

Eriksen, Chaves, Hope, & Dugal  
Creating a Community of Critically Reflexive Feminist  
Scholars

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**ABSTRACT:**

In this paper, the authors explain and display their process for becoming more critically reflexive scholars (Cunliffe, 2003). This is accomplished through creating a *community of critically reflexive scholars*. Within this community of inquiry (Eriksen, 2001), participants attempt to go beyond a simple awareness of their ontological and epistemological assumptions and to reflex upon their individual uniqueness as a human being who is engaged in scholarship. In other words, each participant jointly attempts to understand his or her self as a scholar. Specifically, in this article, the authors critically reflex upon their selves within the context of their roles as feminist scholars. The process of inquiry consists of ongoing four stages: giving an account of one's self with respect to a particular area of scholarship, reading everyone else's account, and responding to reading each others account, and finally sharing these responses with one another. Through this process, the authors not only became more critically reflexive scholars but were also personally transformed and obtained a deeper understanding of feminism.

**Key words:** self-reflexivity, self-awareness, dialogue, inquiry, feminism

**Prologue**

Based on my initial reflections on Sc'Moi's conference theme of feminism and what to write about for the conference, I found myself reflecting upon the question I am often asked by those who become aware of my work with female cadets at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy on their lived-experience as female cadets and our efforts to change the Coast Guard Academy to improve female cadets' leadership development and day-to-day lives at the

Academy. The question that is most often raised is "why?" "Why do I engage in such research?"

I most often answer with something to the effect that it is because I had been engaged with racial diversity issues at the University of Rhode Island while a graduate student there, and I planned on continuing this work at the Coast Guard Academy but quickly found out race was not something that was openly discussed at the Academy, at least outside of Admissions. Also, the

multicultural organizations at the Academy function primarily as social clubs - this is not meant to trivialize their purpose because this is a very important need they fulfill. But they do not engage in the activist role that multicultural organizations do on most college campuses.

Although not very relevant to the day-to-day embodied experience of female cadets, there was some discussion of gender at the Academy (this has improved somewhat because of the cadets' and my work and few other committed staff members). But the discussions mostly focused on the percentage of cadets that were women. The Administrators at the Coast Guard Academy focused on the fact that women made up more than twice the percentage of cadets as they did at the other U.S. military academies. This of course was used to mitigate conversations concerning the actual lived-experience of female cadets. Based on some of the female cadets' personal leadership conundrums (a semester-long project based on the cadet's personal leadership conundrum (Eriksen, 2007) that they explored in my leadership course, I became aware of and interested in lived experience of female cadets' at the Academy and in the operational Coast Guard. This was the impetus for my ongoing work with female cadets and officers.

But what I have come to realize is that this explanation does not really answer the question in a meaningful way. In other words, it does not help me understand myself, why I engage in this type of teaching, research and change initiative, where I am positioned with respect to feminism and what it means to my research approach and day-to-day life. I shared these musings with my colleague Wanda, and through our discussion, we realized that each of us has a unique understanding of and relationship to "feminism" that has to do with our experiences, who we are and what social space(s) we occupy, or into which we are interpellated (Althusser, 1971

& Dugal. et. al, 2003.) - we can separate these three things for means of discussion but they cannot be understood outside one another. Also, we realized that there are material, cognitive and emotional consequences, both "positive" and "negative," for us to engage in "feminist" scholarship and to being labeled a [pro-] feminist. We came to the conclusion that to explore these issues would be valuable to us as individual scholars and to Sc'Moi as a community.

Wanda and I have asked Sanjiv and Angela to join with us in giving an account of ourselves (Butler, 2005) with respect to feminism. After we have done this individually, we will share our accounts among us, and then we will express how this sharing affects our understanding of self, feminism, and our position relative to feminism. Thus, this paper is a personal and collective exploration and account of ourselves with respect to feminism as body of knowledge and a category into which we might be hailed and the consequences of this is to our lived experience. We believe the personal, subjective, narrative nature of this exploration, is more meaningful in understanding our position with respect to feminism and of feminism than to simply categorizing ourselves within a particular feminist camp. Also, it reveals the complexity, flux, contingency and personal nature of our understanding of and position with respect to feminism. Also, we hope to provoke other academics and professionals see and feel the limitations and consequences of most "academic" discussions, research, and knowledge on feminism.

In our paper, each of us will describe our self as we are typically hailed (e.g., Matthew as a pro-feminist) in relationship to our role as [pro]feminist researcher, how we came to the topic as an area of interest, how we understand the topic of feminism, the experience and consequences - positive and negative and personal and professional, how we orient ourselves within or in relation

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to the field of feminism, to us from our engagement in feminist research or practice and of being hailed a [pro]feminist.

