a foreign-born national/Other/immigrant was not directly mentioned by any of my interviewees, a review of the data revealed that it was a salient theme in my self-reflective journal observations.

During these first steps of coding, I highlighted each mention of the identities in a separate color to begin to be able to differentiate the data groupings. Doing this allowed me to dissect information across all the data sets and then be able to read all the data relevant for each identity as a group (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). Thus, I reduced all the raw data into smaller units of themes.

The iterative process of developing code is a way for researchers to make meaning from raw data in order to draw out significant material related to the focus of the study. During iterative reviews, coding allows the researcher to identify codes across the collective raw data and then regroup and sort the findings for each code group together. Sorting allows the researcher to examine more deeply the aggregate of the data to explore meaning (Chang, 2008).

After identifying and highlighting references to each of the identities in the data collection, I began reviewing the data again to identify levels of meaning in the content. I proceeded to refine the data to begin to identify patterns of relevance for possible codes. I followed a three step process—establish code, define code, and find examples of code in raw data (Chang, 2008; DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). For each of the identities that were the focus of this autoethnographic study, I reviewed the raw data and identified the following two codes that were prevalent across the multiple identities that were the focus of this study: cultural influence and social inequalities. For cultural influence, I identified a pattern across the data that elucidated how my ethnic culture compared to perceived normative culture expectations shaped my values and how I expressed my identities.

Chang (2008) describes the data refinement process whereby the researcher must cull out extraneous data and expand upon the data that is relevant to the purpose of the research. The researcher continuously reviews the raw data in order to begin to identify and label significant data. I pulled out examples from my journal observations, artwork, and interviews that supported the codes.

The exploration of cultural influence and social inequalities included both the impact of my ethnic Filipino upbringing as well as how that culture was practiced within my family of origin. Those socio-cultural expectations also impacted how I was treated in the cultural environments of work, home, and school as well as my interpretations of interactions with others in those particular environments. I noticed there was very little data about my identity as a foreign-born national in the interviews but my journal observations spoke a great deal to the relevance of that identity for me personally.

Conversely, I had very little data on my working professional identity within my journal observations and artwork, but there was a great deal of discussion of it in all my interview material. Identifying codes that are not represented robustly in the raw data allows the researcher to reflect upon the reasons for the paucity of that data (Chang, 2008). Further reflection helps the researcher to determine if she/he was purposefully disengaged with content for that code and to address whether or not the absence of data is relevant to the research process (Chang, 2008). As Chang (2008) indicated on the process of data refinement, I took that opportunity to reflect on the potential reasons for that difference within the data.

### **Summary**

In this autoethnographic study I used a combination of self-reflective journaling, artwork, and interviews to gather data to explore both an etic (outsider) and emic (insider) perspective of how my multiple identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national were experienced across the cultural environments of work, home, and school. Interviews with former colleagues, colleagues, and student cohorts from my doctoral program provided additional data to lend trustworthiness to the interpretations pulled from my self-reflections.

From iterative review processing of my data, I identified two salient themes: the influence of culture and the influence of social inequalities in shaping my identities. I culled the data to extrapolate examples of how culture and social inequalities influenced the expression of my multiple identities. I reflected on how cultural context influenced how others experienced my identities across work, home, and school. I described those findings in the following chapter four.

## **Chapter 4**

### **FINDINGS**

At the start of this autoethnographic study, I expected to address the intersectionality of my multiple identities as a worker, mother, and student. Those were the most salient social identities of my life at that moment. I was immersed in the cultural environments of work, home, and school. Those were the cultural landscapes where I spent so much of my time. It was through my journaling that additional identities as a person of color/Other and foreign-born national came through.

I used the data to explore how experiences of truths were defined through different cultural lenses. The journal observations, artwork, and additional data from interviews were used to examine how my identities were expressed and reflected in examples of discrimination and social inequalities as experienced in my cultural environments of work, home, and school. Viewing myself through my private, personal lens and reflections of how others experienced me, I was able to reflect on the intersectionality of my multiple identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national from a post-modernist lens.

In this chapter I provided a synthesis of the data from my journal observations, artwork, and interviews to illuminate how I expressed my multiple identities across the cultural environments of work, home, and school. I addressed each of my multiple identities that were the focus of this study: working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national. In examining these identities, the observations



and reflections explore how social inequalities shaped and impacted my experiences and how others experienced me.

For each of the identities—working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national—I used a similar framework of subheadings to delve deeper into exploring how that identity was expressed and experienced. I provided relevant examples culled from the data. In the sections on Cultural Expectations, I addressed the influence and impact of cultural expectations upon how I expressed my identities. I examined the primary impact of my ethnic culture and the values I internalized from my family upbringing. For the subsections titled Balancing Act I addressed some of the challenges of balancing socio-cultural expectations. In the sections entitled Reflecting on the Culture I addressed how my interviewees experienced my various identities in the respective cultural environment in which that identity was expressed. For the sections on Social Inequalities I sought to address some of the conflicts experienced in those cultural environments that may have stemmed from the intersectionalities of my multiple identities. I provided a summary for each identity to reflect on how the findings related back to the original research question “What are the experiences of having to navigate the cultural expectations of work, family, and school obligations like for me as a full-time working professional, mother, and student of color as I persist in my hybrid online doctoral educational program? How is the intersectionality of multiple identities experienced as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national pursuing a hybrid online educational doctorate degree?”

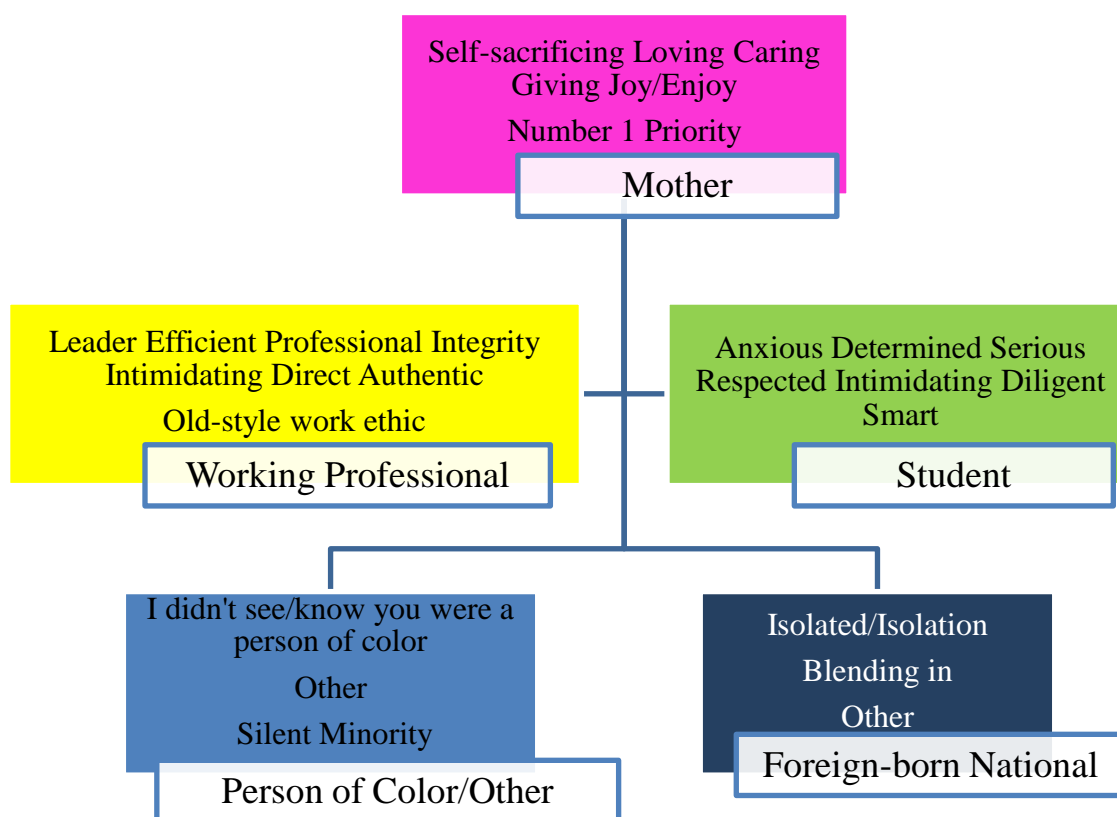


Figure 1. My Identities and Frequently Used Descriptives by Interviewees. This schematic illustrates the hierarchy of my multiple identities and common words and descriptive phrases used to describe each.

### **Working Professional**

From the beginning of this autoethnographic study, I struggled with the decision whether to use the term worker versus professional. The term worker tended to bring up connotations of being a blue-collar worker or manual laborer. Whereas the term professional tended to bring up connotations of White-collar, office-related work. To be a professional seemed to carry more weight, authority, and greater social esteem.

However, I worried that using the term professional made me sound too elitist. I self-identified as a worker. I grew up having a working-class background although I worked in White-collar professions. I did not identify myself as a White-collar worker given my immigrant cultural background and my sense of my marginal political status in my work cultural environments. Even without my identities as mother or student, because I was a person of color/Other and foreign-born national, I did not feel like I was part of the power structure of the institution of higher education. Even as a professional, I was still an Other. I felt like a foreign immigrant searching for validation, both internally and externally. I struggled to establish my place within the cultural system of the higher education environment.

The perception of me as a worker versus professional was, even up to now, also reinforced by administrative leaders under whom I worked. The majority of the supervisors in my work environments in higher education emphasized my status and position in the organization as a subordinate. The administrative leadership clearly emphasized their expectations of my deference to them.

In the hierarchy of the political environments of the college units where I worked, I was a worker. My value to my administrative leadership, across all the various positions I held in higher education, has always been defined by in terms of quantifiable productivity. My work was measured by the number of students seen, number of cases managed, and number of forms processed and filed, etc. The administrative leadership evaluated and critiqued my work even though they did not really value it. I experienced a similar critique and devaluation at home from my family of origin.

While both my parents, all my siblings, and I worked White-collar jobs, my parents have always considered us as workers rather than professionals. I attribute part of this contradiction to a socio-culturally ascribed idea my parents instilled in me that we would always be subordinates to authority in the work environment. Also, within our Filipino culture the careers that were considered professional were medical doctors, nurses, engineers, accountants, or teachers. Among my siblings, our career choices spanned being administrators, an architect, a photographer, a graphic designer, and a yoga/pilates instructor. Therefore, within our Filipino community, the careers of my siblings and I pursued were not considered professional by our socio-cultural standards.

While my work positions were classified by professional titles, I have always been treated as a worker. For the purpose of this study, I settled on the term working professional, a blend of the two terms to more authentically reflect how I felt about my identity in the culture of the work environment.

### **Cultural Expectations**

Based on my cultural and familial background as a Filipino, working hard and being professionally deferential was an expectation of normative behavior. I have worked since the age of fourteen. In my family's socio-cultural background, work was equated to one's personal value. In my family, work was as much an expectation as was fulfilling family obligations and obtaining an education. There was a cultural value instilled in me that the purpose of work was to serve others in the family and in the community at large. The Filipino and Catholic cultural influence of my upbringing reinforced the double messages of self-sacrifice and service to others.

There were numerous stories across my childhood and adulthood of my father's family taking people in and employing them. My father readily gave away his inheritance of his family's property and sent money back home to the Philippines for the care of others, even though we ourselves never had anything extra. I recall my uncle, who was a Monsignor in the Catholic Church, sharing a story with me of how he put me to work in his church in the Philippines removing wax from the church pews. I was only a toddler, younger than four years of age at the time. He wanted to demonstrate to his congregation that, despite his position of power within the Church and the community, I was not above being expected to work just because I was his niece.

Both my parents worked long, hard hours outside the home to secure our basic needs. Work in service of family and the community was a part of one's responsibility in life. We were not rich by any standards, but it was our moral obligation to live and work in service of others.

For my family, as immigrants to the U.S., it was important to be seen as productive and for our work to be socially valued. In my family, there were overt messages about the expectation to carry ourselves so others would accept our value as immigrants. There were constant admonitions that our family's reputation needed to reflect well on our Filipino cultural background. It was a matter of public image and family honor.

To my colleagues, my professional identity in the culture of the work environment reflected old-world work ethics. Those work ethics are not seen as in line with contemporary U.S. attitudes towards work. Therefore, it made it difficult for

colleagues to understand why I accepted so much hardship in the cultural environment of work.

As Jim Swarthow expressed it, "...how you were treated at your last job, which was poorly by the way, ...you stuck with it. There's a sense of you still have I would say, the old way, -country, -school style of loyalty to your employer. ...you still are loyal to the end." He surmised that my professional loyalty was a reflection of "another (cultural) expectation." He articulated my internalized, culturally ascribed work ethic this way, "You're going to be the working person. You have to get the job done. They're not going to treat you nice. That's expected, that they're not going to treat you nice, but you're pretty loyal (to your work). It's your responsibility."

### **The Balancing Act**

Service and self-sacrifice as a working professional were common expectations in both my home and work cultural environments. Most supervisors, faculty, and students expected me to be all in order to give more, even to my own personal detriment. My work in student support focused on service to the students, faculty, administrators, and the college community at large. I spent half my higher education career providing student services under the auspices of an academic affairs division.

Professionally, I worked in the divide between the cultures of academic affairs and student affairs. Speaking to my experiences as a foreign-born national, I crossed the borders between those two very different cultural groups. In order to navigate both, I had to learn the culture of both—their professional vernacular, expectations, customs, and values. Similar to my own ethnic experience of being too American to be considered Filipino while being too Filipino to be considered American, I was a blend of academic

affairs and student affairs cultures. However, I found myself not really able to integrate into either.

### **Reflecting on the Culture of the Work Environment**

In the interviews I conducted, interviewees reflected upon their observations of me as a working professional. My professional identity was characterized as someone with integrity, conscientious, professional, and efficient. I was known to be extremely meticulous and detailed-oriented. C.J. said of my professional working identity, "...as far as your career and job that was something that you take very seriously,...something you prioritize and make sure that you're meeting or exceeding expectations in that regards." Taylor B. used the words "very professional, very efficient, and dependable" to describe her observations of my professional identity in the work culture.

As colleagues, my interviewees trusted the professional guidance, opinions, and expertise I projected. Across the years—despite the changes in lateral and vertical position titles and regardless of changes in upper administration—my colleagues found my professional mannerisms to be consistent and unwavering. Meg Dolly and I transitioned into positions in tandem, across three different units at the same college. In the fifteen years we worked together, we shifted in roles from colleagues to supervisor-supervisee.

Across those years, as our parallel professional and personal relationships developed, she said, "the work relationship and professional demeanor never changed." Of our evolving professional identities, she further added, "...they were easy transitions...because I already knew you were more than competent in what we were doing. ...following you as a leader it was not going to be difficult. ...I knew you would

lead us in the right direction and I knew that you wouldn't treat me in a way that would make me feel less than."

My professional work colleagues and student cohorts believed I represented a vision and model of leadership in the work culture. Whether or not I considered myself an expert in what I was doing, others reflected that I presented myself as knowledgeable and self-assured. Regardless of the differences in reporting lines, colleagues felt I served as a model and guide for them. Even in times when I purposed myself as an equal rather than as a leader with regards to my professional identity, I was someone my colleagues looked to for guidance and answers.

Fiercely Driven shared, "...you were always someone I could go to for guidance, for assistance, guidance in my program of study, what my future goals may or may not be. ...you were someone I could look up to. Someone I could talk to." Rufus Berlin stated he looked up to my perceived professional expertise, even though we were both directors at the time. He said further, "(B)ecause when I needed to do stuff that I didn't know how to do, or what to do, or how to approach it, I always came to you."

My professional approach with colleagues was perceived as very direct, though non-confrontational. Some of my interviewees thought I was direct and efficient in my actions, words, and mannerisms. According to Meg Dolly, "...in a sense that the information (from you) was very specific. There was no fluff. ...There was no figure out what you mean, ...(G)oin around working with different people, sometimes it takes a while to figure out what people are trying to get at. And I didn't have that issue with you."



I was dedicated to my work, committed to making a difference for the students whose lives I touched. Fiercely Driven reflected, "...you're passionate about what you do. ...really passionate about helping others. ...So, that's how I see you come across even now working with the students." Rufus Berlin shared, "I found you to be extremely professional, very knowledgeable, and a bit scary." He explained his experience of my professional working identity as, "I realized how good you were at yours (job) and it kind of put me in my place. I looked up to you. I still look up to you. ...You're always on the ball."

My colleagues reflected I was open in making requests to ensure my teams had the resources and supports they needed to do their jobs. I demonstrated competence in being able to advocate for support of my staff members who, throughout my career, happened to be almost all African-Americans. My colleagues observed, however, I was not able to secure that same level support for myself from my administrative leadership.