--Matthew

### **The Requisite Academic Framing**

It is our desire to understand our selves with respect to the topic of feminism, so we can grapple with how we are part of our scholarship, not something separate of it. We realize the world we research is not separate of our experience of it. Our conceptions of our selves influence how we conduct our scholarship and research and the conclusions that we draw from this research. Who we are determines how we perceive and conceive when engaging in research. Our understanding of our selves facilitates our action, for purposes of this article our action as feminist scholars.

In this paper, we present our process of attempting to become more critically reflexive scholars (Cunliffe, 2003). We do not focus on our assumptions about the nature of knowledge and being, even though we believe a researcher's knowledge and understanding of these assumptions is critical to him or her conducting meaningful research (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2003). The implication of possessing certain epistemological and ontological assumptions has been addressed by many other scholars (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, Cunliffe, 2003). Instead, we focus on "the complex, interactional and emergent nature of our social experience (Cunliffe, 2003, 984)." In other words, as researchers, we are much more complex than simply our ontological and epistemological assumptions, and these other parts of us are worthy of and essential to our exploration in *becoming* more critically reflexive scholars. Thus, in this paper, our accounts of our selves are based in our practical everyday understandings of ourselves, which may be more or less "academic" in nature.

We explore our selves through creating a community of inquiry (Eriksen, 2001, Dewey, 1908). As we explore and develop our selves, we also explore and develop our understanding of feminism. Feminism is not something that exists "out there" separate of us, but rather it is an idea that is created and sustained between us, moves through us, and affects how we understand our selves and our scholarship perspective. In other words, who a researcher is cannot be separated from her or his research. Our understanding of our selves can not be separated from our understanding of reality, or in this case our understanding of feminism. Like Deleuze and Guattari, we conceive of the self not as being but as becoming. "[B]ecoming is not the becoming of some being. There is becoming, from which we perceive a relatively stable point of being (Colebrook, 2005, 52)."

In this paper, we will explain the nature of our engagement, our community of inquiry. Then we will present the content of this process - our writings. Finally, we will present some conclusions we drew from engaging in our process.

### **The Nature of our Community of Inquiry**

For purposes of this paper, the process of inquiry consists of ongoing four stages: giving an account of one's self with respect to feminism, reading everyone else's account, and responding to reading each others account, and finally sharing these responses with one another. Beyond the context of this paper, it was the first round of this ongoing four-stage process in which we continue to be engaged.

First, we gave an account of ourselves (Bulter, 2005), we presented our self to each other. These accounts can be conceived of as photographic images that presents our selves at a particular moment in time (Flusser, 2000, Dugal, Eriksen, & Robbins, 2007) - "a relatively stable point of being (Colebrook, 2005, 52)." It is a

snapshot from which we move into continually emerging understandings of our selves and feminism. In other words, we attempt to create a picture of our self to share with each other; we fix in time and space our process of becoming. In giving an account of our selves, we are trying (re)present something that has no materiality; we are trying to (re)present a conception that emerges from within us and is determined by the social influences.

Rather than being an account of an objective permanent self, our account is an exploration and creation of our self within the matrix of social institutions (Butler, 2005). These accounts are delimited by how we imagine our audience - who we want to be in their eyes, who we imagine them to be, how we imagine they will respond to our narrative, and what that reaction means to us. "[W]e seek to present an aspect of ourselves that is acceptable to both ourselves and the eventual viewer (Dugal, et al., 2007)." These conceptions of self may be accepted, supported, rejected, rewarded, punished, etc. through each other's response. The response may strengthen, weaken, or alter our presented account of our self.

Second, we each share our account and read and experience each other's account. Through our reading of each other's account, we deepen our understanding of our selves. It is through the difference(s) in the selves that we present to each other (Dugal & Eriksen, 2004) that we begin to understand our selves in new ways. The four of us are different in many ways such as sex, age, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and geography, and experience. Some of us have never actually met in person and thus, only know each other through our texts. Difference signifies, speaks, and carries a message (Hall, 1997).

Third, we respond to each other's account. Of course, these responses are another presentation of our selves and our

understanding of feminism. We deepen our understanding of ourselves and feminism through this dialogue with others (Bakhtin, 1935/1981). It is through our recognition of our differences that we begin to understand our self and to imagine new possibilities for our self. As we reflect on, write about, and present our selves, we are actively constructing our selves in the telling. Finally, we share our responses with one another.