Rufus Berlin suggested that some of my struggles with administration in my working environments was potentially related to the perception that I had an intimidating persona. He reflected that although I was extremely personable and authentic in my work relationships, he felt I sometimes made people feel intimidated. He explained, "I think in a good way. I mean, you scare me! But, it's just your professionalism, your efficiency, everything that you think you don't have and the rest of us probably wished we had a lot more of."

It was because of my professionalism, efficiency, directness, and projected expertise that I was perceived by some as intimidating in the work culture. According to many of my colleagues, I came across as strong and bold in my directness and

determination. I personally believed that I projected a professional competency that was expected of me as a worker, supervisor, and leader. Rufus Berlin speculated that senior administrators distanced themselves from me, or sought to dismiss me and my work, because they perceived my persona as intimidating due to my level of professionalism.

While for some colleagues being bold, direct, and efficient were attractive characteristics that drew them closer to me, the perception was these same characteristics resulted in others in positions of power distancing themselves away from me. My perceived directness may have been the antithesis of their social expectations for someone with my identities, i.e. a worker, mother, student, person of color/Other, or foreign-born national. Although, from my perspective, I took care to present my ideas and requests in a deferential manner when addressing my administrative leadership, perhaps I did not always meet my supervisors' expectations to be dutifully demure and deferential enough. In my professional identity, I did not stay silent and invisible enough.

### **Social Inequalities**

Despite external awards and accolades highlighting the impact of my dedicated work as a professional in higher education, I repeatedly found myself in cultural work environments that devalued me as a professional. Across a number of the conversations during the interviews, several work colleagues and student cohorts spoke about me being blatantly dismissed, devalued, and treated poorly by individuals in leadership. Across the years, across different job titles and responsibilities, across changes in leadership, I repeatedly struggled to gain respect and support from my senior leadership. I was in the

marginal fringe. I was not among the minority people of color, African-American and Latino staff, who were mentored by the senior administrative leadership.

One poignant example was of my experience in helping to build an online education program at a previous institution. What we built came to be recognized statewide and nationwide as a model of a success. We were able to establish a program that achieved consistent exponential growth that ultimately supported the launch of online academic departments, online department chairs, and various levels of online faculty positions. Because of that growth we were able to secure funding for technology, and professional development for both faculty and staff.

We built a program that was getting attention and lauded for its comprehensive approach to supporting the success of online students. However, based on campus politics, the online program was dismantled and most of the supporting staff positions were eliminated. Only the online department chairs and online faculty positions were left intact. My staff, whose positions I created through negotiations with Human Resources and the institutional leadership, were allowed to keep their titles. Meanwhile I was demoted. The rationale given for my demotion was that my title and position was not in line with the structure of the on-campus unit. However, no one addressed the contradiction that my staff were allowed to keep their titles and positions even though they were not in line with the structure of the on-campus unit either.

At another institution, I faced frequent criticism for times that my non-work family responsibilities required my physical absence from the office. A supervisor frequently criticized me for requesting to work from home in order to tend to my children when they were too sick to go to school. Although I was told being allowed to

sometimes work from home would be one of the privileges of my position, there was real support for it when it came to my family needs. It did not matter that I always provided support and coverage for her when she was frequently out for her own personal health and family issues. The privileges and benefits of support she exercised as upper administration did not extend to me. Despite our similarities as minority women of color in academia who were balancing work and family life, she support my needs for work-life balance.

As a minority women of color, I found out I was expected to be an invisible and silent worker. I was not expected to excel. Because in doing so I made myself less invisible within the political structure of the institution's cultural environment. The more I excelled and the more awards I earned, the more my leadership became uncomfortable with my presence.

The more professional development I sought to improve myself, the more push-back I received from my administrative leadership. I was chastised as being too greedy when I requested funding to pursue professional development. I was heavily criticized by faculty for attending development programs and pursuing a doctorate degree because those things meant I was not always in the office at all times as they expected me to be. I was not at my desk as they thought a "good worker" should be. These criticisms were entered into my performance evaluations. I lacked the support of members of the academy for pursuing similar educational opportunities and privilege they themselves enjoyed.

In regards to my experiences with institutional leadership at a previous institution, Rufus Berlin shared, "I think the change in leadership we had affected everyone, in

particular you.” He said of the leadership, “(they) gave you less support. ...Just really, ‘You can fly or fall on your own.’” He described his perception of the relationship between a senior male administrative leader and myself, “I felt there may have been some tension at times because you were a woman. Which could have been piggy-backed onto (being) person of color. ...From my perspective on the outside looking in, he just dismissed you, what you did, how you did it.”

That same male administrative leader orchestrated to separate my team for the rest of the online division. In working with the facilities planning team he made it abundantly clear that he wanted the least amount of money spent and the least amount of construction work done to accomplish this separation. After my team was moved to another floor, away from the rest of the division, the online department chairs requested that campus police revoke our access to the office spaces we previously occupied. They went as far as requesting for campus police to revoke our access to the secure entrance to the building, even though we were just moved to a different floor, not a different building. I was politically cutoff and summarily dismissed by the department chairs despite the fact that the creation of their jobs was a direct result of the work I did to help build the program.

C.J. shared, “It has been a challenge for you as far as the work environment. So, either the lack of support that you received in those environments or just the supervisor hasn’t been supportive of you in a variety of different ways.” Despite any of those difficulties, “you didn’t give any less as far as working.”

These experiences happened regardless of the gender, age, ethnicity, and race of my senior leadership. In fifteen years in higher education, I worked under African-

American, White, and Asian administrative leaders. Despite establishing and managing student support programming that was recognized across the state and nationally as an exemplary model, I could not garner the support of my senior leadership within the political cultural environments of the colleges where I worked. I may have privately shrugged off acknowledgements of my personal accomplishments; however, my administrative leadership often shrugged off acknowledgements of my professional accomplishments.

It was difficult to discern if the dismissive attitudes were based on my identities as a working professional, mother, person of color/Other, foreign-born national or part of the institutional cultural divide that places a lower priority on staff versus faculty, or student support services versus academics. Regardless of the basis for the dismissive attitudes of leadership, the message was clearly evident to other work colleagues.

My interviewees reflected that while I was a strong and vocal advocate for my staff and colleagues I was not able to successfully advocate more assertively for myself. They expressed frustration and confusion as to why I did not leave those work environments that were professionally and personally toxic for me. As Jim Swarthow expressed it, "I cannot ever imagine you saying, 'I quit, I'm out of here,' unless you've already ruminated over it for years and you have a very specific exit plan. Most people they're going to be at a breaking point." My work place loyalty and persistence seemed disparately misplaced and incongruous to others' personal expectations for self-preservation.

### **Summary of Working Professional Theme**

My experiences as a working professional and how my interviewees experienced me in this identity were greatly shaped by values of my ethnic culture and the influence of the values of my family of origin. The notions of deference to authority that were ingrained in me and which I in turn internalized may have played a significant role in the dynamics of my work culture environments.

Balancing the expectations to be deferential to authority while demonstrating my aptitude to excel in the work culture created tensions and difficulties along the lines of power and authority. While I may have started my professional career deferential to those individuals in power who employed me, I experienced developmental growth in my identity as a working professional. As several of my interviewees reflected back to me, my professional identity was characterized by my vision and ability to guide and lead.

In my coming into being with my identity in the work place, I started to let go of the worker mentality and took on more of the professional mentality. Regardless, I continued to struggle with the political organization of higher education institutions. I continued to struggle with leaders who exercised authority over me as a subordinate and who were not willing to create space in the cultural environment that made room for my changing work identity.

I am still in the margins of being identified and treated as a commonplace worker. In spite of this I worked to establish a space and place among those recognized as professionals. I was expected to be selfless and silent. As a worker, I was expected to give my all without appearing to be selfish and demanding. I was not supposed to need recognition of the value of my professional identity in the work culture. The reflections

of my interviewees highlighted social inequities I still faced in my work environment culture as a working professional. Central core values of service and self-sacrifice, even if it was to my own detriment, were evident in my identity as a working professional. This pattern of values would also appear in my identity as a mother.

### **Mother**

Out of all my identities examined in this research, being a mother was the one that felt most natural and comfortable for me. From past experiences of having to take care of others early on in my family of origin, I knew how to be a caretaker and nurturer. Motherhood was the pinnacle point under which all my other identities branched. This sentiment was reflected throughout all the interviews.

Fiercely Driven summed up her experience of my identity as a mother this way, "...what stands out to me is just you being a parent, a mom. That you just really enjoy being a parent, you really love your kids, spending time with them, and just all about them." C. J. also shared, "I think that role-slash-identity for you is one that you just weren't going to sacrifice at all. Regardless of whatever drama was at work, or what needed to be done for class, or anything like that, that you just weren't going to sacrifice that. ...That's been one that has not waived at all."

The following image, Figure 2. Mi corazón, is a photo from an assignment from one of my doctoral classes. The project was to create a cajita that reflected our salient identities. For this class project I used a box to create a three dimensional story board that reflected identities I felt were salient to me. Both my external, public identities and my internal, personal identities were represented. My external public identities were on the outside of the box (etic representation), while my internal personal identities were on



the interior of the box (emic representation).

The photo specifically is of one of the interior spaces of my cajita storyboard box. This image represented the saliency of my identity as a mother. Being a mother to my children provided me with an added sense of purpose in my life. They brought sparkle and excitement to my life. They were my life companions as we faced adventures, challenges, and changes together as a family unit. The photo insert reflected one of the few times that I, as a working professional mother, had managed to take time away from work to orchestrate a family trip. That photograph commemorated that particular family vacation the three of us took together. I recall the challenges of making that trip on my own with my kids being so young. It was important to me because it was important to me as a mother to help create positive memories of our shared life journeys as a family.

Having my children provided me with opportunities to demonstrate the type of positive, healthy self-care and respect that I wanted to experience in my own life. I saw my relationship to my children from a sense of nurturing them spiritually, socially, and physically. The image of the holiday meal with traditional Filipino foods reflected my ethnic Filipino cultural roots. Being able to cook Filipino foods represented one of the few socio-cultural ties from my country of origin that I maintained. Food was also one of the major ways our Filipino cultural community expressed caring, nurturance, and love.



Figure 2. Mi corazón. A photo of a portion of my story board box titled mi corazón, from my class cajita project. The montage illustrated my interpretation of my identity as a mother.

### Cultural Expectations

The value of parents sacrificing for one's children is certainly one that was reinforced by my cultural upbringing. As a Filipino, the notion of parental self-sacrifice was one that expressed itself over and over again in my cultural and familial upbringing in the U.S. The idea that parents took on work obligations in order to support their children and provide them with a better life, even if that work required long absences from their own families, was not uncommon within my ethnic culture.

More than just working long hours, many other Filipino families, whose stories I came to know over the course of my lifetime, had parents who worked in other states or

even in other countries. It was not uncommon for those Filipino parents to work long stretches of time, sometimes months or years, separated from their own children in order to provide for their families' financial security. My own family of origin was typical in that regard.

My parents moved to the United States, secured work, established a home, and raised their family far away from their own families of origin. It was accepted as normal when my father took on work in other states or another country. In fact, his trek to the U.S. started long before my mother or my other siblings joined him there.

I was brought to the United States at the age of four by one of my aunts. By then I was old enough so I could go to kindergarten in a public school system. That was when I met my parents and several of my older siblings. Throughout my childhood and adulthood, both my parents worked full-time and sometimes in different states, at least twice in different countries. Self-sacrifice as a parent was an overriding theme in my life, both in terms of my experiences with my own family of origin and choices I made with my own children.

From my cultural, familial, and family's religious background, I was raised with the expectation that I would someday be a mother. As a Filipina woman, I was always expected to take on a role as a caretaker – caretaker to my father and brothers, and caretaker to the rest of the family as the youngest daughter in the family. There was never any question, or room for doubt that I would be a caretaker and a mother. My self-identity and freedoms that I might have expected from growing up in the United States, as opposed to the conservative culture back home in the Philippines, were sidelined to reinforce expectations of my caretaker and motherhood roles for my family.

### **The Balancing Act**

Although I chose to start my own family later in my life than some of my other childhood friends, motherhood was always at the center of the intersections of my multiple identities. My interviewees all reflected that my role as a mother was one that I clearly was not going to sacrifice or be less of because it was clearly the identity that gave me my greatest joy. My identity as a mother reflected a balance between being someone for children and to my children, and being someone for myself and to myself.

I made career choices to provide for my children's financial, personal, and educational security. I was also intentional about creating a nurturing relationship with my children. I made decisions about how I spent my time and what sacrifices I needed to make in order to be actively present, caring, and supportive of my children. Taking on different work opportunities and engaging in my online doctoral program were all decisions I made to be all for my children. My relationship with my children grounded me and served as the central core where my multiple identities intersect. Motherhood was the fulcrum of the balancing act of my multiple identities.

My children experienced the culture environments of my various work experiences across the years. They sometimes went to work events with me, and in some instances assisted me during work events. They shared my journey as a doctoral student with me. We did homework together and studied for tests together as a family of students. There were countless nights when they slept in my study while I stayed up studying, reading, and writing for my schoolwork. They became my constant companions on this journey as we learned to co-navigate the complexities of intersections of my multiple identities.

I grew up in cultural environments and relationships where I felt my self-identity was subjugated to fulfill expectations of my familial caretaker role and to meet the needs of others at work. However, having my children and becoming their mother gave me permission to embrace my own self-identity. In honoring who my children are as individuals, they taught me to honor myself as an individual outside of my service role to others.

From all my cultural environments—work, home, and school—my children were the ones who most holistically and most consistently accepted the messy intersections of all my identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national. In the eyes of my children, I was all things. As a mother, I choose to have a relationship with my children, to respect them as individuals, and involve them in my life journey. My children are my chosen fellow travelers on this journey of life. They are my heart.

My children shared my journey of a thousand miles with me—traveling into uncharted territory when I accepted different jobs, pursuing a doctorate degree, and dealing with significant, personal changes in our family. They were in the same boat as me. From my own immigration experience as a child, I felt the need to protect my children as we navigated the border crossings, as we traversed the different cultural environments. Together we were constructing meanings out of our experiences and creating our truths based on those challenges and experiences. The following is one of my journal observations dated March 28, 2015 reflecting this experience for me.

For you, for us

I'm doing this for us baby, for you and for me.

I need you to trust. I need you to trust, *hell*, even when I can't  
 ...because I need your trust to help me carry this through. This is for *us*.  
 I know baby, this shit is scary. It's scary for the both of us.  
 I disappear to work, I disappear to work on school, I disappear...I disappear...  
 Just like when you were a little baby, you got scared when I disappeared  
 and you didn't know when I'd be back.  
 Baby, I'll be back. I've got to do this. I'm doing this for us.  
 Three years. Three years. Three years. A trimester in triplicate  
 Three years—the tears, the fears...gotta' hold on until, until...the end is near.

### **Reflecting on the Culture of the Home Environment**

My coworkers and fellow student cohorts who participated in this dissertation experience with me met and interacted with my children on various occasions throughout the years. It was clear to others in my work and school environments that my identity as a mother was central to my being. Rufus Berlin described his experience of my interactions with my children as, “giving, loving, and understanding.” He reflected, “You just let your kids do their thing. Be who they are. ...by negotiating, and communicating, and treating them to some degree as participants in their own growth and their own day-to-day activities, I think that's a fantastic example of a parent.”

Reflected throughout all the interviews was the centrality of my identity as a mother. Singularly, this was the identity around which all my other roles revolved. Motherhood served as the central hub from which all my multiple identities branched. Comments from interviewees spoke to an evident, unwavering commitment to motherhood and a willingness to sacrifice myself for the sake of my children. As Meg

Dolly expressed it, "...when you have that child, you become all things to one person (your child)."

The women I interviewed all expressed the notion that the role of motherhood carried with it socio-cultural expectations of self-sacrifice for one's children. For the women of color, in particular, there was a common sentiment that mothers are expected to sacrifice in order to give their best and give their all for the children, to be all for the children. These women of color all had experiences of caring for children, either their own, from blended families. Even in the case of the single African-American female interviewee, she had experience being the primary caregiver for the children of extended family members. All three interviewees who were women of color spoke of maternal sacrifice and balancing all of life's other obligations to the point of self-detriment.

For the women of color involved in this autoethnographic study, social expectations for being a mother were a given and not anything that could be negotiated. Taylor B. responded, "I find that presents an interesting question (on the identity of being a mother) maybe because you're self-less. You understand that there is sacrifice, but it's all to give even more, as much as you can."

She reflected, "You are mother before you are anything else. You put that absolutely first." She shared this observation of me as a mother, "I can tell you just so enjoy it. Your joy is with your children." Being a mother is not without its difficulties and challenges in balancing expectations and identities.

As Meg Dolly put it, "...it's a challenge to feel confident in the choices that you're making (as a mother) and still be able to kind of hold on to a piece of yourself." She went further to say, "...we feel guilty about doing something for ourselves, even

though it may enrich their (kids') lives in the long run. If it feels like you're doing for yourself as we, as mothers, are told at every turn, 'If it's not for your kids, it's not worth doing.' We are kind of boxed...and your life comes last."

Fiercely Driven expressed a mother's self-sacrifice this way, "...that's what people (mothers) do. Whenever you have kids, it's all about them and all the sacrifices and the things that you do, are all for them at the end of the day." She emphasized the responsibilities are all-encompassing, "So you gotta make the household, you gotta manage the kids, activities, your work, school work, intern, Life."

As C. J. surmised, "I'm sure there were certain conditions you made to make that work so time together was...fruitful." There were many days and nights my children and I did homework together and studied for tests together. My children moved into my study the first two years of the doctoral program, in order to carve out time with me. They slept in my study, literally every night of those first two years. They were on the floor, asleep beside me while I stayed up studying, reading, writing, learning, and living my identity as a student.

The photo below, Figure 3. The study: A still life, was of one of those countless nights during the first two years of the doctoral program. This is how my children demonstrated their strong desire for us to be able to spend time together, even if it was just to be asleep in the same space where I spent so many late nights and early mornings doing my schoolwork. They kept me company through those long nights and all throughout my doctoral program journey. Although they each had their own rooms, they chose to sleep in sleeping bags on the floor for two years straight.





Figure 3. The study: A still life. Photograph taken on one of the many nights my children slept on the floor of my study while I stayed up to do my schoolwork.

My relationship with my children helped to keep my multiple identities as a working mother student tethered together. More than anyone else in any of my cultural environments—work, home, and school—they shared the lived experiences within the messy intersectionality of my multiple identities. The photo below, Figure 4. Keeping up with Children: A mudra, was a note my daughter left for me on my study desk. She specifically indexed a mudra meditation meant for keeping up with children that she requested I make sure I exercise.

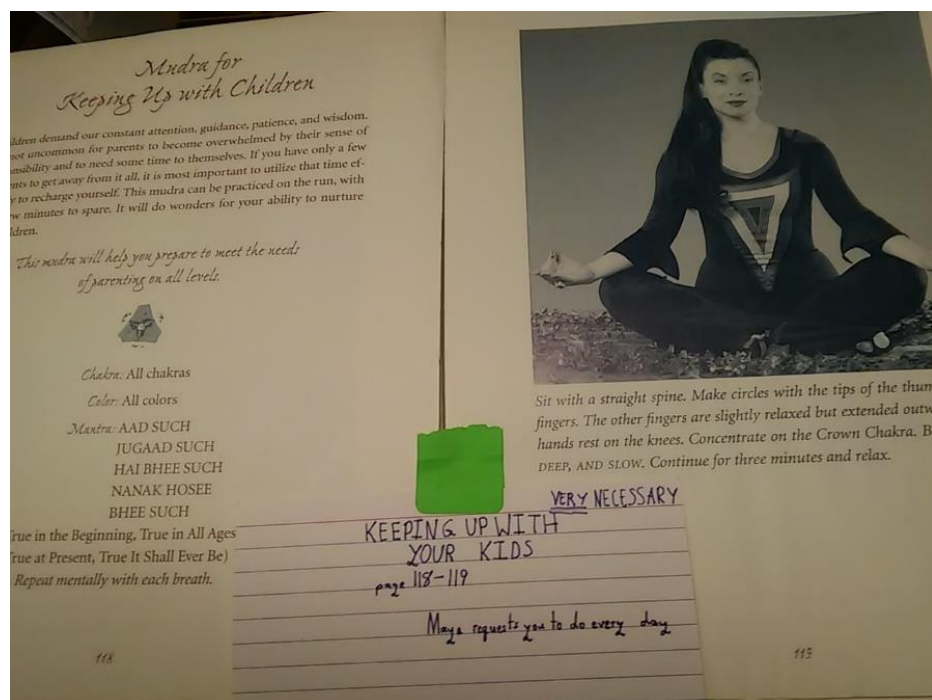


Figure 4. Keeping up with Children: A mudra. Photograph taken of the note my daughter left for me on my study desk to remind me to be more fully present as a mother.

Having my children and becoming their mother was an experience that gave me permission to embrace my multiple self-identities. In honoring who my children are as individuals, they created a space in my life that allowed me to honor myself as an individual. From all my cultural environments—work, home, and school—my children were the ones who most holistically and most consistently accepted the messy intersections of all my identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, foreign-born national. In the eyes of my children, I was all things. In being all things with my children, I was able to be whole.

### **Social Inequalities**

Even though my children accepted all of my multiple identities, this by no means made it any easier to be a mother navigating the demands of all the responsibilities of my multiple identities. Jim Swarthow shared his reflection, “Yes, it would be easy, or a lot

easier, if you were a student. But you're not a student. You're a parent first. You're an employee first. Then you get to be a student, after all the other responsibilities are done. You get to be, so it's not like (pursuing this doctoral degree) is your (only) life. While most people are getting a Ph.D. it has to be their life."

All of my interviewees reflected that I was competent, dedicated, and determined to do my best to represent the best of me in my roles as a working professional, mother, and student. My intent in all those identities was to position myself to be able to provide for my children and be a strong model for them. However, one cannot deny that the intersectionality of all those multiple identities was chaotic and messy.

When I started my doctoral program and later accepted a different position that represented a step up the professional ladder, these two opportunities added layers of complexity to the challenge of balancing my responsibilities. As much as possible, I tried to get my professional and school work done during hours that my children were respectively either in school during the day or asleep during the night. I was dedicated to ensuring that the time I spent with my children was quality time spent primarily focused on them.

Jim Swarthow explained his experience of me as a mother this way, "I would put you in more of the male role. ...you work a lot of hours. You were, I would say, the breadwinner. You were buying the house. You were doing all that, but at the same time then you would have to go back to that role of being a mom. ...overall, I would say it was hard for you."

It was clear to others that at some level I sacrificed self-care in order to continue to be all things as the mother to my children. Others in my work, home, and school

environments could see that. Fiercely Driven shared in one of her recollections, “(Y)ou go to bed already late. I saw your text and I thought, ‘What is she doing up? And she’s going to be up at four o’clock?’.”

Jim Swarthow reflected, “I mean there’s the impression, which is an accurate impression, that you are scheduled full. You work long hours. Get home, take care of the kids. You’ve got all these things that you take care of. That’s it! Try to get some sleep. Get up. Repeat. Rinse and repeat. And then on top of that you’re gonna throw in what could easily take up time to push those things out. ... You didn’t quit your job. You still have your kids. You don’t sleep anymore is what I’m thinking.”

The pursuit of the doctoral program was new territory, for me and for my children. Education and learning were always cornerstones in my family, something on which we focused and in which we excelled. None of us expected how heavy a toll being a doctoral student would have on our family lives. That was the part for which I was least prepared. Especially difficult was the emotional toll we experienced due to missing significant milestones we wanted to be able to share as a family—missed birthdays, missed school performances, and missed graduations.

At times it was the quiet moments with my children that spoke the loudest about how difficult this journey was for them and for me. The summer sessions of the doctoral program always fell on the week of my daughter’s birthday. The following is a journal observation dated March 25, 2015 that captured a moment when my daughter was expressing her deep sense of loss and grief about my absence in her life because of my school obligations as a doctoral student. This was how my daughter voiced her experience of what it meant to her for me to be a doctoral student.

...and then there was that time...

And then there was that time when I held my daughter while she cried hard for an hour. She was telling me about her sense of loss and grief, she lost me to this program.

I'm never there for her anymore.

I'm never able to spend time with her anymore.

I don't keep my promises the same way anymore.

I missed her double-digit birthday. (Our summer intensive week is always on her birthday week.) No one did anything on her birthday.

I'm always missing her birthday.

I'm not there for her anymore.

I knew how to be an efficient professional. I knew how to be a nurturing mother. I knew how to be a smart student. In that moment with my daughter, the intersectionality of those multiple identities felt messy, painful, and chaotic.

In the past I knew how to manage to be all things and meet my responsibilities in the cultural environments of work, home, and school separately. However, I struggled and felt I did not know what it took to continue to be all things in all three environments and be whole in the process. Meg Dolly, Fiercely Driven, and Taylor B. who were cis-gender females and persons of color, all spoke of social expectations and pressures to be all things in their multiple identities. They too felt the pressures to be able to navigate the intersectionalities of their multiple identities.

All three of my White interviewees, one cis-gender female and two cis-gender males, spoke consistently about compromising expectations of motherhood/parenthood in

order to carry out the other multiple identities. C.J. had a blended family which consisted of adult step-children and a young daughter who was her biological child. Jim Swarthow also had a blended family with one young step daughter and one young son who was his biological child. He described himself as “not a traditional divorced dad.” He was the stay-at-home parent with his former spouse. He described his parental role as, “I was the mom.” Rufus Berlin was one of two of my interviewees who was not a parent.

Both C.J. and Jim Swarthow expressed having a choice in how they fulfilled the roles of their multiple identities. Moreover, they both insisted on having the right to make the choice to compromise on expectations of motherhood and not sacrifice one’s selfhood entirely because one is a parent. Jim Swarthow insisted, “...it’s going to be one or the other...You want to be all of them, but you gotta make a choice.” He shared, “You’re allowed to have (a choice). ...in some ways most people say they don’t have a choice out loud, (but) there’s a choice. You’re trying to make that choice to have it all, (make) these locks fit together.”

From her own perspective C.J. observed, “...at some point I just decided I’m not going to be able to give 100% and that was how I reconciled some of that (managing responsibilities related to our multiple identities). ...That was really hard for you to understand that you can’t be a mother 100% of the time, or a professional 100% of the time...It’s kind of this weird puzzle piece of trying to fit it all in. ...I feel like for you everything had to be 100% of the time, or giving it your all all the time for every different thing.” C.J. spoke of making a personal decision to compromise on her multiple identities—professional, mother, and student—in order to navigate them and have some semblance of balance.

Both Jim Swarthow and C.J. spoke of the right to choose to be less than 100% in each of their multiple identities in order to navigate those intersectionalities. Being working parents were identities we all three struggled with and shared. Adding school to that life balance formula was a notion we struggled to fathom and comprehend.

Rufus Berlin, although not a parent, spoke about the necessity for self-care in order to navigate the responsibilities of life and have balance. He shared, “We need to be selfish for our own mental and physical health. And you...don’t have that many options. Well, parents don’t have that many options to begin with, good parents (that is). ...(Y)ou have even fewer options now...fewer options with school and work.”

Jim Swarthow was one of two of my interviewees who was not a student during the period of data collection. He responded to the idea of being a student in this way, “I was very shocked that you are back in school. Very shocked. Extremely shocked that you went back to school. Just knowing how much you had put on yourself, how much was on your plate I was like, ‘Are you nuts? You’re adding a (Ed.D.) on to this?’” Adding the identity of student to the challenges of already being a working parent at times certainly did feel nuts.

### **Summary of Mother Theme**

I found that my ethnic cultural background deeply influenced my identity as a mother. Based on the dual influences of my Catholic, Filipino background I never even questioned the expectation that I would someday be a mother. My identity as a mother was so central to who I was across my work, home, and school environments. All my interviewees, whether they knew me from work, or school, or both knew my kids and witnessed experiences of me as a mother.

Being a mother came with socio-culturally prescribed expectations of self-sacrifice even to the point of self-detriment. From my experiences of my own family of origin, I learned to sacrifice for the care of my family. Just like my parents before me, sacrifice even meant committing to long stretches of absences in order to pursue opportunities for a better future. It was not physical distance that separated me from my children but rather time, time commitments in living out my multiple identities. Even pursuing a doctorate degree was an act of self-less motherhood in order to provide my children with better future opportunities.

### **Student**

The doctorate in a hybrid online educational program was my fourth degree. At that point I had been a student, from kindergarten to the doctorate program, for more than thirty years of my life. Therefore, the student identity was one that I was used to being entrenched in and one I embraced willingly.

Although I was not always comfortable in my competency as a student, it was an identity that I enjoyed for the challenges and opportunities for intellectual growth that pursuing an education afforded me. I have always been the type of student to take the process of learning very seriously and applied myself earnestly to the mastery of my schoolwork. It was in the reflective journey of this doctoral program that I began to more fully embrace my competencies and skills as a student.

### **Cultural Expectations**

Being a student and getting an education was always paramount to me. My father's own family of origin highly prized education. His mother was a teacher before becoming a wife and mother. Four of his six siblings were college educated, including



himself. Their career paths followed the stereotypes expected within the traditional culture of my Catholic Filipino upbringing: priest, educator, engineer, doctor, nurse. It was clear the value my father's family placed on education influenced his own values when it came to how my siblings and I were raised.

Both of my parents were college educated in the Philippines. They came to the U.S. seeking better career and financial opportunities. My parents always insisted that an opportunity for a good education in the U.S. was all they could ever give my siblings and me. No matter what else we lacked growing up, my parents found a way to ensure that my five siblings and I completed college. Given the high esteem that a college education held for my parents, they expected all of us to excel academically.

In so many ways we matched the stereotype of the Asian student—smart, driven, studious, high achievers. I internalized the familial and cultural pressures to be a good student in order to reflect well on my family and my ethnic community. In my family growing up, A's were the acceptable standard, earning B's meant we needed to work harder. Placing in the honor roll for grades was not seen as a particularly exceptional accomplishment but rather simply meeting a basic expectation.

I vividly remember the shame and frustration I felt at graduation, after earning my first Bachelor's degree, when I tried to explain to my father that while I graduated from the Honors College program, I did not graduate with academic honors. My 3.4 GPA fell short of meeting that particular distinction. The pressure to excel came not only from a need to reflect well on my family and ethnic community, but also to build the college's institutional reputation to successfully graduate a diverse population of students.

In my doctoral-level program, I felt a lot of pressure to succeed since we were part of the first cohort. Ours was a new program created by the university system to support the professional development and advancement of staff. Our success would reflect on the wisdom of those who supported the creation of the program. We had our own personal commitment to promote the value of our professions within the culture of higher education. The ability of the first cohort to persist and excel meant paving the way for other cohorts who would embark on the program after us.

Being students in a new hybrid, online doctoral program was a learning experience for all of us—students, faculty, and administrators alike. We were all navigating the nuances of the blended cultural spheres of doctoral education programs and a hybrid online learning environment. We had to learn to navigate the language, tools, systems, and cultural cues as students in an online learning community.

Rufus Berlin, who worked with me in an online educational program and who was also an online doctoral student at the time of this autoethnographic study, emphasized this sentiment, “(Y)ou and I both know being in, having an online course does not mean you get to run around in the house...and then occasionally post to a discussion. I mean, studies have shown that online courses actually take more time, more effort, and more energy than a traditional face-to-face course.”

We had to learn how to function as a class during asynchronous online discussions in order to engage one another in scholarly discourse that would normally be relegated to the in-class experience. We had to navigate the nuances of social etiquette as we learned to express our thoughts to discussion posts and online responses, and then relearn different rules for etiquette our in-class discussion settings.

For example, for me the number of responses each cohort's post received became equated with the level of engagement and connection that others felt to that cohort. The number of responses became an indication of the level to which people were engaging with one another. I interpreted that from my own personal perspective and biases as the more my peers responded to a post, the more accepted, and understood that person was in the cohort.

As I reflected on the question of my level of acceptance and integration into the social community of the cohort, I began to review the discussion board posts. I counted how many times each cohort received a response to their post, even if it was simply an acknowledgement that they posted. There was a consistent pattern across classes and across semesters throughout the doctoral program of their being only a few responses to my discussion board contributions. Looking at the log-in activities and seeing concrete evidence of the lack of responses to my posts and responses further reinforced a sense of isolation, of being singled out in the margins as a student in our hybrid online program.

### **The Balancing Act**

As Fiercely Driven succinctly stated, "The struggle is real." For me the struggle did not come from the learning process of being a student, the conflict came from navigating the intersectionality of multiple identities, responsibilities, and expectations. To that regards, Fiercely Driven observed, "Much balance is needed." As Meg Dolly expressed it, "(Y)ou didn't give up anything to take on that additional (identity). ...So, you didn't get rid of all of the weight (of all other responsibilities) that you already had when you added some massive weight of the doctoral program."