### **Accounts of Self**

Angela:

Three different organizations have had an enormous impact on me growing up and they still continue to impact me greatly. They have shaped who I am in many ways, and they have (with my help of course) turned me into a raging and radical feminist. These organizations are the family, the Catholic Church, and the U.S. military.

My father is a village born Greek. Although he has always supported me in everything I do, he is a product of his culture. For him, women's primary purpose is to cook, clean, and have children or to put it another way serve the patriarchal institution. For my Dad, sure I can rule the world if I want, but I still have to come home and cook for my husband and care for my children. I was raised Catholic and went to parochial schools as a child. I grew up never missing mass on Sunday. If I did, I had to go to confession because it was a sin to miss mass. When I was seventeen, I enlisted in the army and seven years later, I am still in the service. As far as these latter two organizations are concerned, I contend they are the bastions for patriarchy--the match which lights the oil. Both the Catholic Church and the military remain the only two organizations which can legally bar women from certain roles in the United States. These organizations often make me feel like I am in a lion's den; however, I also call them home.

My feminist journey has been a beautiful one so far. Before I entered graduate

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studies, I would have said that I was someone who used the phrase: "Well, I am not a feminist, but..." Then I took a leap of faith and signed up for the course "Feminist Theology" with Dr. Shelly Rambo at Boston University School of Theology in January of 2005. Taking this course was the best thing I have ever done in my life. It marks my transformation from a patriarchal woman into a woman self-defining. I did not ease myself into the literature and the dialogues of this course; I took the jump off the cliff. I remember one particular day very clearly. It was at the end of the course, when we each had to present a liturgy of some sort that could be in the form of a poem, dance, song, or ceremony. When it was my turn to present, I showed a video clip which I had made of women in the military. In the end, I broke down and sobbed. I did not anticipate this at all. I shared with everyone in the class that I felt as though the stool which I had been sitting on for the past twenty plus years was taken out from under me. This challenging experience was filled with passion, emotions, depression, joy, and love. I took the jump instead of walking down slowly because I saw freedom and life at the very bottom of the cliff. At the bottom of the cliff, I saw my gorgon rage calling to me-I saw Medusa, Eve, Mary Magdala. I saw Goddess. My feminist journey was and continues to be an embodied, spiritual endeavor, and healing my feminine wound is a never-ending process.

Part of being a feminist I have found means taking the good with the bad. The range of schools that follow my beliefs and ideologies are regrettably few and far between. For example, when I began searching for PhD programs in Management in the United States, I emailed numerous professors asking if they would be willing to supervise my work. I stated upfront that I was interested in critical, qualitative, and feminist approaches. The responses I did get were not too promising. One particular professor shared with me that finding business programs open to feminist and

critical research would be extremely difficult. Furthermore, the only reason she survived as long as she did was because she was able to secure tenure. I guess I was not surprised. In any case, I would not trade any second of the bad for normalcy and conformity because to do that would be to constrict my will and suffocate my soul-my own divine feminine. I would rather be persecuted and marginalized than become co-opted. Instead, I read and I ensure that I am in community with other like-minded persons in order to armor and maintain my passion.

One of my friends says: "A true feminist is radical." Being a radical feminist for me requires keeping my flame alive but also requires tendering the flame. This does not mean to suppress it, but it means that I have to dodge and weave. I have to have maneuverability in order to subvert and infiltrate patriarchal pollution. As a radical feminist, I believe that patriarchy or heteronormativity is evil. These systems perpetuate racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, fascism--all the classic isms. Being a feminist means for me understanding and taking into consideration the intersection of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation-not just gender.

## **Methodology**

I would say there are three different methodologies for doing feminism. The first is to not to walk the tight rope but instead to be a thorn in people's sides. The second methodology requires being more cooperative and more "reasonable." It involves trying to work to bring about change from within. The third consists of men who are apart of the system but work for the underdog so to speak. I tend to utilize the first method the most, but it is always situation dependent. Finally, my approach to feminism involves finding the middle path between essentialist leanings and social constructivism. I recognize the dangers of extreme essentialism and extreme social constructivism as

viewpoints. The next part of my feminist journey will involve finding a way to articulate this middle path and place it into meaningful praxis in the day-to-day.

Matthew:

Since my work with the female cadets is viewed as an effort towards establishing gender equality at the Academy, I am most often hailed a "pro-feminist." While working for social equality is definitely one of my desires, it is not the only reason for my engagement in the directed studies with female cadets. Thus, this title is does capture the complexity of my motivations to engage in my work with the female cadets.