The physical and emotional struggles I experienced as a doctoral student felt similar to how I experienced my pregnancies in becoming a mother. The long anticipated gestation period filled with uncertainty, anxieties, and physical and emotional pains. These experiences were paralleled in my pregnancies and the three year experience of being a doctoral student. In the following journal entry entitled What to expect when you're expecting... I drew parallels to both experiences. Being a student required so much of me physically and emotionally, just as pregnancy had. Being a doctoral student changed me physically and emotionally, just as becoming a mother had. This journal observation dated March 28, 2015 reflected on my personal experiences with some of the struggles of being in a doctoral program.

What to expect when you're expecting...

The gestation time for this degree is if far longer than either of those last two pregnancies combined, the delivery process that much harder, more painful with the promise that this experience could be miraculous and rewarding in some way too...

Yet, being in this program is like preparing for motherhood all over again.

reading everything given to me to make sure I'm prepared for the experience

what to expect when you're expecting...

every *tri*-semester (summer, fall, and spring)

But the truth is, I'll never be fully prepared.

the birthing through this doctoral program is just as  
 unpredictable, uncontrolled,  
 just as messy and painful  
 the physical discomfort of carrying around so much  
 extra weight  
 not just from all the books and papers  
 I'm constantly carrying around  
 not just the extra body fat I've gained from  
 this crazy sedentary lifestyle  
 like being on bedrest prescribed by all the doctors in  
 this program  
 -sit/study, sit/read, sit/research, sit/reflect, sit/write,  
 sit/write, sit/write

-shit

-it's not just the stress weight I've packed on

-not just carrying the weight of burden on  
 my shoulders

-to represent *my family* well

-to represent *my people* well

-to represent *my institutional community*  
 well

-to represent *all Others* well

the sleepless, late nights of

staying up to *tend* to this baby,  
 this three year doctoral experience  
 the early morning risings because  
 this baby, *this experience*  
 wants and cries for attention  
 the dry-heaves, the *not-just-for-*  
*mornings-anymore*  
 morning sickness of stress-induced  
 nausea  
 the forgetfulness of  
*mommy-mind syndrome* because  
 my brain is overfull  
 from studying, reading, researching,  
 reflecting, writing, writing, writing  
 I sacrifice my sleep, my time, my  
 health, my mind, my body,  
 my soul...this gestation

Rufus Berlin reflected on the reality of balancing being a student, "...one word for me is sacrifice. You have sacrificed a lot for this degree and the time commitment that it's taken on you. And of course, we go into it with eyes open. We're not, you know, four year-olds on the playground. We understand (the challenges), but it has seemed to me that it has been a struggle." Because being a student was not our only single identity, he further added that in my case, "What being a student has forced you to

do is unprioritize being a parent. ...There are times where being a parent has to come second and that's hard."

### **Reflecting on the Culture of the School Environment**

I took my educational identity as a student just as seriously as I undertook my other identities. I was driven as a student. While Meg Dolly and I were work colleagues I took classes for my personal enrichment before embarking on my doctoral program studies. She reflected that, "even as just a student taking classes, you were an intense student. You took what you were doing very seriously even though it wasn't for a particular program. It was for your own enrichment. It was still a very serious undertaking. ...And so I think the anxiety (you) feel that is a motivating factor for you. It pushes you to be the student who you are. You use that to elevate your level as a student. ...you're going to do whatever it takes to make sure that you come out with a grade that reflects your best work."

Speaking to my dedication and work ethic as a student Meg Dolly further reflected, "You would not be able to live with yourself if you put in a half-hearted effort or even if you put in seventy-five percent. You have to do that. That's the way you're wired!" C.J. used the word "diligent" to describe me as a student in the cohort. C.J. reflected that as a doctoral student, "You're reading to be like, 'I want to make sure I get this, that I can apply it and know it.' ...You definitely give 110%. ...You're definitely more thoughtful and articulate about things you're writing online...that's why I said you're more diligent."

As a student, I reflected my understanding of our academic discussions through the lens of my different cultural experiences and multiple identities. While I may not

have spoken up often, when I spoke I was intentionally careful and thoughtful with my words. Taylor B. observed, “(Y)ou don’t waste your words either. ... You only say something when you really having something to say.” She reflected on how she felt when I spoke up and participated in class discussions saying, “Catherine’s saying something and I need to hear this. ... I want to hear this. And there’s some respect that comes with that as well. ... I saw you as someone I could learn from because you would cause me to look from a different lens. ... I tend to stay surface, and you dive deep.”

My propensity to listen, analyze, synthesize, and summarize in classroom discussions reflected skills honed during my previous career as a counselor. In classes and on discussion board, I observed, integrated, and reflected with a practiced ease. As C.J. observed, “I think often times you can be more the reflective person in the (classroom and online learning) space. Maybe that’s more of the counseling background. You like to sit and listen, and kind of synthesize everything that’s going on. You’re able to say something that kind of summarizes. That tends to be more of a counseling-based practice, I guess.”

As a visual learner, I sought to create images with my words in order to convey my thoughts and how I understood the implications of the academic constructs we were discussing. In my doctoral experiences, I often tried to create an image with my words. Often times I incorporated pictures and images to convey my reactions to the readings or discussion prompts. I wanted people to visually see what I was saying. Taylor B. shared, “you speaking about things with us would come off as somewhat like, almost like spoken word. It was just like poetry. Your words were like poetry. I know it for a fact that I



was in kind of awe. I was excited. I always loved to hear you speak. That's why I got so quiet."

Just as Rufus Berlin shared he thought I was intimidating in the work environment due to my approach to my work, Taylor B. shared that she likewise found me intimidating in the school environment due to my approach to school and the learning experience. She openly shared, "You intimidated me. You did. I was intimidated because the way you took information and processed, and then were able to convey your thoughts about it. And the words that you would use presented a visual, like imagery that was so colorful, so lively. Honestly, listening to you in class was intimidating...everyone would just say, 'yea,' you know? Catherine would speak and there would be the holy hush."

### **Social Inequalities**

When I spoke of my struggles about the learning experience as a student, I was speaking to my anxieties and concerns about measuring up to peoples' expectations and acceptance of me. When I spoke of my struggles, my student cohorts thought I was questioning my intelligence. The following journal entry The holy hush/Lost in translation reflected how it felt to me being on the receiving end of the reactions and responses, or rather the moments of silence, from my cohorts. I perceived people's silent reactions as isolation and rejection from my cohorts and faculty.

The original portion When I Speak was written on April 15, 2015. It was after my interview with Taylor B. on November 19, 2015 when she shared her perspective and experience of those moments of silence that I wrote the second half, When you Speak. The second addition to this journal observation served as a counterpoint to the original

April 2015 reflection. The two pieces side-by-side represented a call and response reflection that illustrated how the meaning of those moments of silence was so very different because of our respective personal cultural filters. I was interpreting the moments of silence in class based on my past experiences of being met with silence as a foreigner and my resulting feelings of isolation and rejection. Those socio-cultural experiences of my past filtered my interpretations of my present identities. In my internalized translation, I did not understand the respect others meant to convey in those moments of silence in the midst of our class discussions.

The holy hush/Lost in translation

When I speak...  
*When* I speak...  
 When *I* speak...  
 When I *speak*...  
 ...there is silence...  
 I am muted by your silence...  
 I am told, I do not speak as a scholar  
 I do not engage as a scholar  
 I do not carry myself as a scholar  
 When I speak, I make no point you recognize  
 When I speak, you respond to me with  
     nothing  
 yet you tell me I must speak out more  
 Why? To be shattered by the utter silence of  
     your silence?  
 yet you tell me you think I'm smart  
     when I share that I struggle  
     this blasé response is not the same  
     as understanding my struggle  
 If your response to my expression of my fear  
 is to reassure me that you think I am smart,  
 then inwardly do you think that I question  
     my intelligence?  
     ...  
 When I speak...  
 When *I* speak...  
 When I *speak*...  
 When I speak...

When you speak...  
*When* you speak...  
 When *you* speak...  
 When you *speak*...  
 you paint pictures  
 of images, of ideas  
 colorful interpretations  
 that challenge us to see the world  
     from  
 an "other" perspective  
  
 Your thoughts go deep  
 You open up different vistas  
 You give us a different lens and say,  
 "Look at it from *this* view"  
  
 You seek to understand, summarize,  
     synthesize  
 To see applications  
 You show us a world from your eyes  
     ...  
     ...  
 When you speak...  
*When* you speak...  
 When *you* speak...  
 When you *speak*...  
 You speak,  
     alone

you do not respond to me  
 you do not recognize me  
 you do not hear my struggle  
 you do not understand my *otherness*.

We listen,  
 a reverence for your perspective  
 Our silence,  
 the holy hush

In face-to-face classes, it was easier to attribute the lack of response to time constraints—not everyone could possibly have the time to speak and respond to everyone else within the class time limit. It was not the same in the online environment. Time restrictions did not carry the same parameters. It would have been easier to find the time to respond to everyone in some form or fashion, to acknowledge their contribution to the discussion. Silences and lack of responses in the asynchronous online discussion environment translated to me as being unheard, not understood, and not integrated into the social cohort group.

I experienced the silences in the classroom environments through the filters of my experiences as a foreign-born, first generation immigrant acculturating to a new culture. Those experiences were similar to when I was greeted with silence when I had a hard time making myself understood in social situations where I was not like anyone else. Having spent most of my life now in the South, those moments still happen. Even after several decades of being in the U.S. Even after several decades of being a working professional in successively higher positions in higher education, I still sometimes felt like a foreigner.

The story remained the same. I came to the U.S. as a young child and was immediately plunged into public school and expected to assimilate. Just as I was the only non-White/non-African-American in my classes from kindergarten to high school, it was the same in my doctoral program. I plunged into the doctoral program facing the same expectations from others that I would assimilate.

No one in the school looked like me or sounded like me. Just as I had to learn the language and culture to attempt to assimilate as a Filipino child growing up in rural southern town in the U.S., I had to learn the language and culture of student affairs in a doctoral-level program. As a child, people responded to me with silence when they did not understand me. Throughout the doctoral program experience, I equated the silences both in the classroom and on the online discussions as evidence that other student cohorts did not understand me or what I was saying. I questioned my sense of belonging, inclusion, and acceptance throughout almost the entire doctoral program experience.

I struggled to feel acculturated within the doctoral program with student cohorts and faculty who spoke a language of student affairs, theory, and mentoring that was nearly completely foreign to me. The diversity of their experiences were not similar to mine. I was awash in the same apprehensions and stressors I faced as a first-generation immigrant coming into a new land and a new culture. I faced expectations to fully assimilate. I felt like a foreigner in the cultural environment of the doctoral educational program struggling to get people to understand what I was saying, coming from such a different ethnic and personal perspective.

Taylor B. helped to shed light on this issue for me saying, “(When you) said something- Catherine is speaking, everyone got quiet. And it would seem like what may have felt like, ‘Well what’s going on?’ And are people, ‘Do they understand where I’m coming from?’ Yea, we all got it. It was like there, just let Catherine answer it all because she’s just really tapping into this and saying it in a way that no one else could ever say.”

I interpreted those moments of silence and lack of responses as silent rejection and isolation and as yet one more example of how I was so different from everyone else

in my program. Taylor B. explained it was a response of awed silence, respect, and a certain amount of reference for my differentness. She offered this as a reflection, “There were little comments of things that were happening but I think that, if (your) perception was that you were alone in that and no one was getting it, you may have missed the ‘Wow!’” She challenged my interpretation of my experiences with the cohort as a product of my own personal filters and history with racial bias as a foreign-born national experiencing cultural assimilation.

### **Summary of Student Theme**

How my student identity was expressed and experienced was heavily influenced by values I internalized from my family of origin. In my family’s experiences, in particular that of my father’s family, education was a source of social capital. I was always a serious student and took my educational opportunities seriously. I understood the level of sacrifices my parents made to afford me a chance to pursue those opportunities.

My feelings of inadequacy were internalized criticisms from others in my past experiences. Conducting the ethnographic interviews provided me with feedback and reflections that challenged my internalized critical judgments. The development in my identity as a student was one of profound growth over the years. My journals and interviews reflected a change in how I expressed myself as a student, from being uncertain and apologetic to becoming more comfortable with owning my voice and authority through the doctoral program journey. I began to rewrite the internalized criticisms from people in my past and defy their pre-defined expectations of me. I was able hear and receive new translations of those moments of silence, not of social rejection

but of admiration. I was able to embrace my identity as a student from a place of strength.

### **Person of Color/Other**

Person of color was an identity label that I struggled with from the start of this autoethnographic study. In the southern U.S. the label person of color generally brings up the connotation of African-American. In my socio-cultural experiences of living in the southern U.S., the label person of color did not generally include other races in the social conversations around race. Most conversations around racial identity that I heard being discussed, whether in the professional working environment or in the academic environment of my doctoral program, were presented in terms of Black and White. All the conversations I heard about race were about Black America and White America, about African-Americans and Whites.

Growing up in the U.S. in the 1970's and 1980's, I experienced racial identities as Black, White, or Other. Other was used as a generic, catch-all category for all others who were not Black or White. Therefore, as I was not Black or White, I was labeled an Other most of my life. I was treated as an Other, existing somewhere in the marginal fringe outside of both Black and White racial groups.

I perceived being labeled an Other meant that my racial identity was not important to anyone socially or politically. To me being an Other meant that the racial characteristics that represented someone like me did not count. My racial identity was not important enough for society to give enough thought to make a distinct category. As Meg Dolly expressed, "What is an Other? That doesn't even acknowledge anything other than you exist."

The first time the label person of color was openly used in reference to me was on feedback to one of my papers while in the doctoral program. Seeing that label used in reference to myself literally stunned me and caused me to pause and think about how the label person of color could apply to me. Therefore, for the purposes of this autoethnographic study I decided to use person of color/Other to represent that I was still learning how to wear both labels ascribed to me. I was still trying to decide for myself how they fit me.

The artwork, Figure 5 below, entitled Binary came out of a visualizing the self exercise. I sought to represent where I felt I existed in the social conversations around my identity as a person of color/Other. Pointedly, I am not part of a cultural environment that focuses primarily on a binary split of Black and White, of Black America and White America. I could not identify as one or other. I did not fit within the binary split of how race was labeled and discussed socially and politically.

For some individuals I was White enough in my adapted mannerisms that I was allowed to exist within the margins of that cultural group. At other times, I was colored enough in my adapted my mannerisms that I was allowed to exist within the margins of Black culture. The image of the body in the middle represents where I saw myself, not as Black or White. I am represented as an individual with multiple colors to reflect the many facets and complexity of my existence. That body image reflected how I felt about my multiple identities. I placed my multi-color full self in the middle to symbolize my identity as an Other, existing somewhere along the margins of both Black and White.

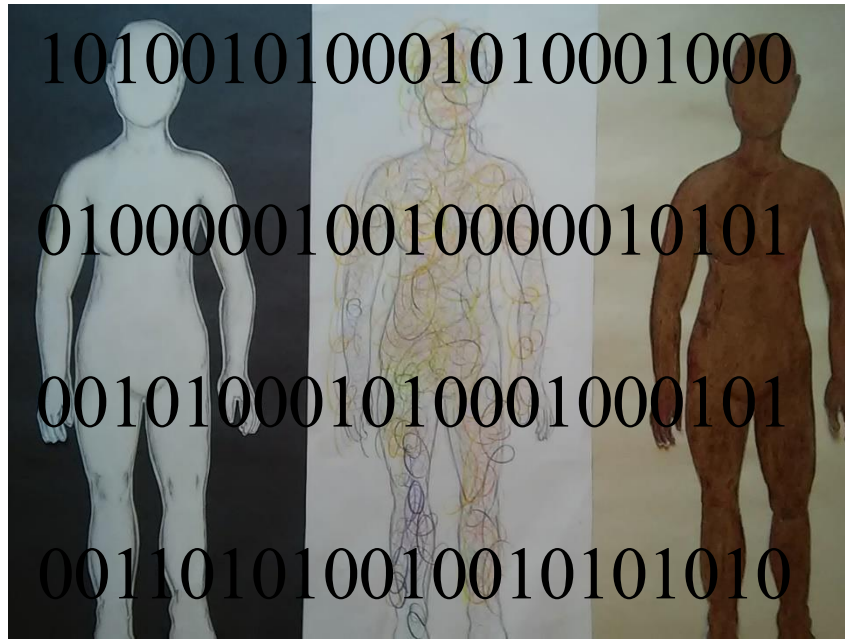


Figure 5. Binary. Artwork titled “Binary” that reflects my conflict in being neither Black nor White in a society that presents the issues of race in terms of Black and White. The title also plays on the term binary, as in the computer codes of zero’s and one’s used to program meaning.

### **Cultural Expectations**

Person of color and Other were labels that were ascribed to me to define my racial identity in the U.S. In the Philippines where I was born, I was part of the dominant cultural group. I was not cognizant of having a racial identity label until I moved to the U.S. and became part of a minority population.

Therefore, as a Filipino national, the labels person of color/Other meant nothing to me from an ethno-cultural perspective. In fact, my light skin complexion made it difficult for other Filipinos and other Asians to identify me as Filipino. I was not dark enough to fit the stereotype image of what others believed a Filipino should look like.



With my facial features and pale complexion, I was often misidentified as Chinese, Japanese, or Korean—even by individuals of those specific ethnic origins.

### **School Environment**

When I was applying for my doctorate program I had a work colleague tell me that I would be accepted because I was a minority. He was certain the institution would choose me in order to represent their commitment to diversity. Already, from the beginning of the process, my place in the cultural setting of my doctoral program environment was framed by my racial identity as a person of color/Other. It was clear upon my arrival and later throughout my years in the program that I was the only Other, among the persons of color.

When there were issues with racial conflicts within the cohorts, the African-American students had each other. Sometimes when group membership for projects was based on self-selection the groups would divide along racial lines. Alliances and cliques often formed among the cohort that were defined along the lines of Black and White, the White students separated from the students of color. Both groups clustered within their own respective comfort zones.

The African-American students leaned on one another for cultural support. I was in-between, crossing borders constantly as a person without my own racial cultural group. From the start until the end of my program, I was still the only person of color among the student cohorts who was not African-American/African.

### **The Balancing Act**

I used my experiences as a person of color/Other to provide context to my points of view and interpretations to explain my worldview. Race in the U.S. was an issue that

was Black and White. I was neither. I lived on the marginal fringe of Black and White, balancing across the borders but never truly belonging. I was a foreigner in the world of Black and White.

Meg Dolly expressed that in-between marginal fringe existence as, “(It’s) a strange anomaly for Asian people. ...I think people put you all somewhere in the middle of this no man’s land but you’re not. It’s in a non-threatening way. It’s in a non-threatening way that you can be a little more widely accepted but in that you lose something because you’re not actually being seen for who you are. So, you have the ability to float between cultures and be accepted equally by all, but not necessarily for who you are.” I was vaguely accepted along the marginal borders as long as I stayed in no man’s land.

Early in my career as an advisor, I was selected and invited to attend a workshop for women of color in higher education who were identified for their potential to aspire to leadership positions in IHE in the U.S. I recall sharing the news of my selection with an African-American male colleague whose response was, “Huh, I wonder why you were chosen.” His reaction and response made it clear he never considered me as a person of color.

My participation in the workshop was an affirmation of my competency, skills, and potential as a minority woman of color in higher education. It made me momentarily visible in the institution. However, that visibility came at a high cost. The response of my administrative leadership when I returned was devastatingly negative. I was told the power in the institution was Black and White, I was clearly neither. My subsequent requests for professional development while I was in that unit were denied. My

supervisor told me I was being too greedy and funds needed to be reserved for the other advisors, all of whom were White or African-American, even though they usually never requested funding for professional development. Administrative leaders used their authority to withhold resources and opportunities that they wanted to reserve for the White and African-American staff members on my unit. As I was neither White nor Black, my status as a person of color/Other was not supported.

As a minority woman of color who excelled I challenged the expectations of administrative leaders and faculty who wanted to pre-define my identity for me (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011) as worker and a silent minority. I was expected to stay silent and invisible. The image I reflected of a self-assured, competent, efficient, professional, leader made me visible in the academy.

### **Reflecting on the Cultural Environment**

At the time of my dissertation study I was the only person of color, non-African American student in four years of student cohorts in my doctoral program. I was used to being a minority among minorities within the cultural environments of school and work. After all these years, however, the experience of racial isolation did not make the struggle to find my place within those cultural environments any easier.

Several of my interviewees struggled to place my racial identity. Fiercely Driven openly shared, “To be honest, I didn’t know forever that you were even a person of color.” She further explained, “I knew you were a different race than myself. ...I didn’t even know, really realize that you were in fact a person of color, that your ethnicity was considered a person of color.” For her, my racial identity never existed in her mind, “I never labeled you. ...I didn’t know that (Filipinos) were people of color.”

Jim Swarthow's response to my identity as a person of color was similar. He explained, "I never saw you as a color." This also meant he never considered my experiences as a person of color/Other, non-African American, non-Hispanic. Nor did he recollect any time that I may have brought up the issue of my racial identity with him in our working relationship. My identity as a person of color/Other was a non-issue in his experience of me in the cultural setting of our shared work environment.

C.J. reflected, "I would say it (your identity as a person of color) presented occasionally, but not as often (as) some of the other people of color in the program articulated." She further observed, "I think when it did present, it was in a pretty substantial way like, 'These are the expectations of my family, of my culture.' So, I think that kind of tied back to some of the challenges (of) being a working mother, and a professional, and a student. You had these expectations because of being a person of color and what those expectations are and how that influenced the other identities."

For C.J., my identity as a person of color/Other was more evident to her in the face-to-face classroom environment versus when we were interacting in our online learning environment. In the online environment, C.J.'s perception of my racial identity was not as strong. My identity as a person of color/Other was less obvious specifically in the online environment. In the online learning environment, I had no color. She shared she was more aware of my self-identifying as a person of color/Other during our synchronous class meeting discussions. As she explained, "(I)t was more impactful to hear you say it versus reading what you're saying. ...Hearing that, I think, is different than reading about something, right? Because you have the tone and seeing the expression or hearing the affect that maybe that identity was having on you at the time."

For others, my identity as a person of color/Other was only slightly less ambiguous. During our interview session when we were discussing my racial identity, Rufus Berlin initially joked, “Well, I always knew you weren’t White!” However, when we delved into the construct deeper and I asked him how he identified me his response was, “It never meant anything.”

Somewhat similarly to how Jim Swarthow, also a White male, responded, Rufus Berlin had not given much thought to the possibility of my experiencing the culture of the work environment as a person of color/Other. When I shared with him that Jim Swarthow responded that he did not see me as any color, Rufus Berlin agreed, “(I)t sounds cliché, but I don’t. I don’t. I haven’t. ...I don’t know if that’s my upbringing, my experiences, or whatever, but I haven’t.”

Only one of my interviewees readily identified me as a person of color/Other. Meg Dolly grew up using a “broader definition” of person of color/Other in her socio-cultural environments. She shared how her own experiences growing up in a military community that included other races, especially Filipinos, made it feel natural to accept me as a fellow person of color/Other. She spoke of an NAACP celebration event at her college that included, involved, and celebrated a broad number of ethnic groups. She described the event as, “we had an African-American house, and a Filipino-American house, and we had all these (other ethnic group houses)...So, we’re doing the program and different organizations were getting awards and they were all organizations of color.”

My identity as a person of color/Other and how that impacted me in my socio-cultural environments was far clearer to Meg Dolly. She recounted a particular incident that illustrated this, “Ok, let’s flash back to when we were getting ready to go to, I want

to say St. Simons maybe. And (he) recommended that we drive down some little dirt roads. And you know, I think our response was, ‘White man, you got a little Black girl and a little Asian girl driving down in the country! We’re not doing that! We are not crazy! Were you trying to get us killed?’...And he looked oblivious to why that would be a problem for us...that is a function of knowing who you (racially) are and where (culturally) you are.”

### **Social Inequalities**

Meg Dolly’s insight emphasized the notion that owning one’s identity required awareness. She explained how I brought my identity as a person of color/Other to her cultural awareness of in this way,

Well, you know, that’s interesting because it’s all about awareness.

And we hear so much about Black and White. And when people say minority or people of color, people automatically think Black.

And for me, you brought to my consciousness to look around and there really aren’t that many Asian people, you know,

professionals working here. You know, we go to conferences, and

we go just out on campus, or what have you, that there were staff positions in particular, you didn’t have a lot of cohorts. You didn’t

have a lot of people (at work) to identify with culturally as an

Asian person. It’s kind of a silent minority almost.

I raised her awareness of my particular experiences of racial isolation in the work cultural environment that was predominantly Black and White. She was able to express empathy and understanding of my underlying sense of isolation. Although I adapted and

was accepted within the African-American group at work, it was clear that I had a different cultural identity from them. As she stated,

people don't really pay attention to the fact that you don't have a large (racial) cohort like everybody else has a large cohort (here). You were just kind of like with us all the time, you and I were together all the time. So, you were just part of us. You know, the minority of being online, the minority of being...women of color. Your experience to me was one of, you didn't make a big deal about it, but one of isolation in a sense that you didn't have a whole lot of people that you can look at and go, 'We can connect culturally. ...I mean, you didn't have that, a strong cultural community.

For Taylor B., being a person of color/Other was an identity we both poignantly shared. As student cohorts we bonded quickly over this shared identity during the very first day at the start of our doctoral program. On that day the seating in the classroom just happened to be arranged in a classic fishbowl style—chairs all around the periphery surrounding a cluster of seats in the middle. Taylor B, and the only other person of color (also an African-American woman) in our cohort, and I all happened to end up sitting together on the inside the fishbowl surrounded by all the other cohort members who happened to be all White.

Taylor B. described the incident over which we bonded in this way, "There were empty seats. ...I know that I felt so much angst about going into that room and sitting down and seeing what I'd gotten myself into. I felt that we sat together in the middle of

that circle, but together, because it was (where) we naturally gravitated towards each other for comfort. ...I didn't feel anything intentional about it but it certainly became intentional once ...that whole realization sank in really, really quickly, 'Oh my gosh! We all happened to sit together in the middle'."

Fishbowl, Figure 6 below, was an art piece I created as an exercise of visualizing the self. The depiction of two black koi and one yellow koi fish surrounded by all white koi in a fishbowl represented that particular incident, the same one recounted by Taylor B. We corralled together, whether out of a conscious or unconscious need to find a comfort zone of support, or by sheer serendipity. It was one of the first incidences where our collective identity as persons of color brought us together and singled us out from the rest of the student cohorts.





Figure 6. Fishbowl. Artwork illustrates one of my early experiences of observing my racial identity within the cohort in my doctoral program.

For me, that incident was a pivotal moment in my experience of wrestling with my racial identity within the cultural context of being in the school environment. I knew that connecting as a person of color/Other with the only two other non-White students in my cohort would prove to be meaningful for me. There were other incidences where my identity as a person of color/Other reflected how I experienced cultural integration in the school environment.

Entering the elite bastion of a doctoral program in higher education was like trying to add my voice to a master narrative that has not always been inclusive of persons of color. As a minority person of color/Other, more-over a non-African American/non-

Hispanic minority, I experienced my racial identity acutely while I was in my doctoral program. Interactions within the student cohorts sometimes broke down along racial lines. The following journal entry dated March 2, 2015 spoke to one such situation where the persons of color, myself included, felt singled out as the other White student cohorts created comfort groups among themselves.

That first semester, that first summer, that second class...sitting in the master's house.

That first summer in that second class when we were told we had to do a group presentation and that we needed to self-select our groups. As we were breaking for lunch, we three only non-White students realized that somehow everyone else had already chosen their groups and were eagerly discussing their plans. We three amigos of color, we, by default were our own group.

### **Summary of Person of Color/Other Theme**

My identity as a person of color/Other was the single identity in this autoethnographic study that drew the most polarized responses. While one person acknowledged awareness of my identity as a person of color, the majority of my interviewees were unaware of how that identity label applied to me. Their struggle with this identity served to reinforce my own experience that most people in Southern U.S. apply the label person of color primarily to African-Americans. For most of my interviewees, I did not fit their pre-defined definition of a person of color.

Labeling this identity as Other was based on my experiences of how the conversations of race in U.S. were defined in terms of Black, White, and Other for most of the years I lived in the South. As an Other, my place was further out in the marginal

fringe. My place on the outside boundaries of marginal racial identities made me more invisible. I was a minority even among minorities, and unseen by most. I was outside of Black and White cultures in my socio-cultural environments. Experiences that occurred during my doctoral program highlighted the realities that racial divides continue to exist, in subtle and not so subtle ways, even in educational programs that seek to enlighten and impact social justice.

### **Foreign-born National**

My identity as a foreign-born national immigrant existing as a minority among minorities ended up being a very salient identity for me. My experiences as a working professional, a mother, a student, and a person of color/Other were framed and impacted by my identity as a foreign-born national. For me, the impact of this particular identity was overarching in how it defined so much of my axiology. Even as it was the most silent of my identities in defining my personal truths, it was the least tangibly visible of my identities.

I filtered all my experiences of my otherness as a working professional, a mother, a student, a person of color/Other through the lenses of my experiences as a foreign-born immigrant minority. I defined so much of my sense of social inequalities and struggles across my multiple identities through a filter of my experiences being a foreigner. I drew parallels across my cultural environments at work and school of having to adapt to other peoples' different expectations of me. As a foreigner, I often felt lost and confused, uncertain of my place.

### **Cultural Expectations**

Socially on the outside, my family of origin assimilated. We adapted to our adopted homeland in the South. Outside of our home we adapted to the food, vernacular, mannerisms, and style of our community. However, within the confines of our home, we exercised our Filipino culture—the foods we ate, the religion we practiced, the socially prescribed gender roles and expectations. We were living in both worlds.

### **Socio-cultural Environment**

Assimilation was the cultural expectation for immigrant populations in the 1970's when I came to the United States. My parents emphasized the need for our family to assimilate when it came to our lives outside of the home. We were both etic and emic. On the outside we were supposed to be like everyone else, but on the inside of our home we were expected to retain our distinct Filipino cultural values. We were crossing borders daily, living dual lives while living within the social margins.

### **School Environment**

I was a first generation doctoral student and was completely unfamiliar with the processes and experiences of education at this level. Thus began my second indoctrination as a foreigner, this time a foreigner to the doctoral program culture. In many ways it felt similar to my original first generation immigration experience into the United States. Once again there were expectations of me to assimilate and blend, this time academically as a scholar practitioner of student affairs.

I did not know the culture and language of student affairs as the other student cohorts did. I did not know any of the theories or applications of those principles. So, at first I did not understand the conversations or discussions happening around me. I had to

learn the culture and the language in order to survive and integrate into the doctoral program. I had to learn to acculturate myself into the culture of student affairs in higher education.

For the first two years, at the start of each course each semester I apologized to the instructor for not having any background knowledge of the content. I made earnest promises to learn and try to keep up. There were so many late nights of studying the literature, first to understand the language and the vernacular. There were many repeated readings in order to understand the content and context.

I had to blend in with my cohort class, to acculturate and assimilate. Wanting to prove myself to be a good immigrant and worthy of being allowed into the academic culture of the doctoral program, I needed to prove I was willing to work really hard. I needed to prove that I was willing to adapt.

But just like my reaction to my parents' entreaties to blend in, I knew I could not physically blend into my cultural environments at work, school, or local communities. I found myself in a cultural environment again where no one looked like me. No one talked like me. No one was like me. I felt like a foreigner. Even though I had been a student for several decades of my life, I was still a first generation immigrant in the doctoral program cultural environment. Even towards the end of my program I was still the only non-White, non-African American, non-African student. There were no Others like me with whom I could relate and share my racial or ethnic cultural framework of experiences. Assimilation continued to be a struggle for me.

### **The Balancing Act**

My identity as a foreign-born national is not one that other people in my cultural environments, at work or school, focused on or paid much attention to. People in those environments generally gave little notice to my ethnicity. In much the same way they treated my identity as a person of color/Other, most people simply overlooked it.

I did not wear my identity as a foreign-born national outwardly. I was not generally overtly outspoken about my ethnic nationality. However, this identity expressed itself through my cultural values. As C.J. pointed out, I only brought up this identity as a way to provide context when sharing my perspective in class, “how that influenced the other identities.”

My parents raised us a Filipinos within our adopted southern U.S. community. As a first generation immigrant I had one foot in Filipino culture and the other foot in U.S. Southern culture. I grew up a mix of both but not truly enough to be considered one or the other. It was a balancing act to cross cultural borders in order to be Filipino at home and American outside in the community. It was a culture clash on a daily basis trying to navigate both worlds with sometimes conflicting, different values. My experiences with my foreign-born national identity was both etic and emic. My Filipino characteristics and values made me an outsider in our adopted Southern U.S. community. My American characteristics and values made me an outsider within my Filipino cultural community. I was on the outside looking in at the same time that I was inside looking out.

### **Reflecting on the Influence of Culture**

Although none of my interviewees brought up my identity as a foreign-born national, I found myself using this identity as a framework to provide context to my

explanations and responses. I felt that my identity as a foreigner gave me a framework to explain the dissonance and disconnect in my cultural experiences, whether at work, at home, or at school. Foreigner became the filter for the axiology that I used to define most of the social inequalities and cultural dissonances I experienced in all three cultural environments.

### **Social Inequalities**

Feeling like a foreigner as I struggled to assimilate into my work and school cultural environments made me feel less than. I felt the need to apologize for my potential shortcomings. Being an apologist diminished and marginalized who I was as an individual in my doctoral program. It was not until embarking on this reflective autoethnographic study that I started to claim my own space. Reflecting through this autoethnographic study I wrestled with the cultural conflicts I experienced whether at work, home, or at school.

In some of my journal observations I described how I experienced peoples' interactions with me from the filter of being a foreign-born national. Being singled out as different because of my physical features that belie my race—my almond-shaped slanted eyes, my flat facial bone structure, my straight, black Asian hair. Being singled out because my cultural experiences gave me a different perspective. My differences left me feeling like I existed only in the margins. Being an immigrant, labeled as an Other, and an invisible minority led to my filters that left me feeling marginalized.

A journal observation dated 5/20/2015 titled Reflections- where I am... spoke to the parallels I drew in feeling like a foreigner in my doctoral program. I struggled to

become integrated into my new cultural environment as a first generation doctoral student. The following are excerpts from that entry.

Reflections- where I am...

As I sit in my room in 1516, the building that served as home for three summers of my UGA Ed.D. experience, I reflect back on what this journey has been for the last two years.

I recall arriving at UGA for the first day of the first class of the first semester.

There were many firsts that morning.

I arrived as a 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrant to this land of UGA. Much like my first original border crossing so many years ago to the United States, I felt lost & confused, uncertain of my place. I was meeting my cohort family for the first time. Much like my coming to the United States & meeting my family of origin for the first time.

I didn't understand the culture of student affairs, nor the language of the profession. All around me people were having conversations around me that went completely over me. I didn't have a background, networks, connections, history, theory, or credentials to tie me into this culture, this world. My context came only from the street cred of having worked in higher education for thirteen years. Even my history with the trajectory of my career was one of always being on the fringe, of not being understood in the work that I did.

Sitting in classes all that week, I didn't understand the conversations, yet I knew I was expected to be a part of them. I didn't know what to say, how to say, what to do, how to do. I could only speak in the language that I knew from the



background that I brought with me. I spoke as an immigrant in this new cultural environment.

Like a new 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrant, I took stock of how much *unlike* everyone else I was. No one looked like me, no one spoke like me, no one thought like me.

My contributions were foreign, sounded foreign, and looked foreign. *I was a foreigner* all over again, struggling to get a foothold, struggling to understand & to be understood, to find my sense of place in this new world of the study of student affairs.

### **Summary of Foreign-born National Theme**

While some of my physical features lend themselves to suggesting my racial identity as an Other by Southern U.S. social standards, there were no outward signs pointing to my identity as a foreign-born national. My interviewees were not aware of my background as a first generation immigrant and therefore did not speak to that identity directly. Out of all my identities, this was the one that was the least discernable to all of them.

However, for me, my identity as a foreign-born national seemed to impact all the other identities addressed in this study. It was my ethnic cultural roots that seeped into how I expressed myself as a working professional, a mother, a student, even as a person of color/Other. My identity as a foreign-born national provided a filter. I translated my experiences in navigating the socio-cultural expectations I encountered in my work, home, and school environments through that filter. The truths and interpretations of my experiences were often translated through the filter of my reality of growing up as a

foreigner. This identity became a map for how I navigated, interpreted, and experienced my multiple identities.

### **Navigating Multiple Identities and Intersectionality**

My interviewees were aware of several of my multiple identities from our interactions within the cultural environments of work and school, and sometimes home. As from the start of this autoethnographic study, I expected they would be familiar enough with my identities as a working professional, mother, and student. Their impressions of my ability to navigate the multiple identities in this study—working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national—ranged from guarded and controlled, to compartmentalized, to fluid. Their impressions had less to do with gender identity or their experiences with parenting and more to do with their valuing their own multiple identities within their own cultural contexts.

Jim Swarthow's impression of me as a working professional was of someone who was "extremely guarded" and as someone who "felt the need to exercise a great deal of control" over the respective areas of my life. In my interactions with him, I seemed to compartmentalize myself and keep my identities, aside of my professional identity, quite private. Despite this impression, we had opportunities to share our multiple challenges with navigating being working professionals and parents. From his comments about the ability to make choices between the two identities, what he saw as both a right and a reality, it seems that he too compartmentalized these identities in the cultural environment at work.

In contrast, Meg Dolly used the same term compartmentalization as a way to describe how we both navigated our respective multiple roles as professionals and parents in our shared work environment. She shared,

I think that one of the things we also share is the ability to kind of compartmentalize the various relationships that you may have with the one person. I think it was important to be able to recognize when we're being, when we're working, when we're having that professional relationship and then there may be a point in the day when we're chatting about our other roles in our lives. And that's a different thing that doesn't necessarily, directly impact our professional relationship. So, the ability to compartmentalize that, I think, is part of why we work well together.... You know, we had a different relationship. Being able to manage the duality of the relationship was good.

The fluidity of our transitions as we crossed the borders of our dual identities as working professionals and parents was a reflection of mutually shared values.

Rufus Berlin, while not a parent himself, spoke of the transitions between my professional and parenting identities in the work environment. He stated, "Your transitions were smooth. Smooth. And I can see how you prioritize at different times. ...you would transition back and forth." He perceived me as able to navigate the borders of my multiple identities seamlessly in a manner that did not disrespect others, nor make apologies for my juggling those identities in the work environment. He shared this memory, "I remember us having a conversation, me, you, and (someone else). Something was going on with (one of your kids)...and you just stopped what you were doing and

just walked away, took care of it, came back, and started, like in the middle of the sentence, at the end of a sentence you'd left with. I remember that, going, 'Wow! That's impressive!'.’”

I talked about my children and brought them to events related to work and school. As motherhood was a central identity to me, it was an identity that I expressed publicly across my work and school environments. It is perhaps the strong influence of my parents' emphasis on the power of education that I found myself so drawn to a career in higher education and continuing my own identity as a student across more than thirty years of my life. In many ways, I attempted to live authentically and embrace my multiple identities across the cultural environments of work, home, and school. In reflecting back on how I presented myself Rufus Berlin shared, “You're one of the most authentic people I know.”

In living my life within the chaotic intersection of my multiple identities, how I presented to others reflected my internalization of socio-cultural normative expectations. As I reviewed the data, the experiences that were expressed throughout the journal observations, artwork, and interviews highlighted the challenges I faced in being authentic. My greatest struggles were in trying to address when social inequalities, based on the confines of socio-cultural normative expectations, did not acknowledge or validate my multiple identities.

The reflective data highlighted inequalities inherent in the working environment of higher education. My experiences in higher education in the U.S. was one that reinforced systematic social inequalities within the organizational hierarchy. The cultural

values maintained systems of privilege and oppression where certain individuals were valued over others, and advocacy was for specific marginalized groups and not others.

Within my home life, socio-cultural normative expectations definitely impacted my identity as a mother. My family of origin and my spouse at the time all had pre-defined expectations of me to be the caretaker, nurturer, and provider. I was expected to be all things for everyone else even to my own self-detriment. The inequalities of gender-based expectations as a working professional mother created a great deal of chaos and challenges.

My identity as a person of color/Other shed light on socio-cultural inequalities in the sense because that identity left me invisible to others. Very few people gave any thought to the socio-political impact of my racial identity. Most of my interviewees did not place me anywhere along the binary split on the discussion of Black and/or White. By not seeing me as a person of color, few of them gave any thought that I might have experiences with racial discrimination or oppression.

As invisible as my racial identity was to others, my identity as a foreign-born national was even more invisible. Most of my interviewees were aware of my identity as a foreign-born national in the way that I spoke about my ethno-culturally ascribed values. They could see the contrast in how my ethno-cultural roots impacted my approach to my attitudes about work, home, and school responsibilities.

Those socio-cultural expectations were deeply influenced by my ethnic cultural background. The values I internalized from my family of origin and my experiences as a foreign-born national shaped the development and expression of my multiple identities.

Being labeled a person of color/Other after my immigration to the U.S. as a young child also left a lasting impression that defined the marginalization of my identity.

### **Support**

Intersectionality deals with addressing and challenging social inequalities in one's cultural environments (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). On my own personal journey of a thousand steps, my experiences navigating the challenges of the intersectionality of my multiple identities allowed me to be supportive of others. Integrating my multiple identities across my work, home, and school cultural environments required me to develop and demonstrate a capacity to commit to giving my all and being my all in all things.

Those experiences also forced me to recognize the limitation of my abilities and, at times, recognize when I myself needed support. As I have often shared with my own students, "Your successes are never achieved alone on your own; neither should you have to face your failures and challenges alone. Support is one of the most vital elements to living to your fullest potential." This autoethnographic study allowed me to reflect upon how the impact of support shaped my experiences, both as a giver and as a recipient of support.

### **Providing Support**

Meg Dolly and I shared "a parallel existence for many years" in that we had similar transitions in our professional, personal, and familial identities at roughly the same time. It was our shared experiences that made our relationship seem "symbiotic." She reflected, "...watching both you and I transition to motherhood and still try to be all other things. I think was, I guess, comforting in a sense that it's not something I had to

say to you for you to understand because you knew where I was...kind of the same journey.”

Fiercely Driven shared that she saw how my capacities to navigate my multiple identities impacted how I treated and supported others in my environments. She stated, “You do have a family. You do have kids and you are trying to balance it with everything else going on in your career, this, that, and the other; but, you related to reality, to people, and your communication, in the way you interact... I think when people do have kids, especially when they’re younger kids, that’s something valuable to me. I feel that’s very valuable to me. Because you do understand that people are people, they’re human, they’re not perfect. They aren’t robots. So, I really appreciate that.” She felt that the challenges I faced in navigating my multiple identities made me more sympathetic and empathetic to colleagues and students in my work environments.

C.J. reflected a similar sentiment in how I presented myself and engaged with the doctoral cohort group. She shared, “I would say you’ve been really, if anything, with everything you’ve had going on with the different things throughout this program, you probably, out of anybody, has been the one to be more of the cheerleader. You’re really good about sending emails and infographics. You know, that to me is really important. That with everything you had going on, you still made time to be like, ‘Hey! I hope you’re all doing well,’ or this, or that, or the other. ‘We’ll get through it’...That to me, says a lot about your character and who you are as a person.”

### **Receiving Support**

My familial and ethnic cultural upbringing shaped my capacity to provide care and support for others in ways that it did not prepare me as well for self-care or to expect

support for myself. In my family, support came in times of severe and extreme family crises; otherwise, financial support in pursuit of an educational degree was the primary form of support one could ask for and expect.

In discussing how I navigated my multiple responsibilities as a working professional, mother, and student, Jim Swarthow posed the question to me of how my family—parents, siblings, and my then-spouse at that time—offered support and encouraged self-care. My response was that in the cultural environments of my familial home, “take care of yourself” translated into, “take care of (everything) yourself.”

As I was raised to be a caretaker and nurturer, in the home cultural environment, “take care” meant: take care of your father, mother, brothers, and sisters; take care of your husband; take care of your children; take care of your job; take care of your house; take care of the chores. In the workplace cultural environment, “take care” meant: take care of your boss and supervisors; take care of your faculty; take care of your students and their parents. As a person of color/Other and foreign-born national, “take care” meant: take care of your reputation; take care of how others perceive you; take care of how your behavior reflects back on your community.

Based on the messages of my upbringing in my home and work cultural environments, I often framed my requests for support through outreach to others. In reaching out to others, I hoped that others would reach back out and reciprocally offer support. As C.J. reflected, “You don’t directly ask for support. Often times it is subtle or masked through providing support to others. You, like most, when asked how best we can support you often are not sure the best way (to respond.) I could relate to it in a lot of ways mainly because they are ‘things’ I just needed to do myself, but also partly related



to gender, or even other salient identities because I don't want to 'burden' the other person."

Rufus Berlin reflected on the necessity of being able to balance one's ego in asking for support and being open to receiving help. He shared, "You tuck your ego away. You just ask. ...Me asking for help, it's about my ego. I don't want to seem weak, don't want to seem worthless, or that I failed in some way that I have to get help. ...I don't see you as a person who would do that." Further, being able to ask for help and open to receiving support was related to the degree of the relationship between people.

### **Summary**

In this autoethnographic study, I examined several of my identities: working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national. My identities as a working professional, mother, and student were salient across all my data. The reflections of my interviewees indicated that I presented as authentic and committed to navigating those identities simultaneously across the cultural environments of work, home, and school. My dedication to my multiple identities often came at a price of self-sacrifice. I internalized an expectation to be 100% in each of those identities at all times.

My ethno-cultural values as a Filipino Catholic and those I internalized from my family of origin influenced my multiple identities. My identities as a person of color/Other and a foreign-born provided filters and a foundation for how I interpreted my experiences of social inequalities across my cultural environments. The cultural values of service and self-sacrifice also influenced how I provided and requested support from others in my cultural environments.

## **Chapter 5**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

In this autoethnographic study I examined my multiple identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, and foreign-born national pursuing a hybrid online education doctorate program. The artwork produced through exercises of visualizing the self (Chang, 2008), journal observations, and interviews all sought to illuminate the struggles of navigating multiple identities across my cultural environments of work, home, and school. One's sense of self is constantly defined and redefined based on cultural context (Sakamoto, 2006). The interpretations of my self-identity and how others experienced me were dynamic and fluid in the context of my cultural environments.

For this study, intersectionality provided a theoretical framework to view the impact of cultural context on perceptions of social inequalities. The reality of my truths, from a post-structuralist standpoint, is that my self-identity was not constructed by stringing together separate identities in an additive fashion. Dill and Zambrana (2009) argued that our experiences of our selves is a complex combination of the intersectionality of multiple identities in shifting contexts.

#### **Multiple Identities**

By living within the intersections of my multiple identities I experienced conflicts and struggles related to people's exertions of power and control. My struggles with social inequities within the cultural environments of work, home, or school were

exacerbated when others tried to impose upon me their pre-defined identity expectations (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011). Their pre-defined socio-cultural expectations created pressures that aimed to restrict, reduce, and confine me to whichever single identity best suited their needs of me. I was expected to integrate and adapt to the expectations defined by the individuals who held power within the dominant culture.

Power in organizational structures and the hierarchy of IHE in the U.S. is primarily exercised by White males and continue to perpetuate White male privilege (Wall, 2008). As a working professional, mother, person of color/Other, those racial and gender-based structural inequalities compounded the discrimination and oppression that I experience due to my multiple identities (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011; Wall, 2008). Through the process of this autoethnographic study, I faced challenges as an integrated person struggling in environments that chose not to acknowledge me as such.

My cultural environments at work, home, and school exerted pressures to choose a singular identity. As a working professional, women of color, and mother working in higher education I was expected to choose between my roles to either sacrifice for my career or sacrifice for my family (Turner, 2002). My administrative leaders and supervisors expected me to be a worker, regardless of my home and school life obligations. Members of my family expected me to be a mother, regardless of my work and school life obligations. Many of my doctoral program faculty expected me to be student, regardless my work and home life obligations. I was expected to linearly prioritize my identities as if they were bound within static confines; however, the complexities of one's multiple identities are not static nor linear.

Seeing myself through the lenses of multiple identities initially left me feeling fractured and fragmented rather than whole. Reflecting on being a working professional and mother and student and person of color/Other and foreign-born helped me own that these were different aspects of my identity as a whole. This autoethnographic study allowed me to see how my multiple identities are integrated into the sum of me.

In contrast to Table 1 where I originally presented my identities in a linear, hierarchical structure, through the process of this study I came to understand that my identities were better represented as concentric layers. Each identity building and adding layers of complexity that together shaped the totality of me. The boundaries between each layer was dynamic and permeable, allowing a blending of characteristics of my identity, for example the nurturing, motherly side of me that work colleagues and student cohorts experienced in how I related to others.

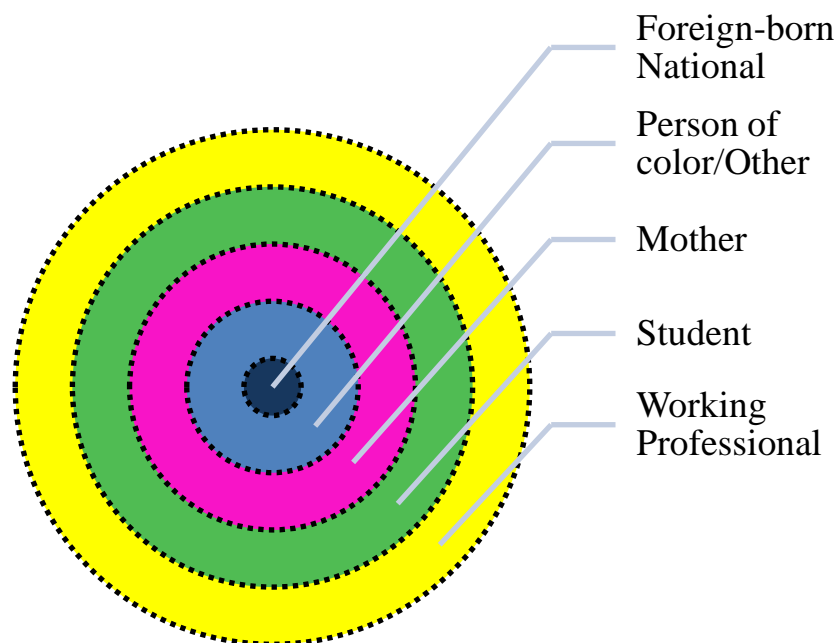


Figure 7. Schematic of my Integrated Layers of Identity. Layers of identity are represented as a whole with concentric circles stemming from the center outward.

Represented at the central core was my identity as a foreign-born national. I identify my ethno-cultural roots as a Filipino Catholic, born in the Philippines into a large family with staunchly conservative Catholic values. The socio-cultural values of service and self-sacrifice, cornerstones of my experiences as a Filipino and Catholic, greatly shaped how I experienced my world and therefore shaped my realities. The cultural influence of those values were thematically represented across all my identities. My internalized value to be all things in order to be a caretaker and nurturer was seen in my interactions with others across my cultural environments at work, home, and school.

### **Influence of Cultural Context on Identities**

Those fundamental socio-cultural values greatly influenced my sense of self (Sakamoto, 2006) and permeated the layers of my identity as a working professional, mother, student, and person of color/Other. My identity as a foreign-born national deeply impacted all the other layers of my identities that were the focus of this study. Those socio-cultural values, instilled in me through my Filipino Catholic background, provided context of my identities and how others experienced me. The patriarchal system inherent in both the Filipino culture and conservative Catholic religion greatly influenced the gender-based and family-oriented values that were instilled in me.

Culturally-ascribed values of service and self-sacrifice reflected an emphasis on collectivistic nature woven through both my ethnic and religious cultural background. These values played a significant role in how I defined my identities and acculturated within my cultural environments at work, home, and school (Sakamoto, 2006). Growing up Filipino in the southern U.S. meant that I straddled both worlds and was expected to maintain the cultural values of both old-world (country of origin) and new-world

(adopted country). Cultural integration therefore presented a challenge in navigating the cultural schism created by crossing the borders across sometimes conflicting cultural values (Sakamoto, 2006).

Thus, my identity as a foreigner—representing the differences in my cultural values—filtered through my multiple identities as a working professional, mother, student, and person of color/Other. The expression of my identities fluxed as I navigated both cultural boundaries as a Catholic Filipino and as an acculturated American living in the southern U.S. Jim Swarthow's reflections that my work ethics reflected an old school, old world way was an example that highlighted the impact of that socio-cultural context.

When I immigrated to the United States in the early 1970's, my identity shifted. I went from being part of the majority in my home country, where my membership in the dominant culture meant I did not have to question my identities, to being a minority Other in the southern U.S. city where my family relocated. The geographic transition resulted in my immigration experiences providing an interpretive filter as a foreigner acculturating to host environments.

Being labeled a person of color/Other was similarly a parallel yoke that grounded my socio-cultural values. That certainly impacted how I approached my identities as a working professional, a mother, and a student. The border-crossings between the cultural schisms of my foreign-born (marginalized culture of origin) and my Americanized (dominant host culture) sense of self posed a constant challenge to my integration experiences. My adaptation as a foreign-born national and person of color/Other placed me in the marginal fringe. I was a minority among minorities, an outsider.

Most of the research I read for this autoethnographic study problematized socio-cultural inequality from a race perspective and/or gender. In terms of social power, White males are recognized at the top of the hierarchy, second are White females, followed by people of color as a collective group (Turner, 2002). As a person of color, I was expected to fit a pre-defined racial identity (Hernandez, Ngunjiri & Chang, 2015; Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011) wearing the label Other. As an Asian minority, I was placed in a categorical box and my personal identity lost in the myth of the Asian model minority. As Wong recounted in her own experiences, she was told that as an Asian American she did not count, she became invisible (Marbley et al., 2011).

My own data in this autoethnographic study revealed that I too was an invisible minority. In my work environments I did not fit the pre-defined identity as a woman of color since I am not African-American or Latino/a. I was therefore invisible. Even among my interviewees who were my professional colleagues and student cohorts, the majority of them were not aware and did not see me as a person of color/Other. My invisibility meant that others in my work and school environments gave little to no thought that I would have experiences of racial discrimination and oppression as a person of color. I was lost in the myth of the model minority.

This stereotype too readily dismisses the discrimination and oppression experienced by Asians and Asian-Americans in the U.S. (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011). In presuming the success of all Asians and Asian-Americans in the U.S., society enforces their invisibility and silence, and dissects them entirely from any meaningful socio-cultural and socio-

political discourse. Some researchers speak to how identity stereotypes, such as the myth of the Asian model minority, tends to perpetuate acts of discrimination and microaggressions. The myth allows individuals to gloss over the needs of this group and exclude their members from discussions around social inequalities (Marbley et al., 2011; Turner, 2002; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011).

Asian-Americans are typically not counted in statistical data due to perceptions that they are not an underrepresented racial group in IHE among faculty or student populations. However, the numerical representation of Asian-Americans in IHE belie that fact that their statistical representation is skewed towards men is very specific disciplines. In fact Asian women of color do not represent a large proportion among faculty, and proportionately less so among higher faculty ranks (Turner, 2002). This skew in underrepresentation, coupled with the Asian minority myth, compounds their struggles in the cultural environments of IHE. Their struggles with discrimination and oppression are rarely brought to light.

Of the three cultural environments I explored in this autoethnographic study, the culture of my work environments in IHE was where I experienced the greatest levels of systematized social inequalities, discrimination, and oppression. My multiple identities compounded the cumulative disadvantages I faced in this environment (Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011). Similar to many other women and women of color in IHE in the U.S. in the research, I experienced the institutional climate as unwelcoming, oppressive, and isolating (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011; Turner, 2002). I struggled with feeling like I was expected to be invisible (Turner, 2002; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2011). My professional identity was invisible in my personal reflective



data, but experienced quiet profoundly as represented by the reflections of my interviewees that presented me as a proficient, competent leader.

As I developed in my competencies and skills, I became less invisible in my marginal space. My visibility threatened to bring to light the impact of social inequalities that were part of the culture in the institution, to call attention to the implications of the structural power at play (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011). The more I excelled and became more professionally visible, the more difficult and problematic my presence became within the institution. I was told I did not fit the power structure of the institution because I was neither Black nor White.

Administrators maintained a cultural environment that sought to keep me in a place outside on the marginal fringe. In controlling the structural power, the power to distribute resources, opportunities, and establish constraints in order to enforce control (Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli & Bell, 2011), their exercise of discrimination was subtle and difficult to challenge. My presence was managed and tolerated; as an Asian woman of color, I could account for expanding their numerical representation of diversity. However, numerical representation did not equate to empowerment (Turner, 2002). I was a token (Turner 2002; Turner, Gonzalez & Wong, 2011; Wall, 2008). I was criticized for negotiating the pursuit of my doctoral education, a benefit that was exercised by the upper administration as a resource supported only for the privileged classes in the institution (Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli & Bell, 2011). A major reason I pursued my doctorate degree was to earn the credentials I needed in order to lend my voice to the academic discourse about social inequities.

### **Voicing Motherhood in Institutions of Higher Education**

As faculty mothers working in academia, women need to raise their voices and address the social inequities they face (Acker & Armenti, 2004). Making self-sacrificing choices in silence while carrying the weight of both professional and familial aspirations will not change the cultural environment. Motherhood/parenthood is not considered normative in the cultural environments of IHE in the U.S. (Wall, 2008).

In the myth that idealizes the life of an academic, no room is left for the competing needs of familial obligations (Turner, 2002; Wall, 2008). Whether in the context of women juggling motherhood and academia, women juggling motherhood and pursuit of doctoral education, or mothers among women of color, research showed a universally common pattern of mothers dealing with socio-cultural expectations to serve as caretakers, nurturers, and make sacrifices in the interest of their families. Gender-based socio-cultural expectations were found across the research (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Sakamoto, 2006; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Wall, 2008). Women balancing professional aspirations along with motherhood spoke of their identities as mothers as a source of great stress and great joy.

The findings in my autoethnographic study reinforced similar experiences and sentiments expressed in other research on the experiences of working professional women in higher education who are also navigating family obligations (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). While motherhood for me was taxing and consuming—requiring sacrifices both physically and emotionally, and in terms of time both personally and professionally—it was the identity that most grounded my holistic integration of the layers of my multiple identities.

## **Persistence and Integration**

In the 1970's total assimilation into the dominant culture was expected of immigrants coming to the U.S. Reflective of the socio-political sentiments of that era, social expectations of cultural assimilation were the hallmark of Tinto's (1973) Student Integration Model as well. Sakamoto ((2006) proposed that acculturation and integration are related to issues of power. The dominant culture exercising power exerts pressures and sets up expectations of conformity to their cultural values, behaviors, and expectations.

Museus and Quaye (2009) countered, integration models and applications need to take into account the multi-cultural contributions of those individuals who are not part of the dominant group. Research provides a counter argument that an approach to multi-cultural integration allows for individuals to navigate the borders of multiple cultures—culture of origin and cultural environments of social context. Therefore, individuals could more fully actualize a healthier integration their multiple cultural identities (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011). One should not have to lose one's identity in order to fit in and gain acceptance into a dominant culture. Assimilation that requires one to do so in order to fit in is dehumanizing (Turner, 2002). Hernandez, Ngunjiri, and Chang (2015) propose that multi-national cultural identity presents a powerful opportunity to claim personal agency to define/redefine the dynamic shifts on one's multiple identities.

Along with my professional identity, I was also a non-traditional aged individual balancing family while and pursuing an online doctorate degree. These were the current prevalent, characteristics of an online student (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007;

Rovai, 2003; Willging & Johnson, 2009) matched my profile as an online student. I was able to persist despite those challenges (Rovai, 2003). Those same characteristics proved to be my motivation to stay focused on my goals. I saw my doctoral experience as a way to elevate myself professionally as well as support my children's' own future aspirations.

The asynchronous nature of the hybrid online format of my doctoral program provided me with unique opportunities to connect to community resources for support. In my doctoral program I was able to forge a system of support in large part due to the cohort model structure. All the cohort students were balancing work, and most of us with family or partners at the start of the program. Therefore, we had a shared commonality in our struggles to navigate work-life balance and our respective multiple identities.

The framework of the doctoral program provided us a forum to find validation among ourselves for our alternate identities (Museus & Quaye, 2009) across our cultural environments of work, home, and school. We were able to engage one another on a number of levels with respect to our multiple identities. Even within the asynchronous space of our online community we were able to establish a space where our identities and goals mattered (Boston, Ice & Gibson, 2011). We had shared goals in pursuing our degrees to support our professional identities and hopes that a greater level of empowerment came with those achievements.

Through this autoethnographic study as a working professional, mother, student, person of color/Other, foreign-born national pursuing a hybrid online doctoral education program I took my first steps to embrace my integrated self. The online discussion forums were the first platform where I began to speak my ground and discuss what life was like for me within the margins. In using my voice, I helped to shape our discourse

and proffered a view as an outsider (Allen, 1995). I was not silent about extant social inequalities perpetuated in our IHE administrative systems and ideologies. I learned to use my space within the margins to exercise my etic outsider's perspective and claim my voice as a scholar and advocate (Allen, 1995; Turner, 2002).

### **Implications**

The findings of this autoethnographic study, as well as the research used to support its process, highlight the social inequalities that are systematically engrained in our culture and environments. One of the goals of higher education in the U.S. is to challenge the intellect and push for social change; however, as is the reality of many social systems, it is replete with values and practices that perpetuate social inequalities (Turner, 2002). As educators serving as advocates continue to broaden the discourse on diversity inclusion, the categories of identities continues to expand.

Discussions around diversity and inclusion make the argument for the enrichment of social experiences when socio-cultural environments embrace the inclusion of a wider variety of different identities (Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli & Bell, 2011; Turner, 2002). Models of integration that require individuals to adapt and adopt dominant cultural values at the expense of their own values creates environments that are isolating, discriminatory, and demeaning (Museus & Quaye, 2006; Turner, 2002). Inclusion is about addressing the social inequalities and power differentials that are perpetuated in socio-cultural environments. Most of the current literature on diversity and intersectionality follows within a narrow discussion of social inequalities based on gender and race binaries that do not do justice to capture other marginalized groups (Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli & Bell, 2011).

Existing research on intersectionality is largely framed on a gender-based binary of men versus women. By framing discussions around social inequalities related to caretaking and nurturing and other non-work life social expectations as a women's issue we deflate the potency to advocate for greater social change by leaving men out of the discussion. Reframing the conflict of caretaking and nurturing as a work-life balance conflict, men's concerns regarding work-life balance challenges can help garner more push for changes to neutralize gender bias (Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli & Bell, 2011).

Most research literature I read on the impact of the social inequalities women and women of color in higher education experienced based on their dual marginality of race and gender are primarily framed from the vantage point of faculty or graduate students preparing to assume faculty roles (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006; Wall, 2008). Women of color who are faculty speak about the benefits they enjoy in the privileged class as academicians—schedule flexibility, support for pursuit of intellectual interests, stability of tenure and promotion opportunities. They state these benefits help them to buffer the conflicts they face due to social inequalities related to their gender and race (Acker & Armenti, 2004).

This discourse largely ignores the impact of those structural inequalities that impact women of color in higher education who hold non-faculty positions. Women of color are disproportionately represented in the lower categories of faculty ranking (Turner, 2002). The same culture of discrimination and oppression that is leveled on women of color faculty members is also leveled on those who are not faculty or who are not eligible for the benefits of privilege of those who are tenured and tenure-track faculty. If our aim in exposing and problematizing the social inequalities is to change social

structures to promote greater parity among women of color, then the charge should not fall short and protect only a single classification of women of color. Most of the research literature I found that problematized discrimination and oppression experienced by women of color focused on African-American, Latina, and international Asian women. If socio-political advocates are going to have significant impact on issues of social inequalities related to race, then our social discourse needs to recognize the need of all currently marginalized groups to be seen, their voices lifted, and members empowered.

### **Recommendations for Implementation of Findings**

Senior administration and faculty tenure status should not provide protection to individuals who espouse oppressive ideologies in IHE. The cultural environment is replete with examples of such abuses of power, for example there was only a mild reaction but no response from my senior administrators when I shared that a senior, White male faculty member—who was recognized within the college community as an advocate for cultural diversity—openly said to me, “(Staff) are paid to be burned out.” Education leaders need to challenge the current culture that breeds and perpetuates environments that create classes of privilege and oppression and structural inequalities in IHE. Administrators, faculty, and staff need to feel empowered to challenge social inequalities so that each person and their contributions to the educational experience—no matter their title or rank—are valued and validated. Institutions should provide and promote safe forums to challenge instances of discrimination and oppression where people feel safe, honored, and acknowledged by the institution. The academy should advocate for social equity, not just in classroom discussions, but through their own institution’s organizational structures, policies, and practices as well.

Administrators can explore the possibilities of expanding benefits and privileges currently enjoyed by faculty and upper administrative levels of academia to other non-faculty employees. Adaptations that allow for schedule flexibility, and funding for sabbatical-type leave to support opportunities for creative intellectual and professional development could be expanded for staff members. University leaders can continue to support and expand the creation of the educational degree programs, such as the one in which I participated, for staff members to foster leadership skills and knowledge. Other employees in IHE, not only faculty, can thrive on intellectual stimulation, skillfully participate scholarly discourse, and shape the environment of the institution. Staff members and skilled workers across the ranks should have opportunities to participate in continuing educational programs to update and enhance the skillsets applied to their professional work. For example, facilities and plant management staff could be encouraged and supported to attend workshops in order to learn advances and improvements that can make their work safer, more efficient, and more effective.

The findings from this autoethnographic research could provide administrators in higher education with suggestions for policy and program implementation in order to increase the persistence and integration of students who identify within marginal groups. Administrators need to become more aware of how the organizational structure, policies, and practices in the culture of higher education perpetuate discrimination and oppression. The influence of Tinto's SIM model too narrowly defines institutional integration by setting up expectations for everyone to adapt to characteristics of the culture of dominance. In doing so we miss out on the cultural richness that individuals with othered, different cultural values bring to our communities. Below, Table 2, are some



practical theory-to-practice suggestions for administrators in IHE in the U.S. can implement at their institutions to foster more effectively inclusive diverse communities. Some of these practices may already in place and scattered across the institution, administrators need to ensure that the promotion, support, and maintenance of such resources is widely known within the institution's community.

Table 2. Theory-to-practice Takeaways for Administrators

<b>Awareness:</b> Review and address organizational structure, policies, and practices that perpetuate discrimination and oppression against those who do not fit White, male dominant cultural normative characteristics.
<b>Validation:</b> Validate the cultural richness individual members bring to the environment from their respective cultural backgrounds. Create positions within your institution and opportunities to cultivate community partnerships that celebrate cultural inclusion.
<b>Orientation:</b> Provide information on services available at your institution that provide support for individuals who experience discrimination or oppression due to marginal identities. Make sure faculty, staff, and students are aware of these resources and how to access them for safe, confidential support.
<b>Mentoring:</b> Provide support for mentoring individuals who identify in marginalized groups, whether cross-discipline or cross-institutionally. Support employees in finding mentors to support their multi-cultural integration, professional socialization, and development.
<b>Public promotion:</b> Support and invest in public promotion of your support resources. Make sure your message is reaching its intended audiences, be strategic in placing your advertising.
<b>Academic Curriculum:</b> Include a focus on social justice throughout curriculum to challenge the impact social inequalities perpetuated by course content across disciplines. Focus on development of culturally inclusive curriculum.
<b>Professional development:</b> Support and invest in in-service and employee development opportunities so employees have opportunities to be engaged in topics meaningful to their membership group identity. Encourage a collective sharing of information and resource materials.
<b>Support groups:</b> Encourage and support the creation of active support groups that can address the specific concerns of membership identity groups. Allow for dedicated time so people can participate and benefit from support from like-minded members of identity groups.
<b>Online Communities of Support:</b> Encourage participation in online communities of support. Identify resources for professional communities of support so people can participate asynchronously with a larger collective membership.
<b>Create a space for mothers/parents:</b> Create an appropriate physical, child-friendly space on campus that is centrally located so mothers/parents can be with their children that can be used as study or a meeting space. Committing to a gathering space creates a community that supports work-life balance for mothers/parents and allows parents to positively demonstrate to their children the importance of educational pursuits while balancing family values.
<b>Evaluate job composition:</b> Determine proportion of job composition can be done in- and out-of office. Support schedule flexibility for all employees beyond leadership and faculty ranks.
<b>Work-life balance:</b> Support and invest in programs that support work-life balance for all employees. Create opportunities that allow employees to engage in non-work interests that are creative, intellectually challenging, and personally meaningful.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As the social discourse continues to evolve, researchers and socio-political advocates need to expand the scope of focus to include other diversity groups that have not yet been represented in the research literature (Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli & Bell, 2011). While White women faculty in academia have made some gains, other women of color faculty are trying to widen the frame of the discussion to include and account for their space in the institution (Turner, 2002). In my research for this autoethnographic study, I was not able to find articles that address the needs of individuals working in IHE who are non-faculty. Women and women of color in the institution who are non-faculty also deserve to be included as advocates challenge social inequality in the system, as do members of other marginalized identity groups.

Future research on intersectionality needs to continue to expand the discourse of examining social inequalities to include other marginalized minority groups. In terms of race-based social inequalities, we must challenge the stereotypes such as model minorities, and going beyond the Black versus White binary. Expanding the scope of diversity discourse will critically enhance scholarly conversations and the potency for advocacy. Intersectionality has the potential to challenge other restrictive socio-culturally prescribed binaries as well—to go beyond gender binaries, to go beyond definitions of heteronormative relationships, to address many other marginalizing labels. Beyond numerical representation, representation in society is not inclusion (Turner, 2002) when there is no redress of inequities of social status or imbalance of power.

It is important to explore and understand how ethno-cultural values impact identities and experiences of social inequalities (Sakamoto, 2006). Especially as our

world becomes increasing global and mobile, differences in cultural values can bring to the fore conflicts and cultural dissonance. When our current socio-normative standards for integration require individuals to assimilate and modify, ignore, or erase a part of their identity in order to fit into a cultural environment, we create situations that are potentially brutally damaging to those who find themselves labeled in the minority (Museus & Quaye, 2009; Turner, 2002).

For those living in the margins, being an outsider lends a value perspective and voice to the social discourse to challenge social inequalities. Let us challenge and contradict that labeling the standards of dominant cultures as “normative,” implies that the standards of group cultures in the minority are non-normative or, even more, problematically aberrant. Let us challenge that structural and social inequalities serve to perpetuate cultural practices that privilege a few at the expense of dividing and devaluing others less empowered. Researchers need to examine the impact of the dominant-culture integration model that permeates so many of our systems and advocate for a more humane model of multicultural integration (Museus & Quaye, 2009).

### **Summary**

I AM ME. – Intelligent, Authentic, Messy, Magnificent, Empowered...period. We are all complex individuals with multiple layers of identities. The cultural practice of socio-normative behaviors and expectations in our environments sets up systems that privilege some and oppress others. I present my autoethnographic study in I hopes that others hear in my narrative the call to widen social discourse and address social inequalities in their cultural environments. I hope that those who hold positions of power and influence can embrace the rights of everyone to live as holistically authentic

integrated selves. In coming towards the end of my dissertation journey, I felt it important to share this part of my narrative story in hopes that my journey, my story, and my voice helps others to claim awareness and validation of their journey of a thousand miles. This edited journal observation titled Re-imagined(d) dated May 7, 2015 spoke to my experience of redefining my own identity and claiming my space in the margins where I no longer have to be invisible or quiet.

Re-imagine(d)

Living on the margin

Living on the fringe

The way I've lived my whole life, you say *you can't even imagine*

Feeling left behind

Your voice in my mind

You're not a teacher, *be quiet*

You're not a leader, *be quiet*

You're not like them, *be quiet*

Don't be seen

Don't be heard

You don't have the *right* to say one word

Know your place. You're not like them. Be quiet.

Feeling *unseen*

Feeling *unheard*

Feeling like an *Other* from another world

I have *this* voice

I have *this* choice

I have *this* body

You can't tell me I'm no-*body*

I have this mind

to break the silences and the ties that bind

*Making* myself seen

*Making* myself heard

Determined to be something other

in this world

I'm not this

I'm not that

I'm more this

I'm less that

I know my place

This place is mine

I'm not like them

I'm my own kind

My quiet

is my stillness

My quiet

is my strength within

*I am an Other*

Quite like no  
other

You  
don't  
look  
like me  
You  
don't  
talk  
like me  
You  
don't  
have to  
be

for me to be me

for you to be you

for us to live in a spirit that is true

I *will* be seen

I *will* be heard

I will write. I will speak. I will be.

I will live my life by my word

No longer bearing your margin

No longer wearing your fringe

I will live my whole life,  
you won't even have to imagine



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### Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Hello All,

I'm waiting for the UGA Institutional Research Board to review my IRB proposal to conduct data collection for my dissertation. I'm reaching out in anticipation of their approval & I wondering if any of you would be willing to participate in the interview process with me. My dissertation is a self-study autoethnography focusing on the experiences of trying to navigate my multiple identities as a working professional, mother, student, person of color in a hybrid online doctoral program. I anticipate the interview to last around an hour. I'd like to record the interview so I can generate a written transcript from the audio recording. This will help in my data collection process. If you're interested & willing to participate, please let me know. Once I get my IRB clearance, we can work out how to work around our respective schedules. I'll make sure you get the necessary information for the consent form & interview protocol.

Thanks for your consideration!

## Appendix B: IRB Autoethnography Protocol Proposal

### 1) Protocol Title

Intersectionality of multiple identities: An autoethnographic study of a working mother student of color

### 2) Research Design and Methods

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways the intersectionality of multiple identities are experienced as a working mother student of color. The intended outcome of this study is to contribute to the literature and practice of student affairs graduate preparation programs. The study will be approached from a post-modern, post-structuralist lens using an intersectionality framework. The research question for this study is:

1. “How is the intersectionality of multiple identities experienced as a working mother student of color pursuing a hybrid online educational doctorate degree?”

Data will be collected in three parts: self-reflective journaling, self-visualization, and free drawing. As the participant, the secondary researcher will reflect on the intersectionality of multiple identities as experienced at work, home, and through the hybrid online learning process using the data collection methods. Reflections will be documented on a weekly bases using a journaling prompt protocol to guide reflective observations. A digital record will be kept of all data collected. Photos of any two-dimensional and three-dimensional art work collected as part of the self-visualization process will also be taken in order to maintain a digital copy.

The secondary researcher will be the participant in this autoethnographic study.

### 3) Study Timelines

I will collect data over an eight month period.

I intend to have the coding and analysis by December 2015.

### 4) Procedures Involved

**Recruitment Procedures.** The secondary researcher will serve as the participant in this autoethnographic study. Journaling prompts for reflective exercises are listed in Appendix A.

**Data Collection.** Data collection for this autoethnographic study will take place in three parts: self-reflective journaling, self-visualization, and free drawing.

1. Self-reflective journaling: I will collect self-reflective journaling entries over the span of eight months. Entries will be written on a Word document with dated entries.

- a. Think about ways the multiple identities of being a working mother student in a hybrid online doctoral education program are experienced. Think about how these multiple identities are experienced as they intersect in the cultural environment of work, home, and through the hybrid online learning experience. Self-reflective journaling prompts will be used to guide reflections- see Appendix A.
2. Self-visualization: I will create and collect illustrations, photos, drawings, and other visual artifacts that reflect the intersectionality of multiple identities as a working mother student.
  - a. Think about ways the multiple identities of being a working mother student in a hybrid online doctoral education program are experienced. Think about how these multiple identities are experienced as they intersect in the cultural environment of work, home, and through the hybrid online learning experience. Collect or create visual representations of these experiences. These visual representations may be illustrations, photos, drawings, or other two- and three-dimensional artwork. The self-visualization exercises will use the same prompts as the self-reflective journaling used to guide reflections- see Appendix A.
3. Free drawing. The researcher participant will create and collect free-style drawings reflecting spaces relevant to the experience of the intersectionality of multiple identities as a working mother student within the cultural environments of work, home, and the hybrid online learning experience.
  - a. Think about ways the multiple identities of being a working mother student in a hybrid online doctoral education program are experienced. Think about how these multiple identities are experienced as they intersect in the cultural environment of work, home, and through the hybrid online learning experience. Collect or create visual representations of these experiences. The free drawing exercises will use the same prompts as the self-reflective journaling used to guide reflections- see Appendix A.

## **5) Data and Specimen Banking**

N/A

## **6) Data Analysis**

I will use a reflective process to identify the relevance of the collected data along the lines of personal interest, professional significance, and ethical considerations as indicated in Chang (2008). I will review data to identify patterns or themes of cultural relevance, examining how past and present experiences reflect the intersectionality of multiple identities across cultural frames.

Chang, H. (2008). Autoethnography as method. In *Developing Qualitative Inquiry* series. Janice Morse, Ed. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

## Appendix C: IRB Ethnography Protocol Proposal

### **1) Protocol Title**

Intersectionality of multiple identities: An autoethnographic study of a working mother student of color in a hybrid online doctoral educational program.

### **2) Research Design and Methods**

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways the intersectionality of multiple identities are experienced by a working mother student of color. The intended outcome of this study is to contribute to the literature and practice of student affairs graduate preparation programs. The study will be approached from a post-modern, post-structuralist lens using an intersectionality framework. The research question for this study is:

1. “How is the intersectionality of multiple identities experienced as a working mother student of color pursuing a hybrid online educational doctorate degree?”

Data will be collected in two formats: interviews and written reflections or photo elicitation with multiple participants. Participants will be asked to reflect on how they perceived the subject of the autoethnographic study, the secondary researcher, as she navigated the intersections of multiple identities as a working mother student of color. The researcher will follow a loose conversational interview format starting with a broad opening question and using prompts to generate more specific feedback.

Participants in this study will be my children, cohorts, and coworkers who work in higher education who have experienced the secondary research as a working mother student of color in a hybrid online doctorate educational program. Interviews will be digitally recorded. Members of the research team will transcribe the interviews and destroy the digital recordings upon transcription. No names will be used in the transcription of the interviews – we will use pseudonyms to refer to participants.

### **3) Study Timelines**

We will recruit participants in August and September 2015.

Interviews will be scheduled from August 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30, 2015.

We intend to have the interviews transcribed by October 1st and complete preliminary analysis by November 1, 2015.

### **4) Procedures Involved**

Recruitment Procedures. Participants will be recruited through invitation either in person, via email, and/or phone. The recruitment email and phone scripts are attached in Appendix B. We have also included “Instructions to Participants” as Appendix C. This will be provided to participants who indicate they are interested in participating in the

study. The consent form will be attached to the initial email provided to the participants and is included as Appendix D.

**Data Collection.** Data collection will take place in two parts: an interview and follow-up invitation to provide additional written reflections or photo elicitations.

1. **Questionnaire:** Participants will complete a questionnaire of demographic information and an open-ended question about how they understand theory to practice. This questionnaire will also include the consent information, with the instructions that by completing the survey, participants are consenting to participating in the study and may withdraw at any point. The questionnaire will be administered through Qualtrics and will consist of the questions listed in Appendix C.
2. **Photo-Elicitation:** Participants will be asked to take photos responding to the following the prompt during one week of their choice:
  - Think about ways you incorporate theory to practice in your work. Take pictures of representations of theory to practice in your work - these can be events, programs, items, meetings, or anything else that represents theory in your work. Please refrain from photos with identifiable people in them. You will take pictures for one week and choose up to five to submit to the research team. The researchers will then bring these photos to the focus group to discuss.

Participants will then upload their photos to a Qualtrics questionnaire. Participants will submit up to five photos to the research team, with a brief description of what each photo represents to the participant.

3. **Focus group.** The purpose of this focus group is to provide a more in-depth understanding of how new student affairs professionals translate theory to practice. This is the follow-up to the photo elicitation part of the study where the participants were asked to take photos of examples of theory to practice work. The focus groups will take place at the national conferences of the two primary professional association conferences in the field of Student Affairs. Each focus group will be made up of no more than 10 participants and moderated by a member of the research team. The research team is composed of a faculty member and five doctoral students with varying years of experience and education in the field of student affairs. The moderator will facilitate a semi-structured interview protocol using the photos taken in the previous part of the study as a guide. Each focus group will last no longer than 90 minutes and will be audio recorded. The focus group will take place at the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators conference March 15-19 in Baltimore, MD and at the American College Personnel Association conference March 30-April 2 in Indianapolis, IN. We will do a maximum of five focus groups for both conferences combined. The focus group protocol is attached in Appendix D.

## 5) Data and Specimen Banking

N/A

## 6) Data Analysis

We will use a reflective process to identify the relevance of the collected data along the lines of personal interest, professional significance, and ethical considerations as indicated in Chang (2008). We will review data to identify patterns or themes of cultural relevance, examining how past and present experiences reflect the intersectionality of multiple identities across cultural frames.

The researchers will transcribe the focus group interviews and each member of the research team will review each transcript, the composite responses of the open-ended question on the questionnaire about theory to practice, and the descriptions of theory to practice accompanying each photo. The research team will engage in three-cycle coding process (Saldaña, 2009). During the first round of coding, team members will note common ideas throughout the data collected and generate a list of codes with a brief description of each to share with members of the research team. In the second round of coding, members of the research team will come together to discuss the codes generated by members of the team, collapsing similar codes. The third round of coding will consist of two members of the research team going back through each piece of data and re-coding the materials using the common codes generated by the research team. At this point, the research team will meet to organize the codes into groups, or overarching themes, based on the data. As patterns emerge, the researchers will construct whole narratives from these interrelated parts. The researchers will then process the narratives with the literature to contextualize, understand, and confirm the interpretation of the narratives created from the interviews. The researchers will act as the narrators or instruments of analysis for this study (Jones et al, 2014).

Chang, H. (2008). Autoethnography as method. In *Developing Qualitative Inquiry* series. Janice Morse, Ed. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Jones, S.R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2014). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental Elements and issues* (2nd edition). New York, NY: Routledge.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

#### Appendix D: Reflective Prompts

- How are my multiple identities as a professional working mother student experienced at work?
- How are my multiple identities as a professional working mother student experienced at home?
- How are my multiple identities as a professional working mother student experienced at school?
- How does my identity as a person of color, as a non-African American/non-Hispanic in the South, influence my identities as a professional working mother at work, home, and school?
- How do my past experiences of being socially labeled as a racial *other* impact my experiences of the intersectionality of my multiple identities at work, home, and school?
- How do my children experience the intersectionality of my multiple identities as a professional working mother student?
- How does the intersectionality of my multiple identities as a professional working mother student impact my experience of pursuing an online educational doctoral degree?
- What are my personal interests in reflecting upon this research topic?
- What is the professional significance of reflecting upon this research topic?
- What ethical impact might reflecting upon this research topic have?