On a general level, I have always been fascinated with social equality and social justice movements. This came from reading about people like Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela. I have an interest in understanding the lived-experience of 'Others'. Not just to understand their experience, but through dialogue with 'Others', to construct an understanding of my self (Bahktin, 1981); actually, I think these two understandings cannot be separated. Through dialogue with the female cadets, I have come to know my self. For example, I have come to know my sexism and my social privilege as a [white] male. Engaging in dialogue with the female cadets and officers made me begin to watch my self in my daily interactions at the Academy. For example, one morning I was working out in the gym at the Academy. After the workout, I went to get a towel for my shower and for two male officers that were finishing up their workout. As I was handing the towels to these two officers, I exclaimed "here you go ladies." As the words were coming out of my mouth, I realized I was playfully insulting these officers by referring to them as women. I was being sexist.

Some other reasons for my engagement with the female cadets in these directed studies were that it would help my performance evaluation and academic

career because teaching the directed was going beyond my required teaching load, I would be able to generate some research out of it, and it made me feel good about myself since I was engaging in behavior that was attempting "to make the world a better place." As a side note, I was always upfront with the cadets about what I thought would gain from our interactions. This was as much for my self, as it was for them.

By doing this, I was able to suppress any feelings of "using" them.

The "costs" emanated from the suspicion of some of the military officers of my intentions and that their behavior or the culture of the Academy might be exposed through cadets' and my work. Although true for more male officers, it was also true for a number of female officers. If the sexist culture was articulated and acknowledged, these officers would have to admit to themselves what they knew it existed, at least subconsciously and struggle with what it meant to their self conception. This affected my day-to-day interactions with certain officers and led to a lack of support for me obtaining a tenure-track position at the Academy and personal criticisms and attacks. Because of this, I had to be meticulous in my interactions with the female cadets and my behavior in general. I was worried that officers would attempt to sexualize the nature of my interactions with the female cadets and use this against me and to attack the legitimacy of our work. For example, I had to make sure that when our conversation was of a sensitive nature, that I would ask the cadets if they wanted me to close the door and to make sure the shade over the window on my door was up so that people could see into my office. I had to be transparent.

My suspicions were justified. In conversations with a number of male officers, they did sexualize my interactions with cadets. I had to make sure that I did not let any desires of wanting to fit in at the Academy influence me to engage in such discourse. Of course, the reality was that I

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could never truly fit in. I did not go to the Academy, and I was not in the military. I was and would always be an outsider. But being an outsider allowed me to see certain things and engage in certain endeavors that an officer could not without greater pressure from his or her fellow officers to cease and desist.

As it turns out, my suspicions of these officers were justified, as were their's of me. As an outsider, I did not operate by their guideline of, "What happens on the ship stays on the ship." The cadets and I exposed aspects of the sexist culture and many of the behaviors that were enacted within that culture. Although, we did so in a format that I thought would be constructive, there were both negative and positive consequences to our actions. Unfortunately, individual and organizational growth and truth do not happen without pain and suffering.

As I was receiving much praise for my work and feeling good about my self, there is one incident of my engagement in our change effort that has recently hit me like a brick in the head and made me realize the consequences of breaking someone's trust, for what I believed to be a higher purpose, and that any organizational change effort is ultimately played out in the day-to-day lives of individual members of the organization.

During my last year at the Academy, a female officer had confided in me how she had been sexually harassed. A number of months later, trying to help him understand the present sexist culture and climate at the Academy, in the hope that he might be able to persuade someone at headquarters to seriously address and take actions to improve the lives of females at the Academy, I mentioned these incidents to a commander that was working at headquarters in Washington DC. About six months after that, with a government investigation pending of the Coast Guard Academy and a ongoing Coast Guard investigation of the Academy because of

the court martial of a male cadet on sexual assault charges and other sexual harassment issues at the Academy, based on the information I had provided him, the commander confronted a lieutenant commander that worked with him at headquarters that he knew that had been at Academy when the above incidents occurred. He asked the lieutenant commander if he knew anything about the incidents and mentioned it was best that if something had happened that it be brought to the surface now rather than it being uncovered as part of the upcoming government investigation. The lieutenant commander admitted to witnessing at least one of the sexual harassment incidents and then reported his knowledge to the Coast Guard Admiral who was leading the investigative team of the Academy. Within a few days of this, the female officer was contacted by the Coast Guard investigative committee about the charges.

The female officer called me a few days after that and asked me if I had reported the incident. I said yes and explained to her how it had all unfolded. She was and still is very upset with me. I had violated her trust. I had taken away her agency.

At first, I rationalized that although I had violated her trust, it was for the best. Actions would finally be taken to improve the sexist culture and climate of the Academy. My actions would lead to an improvement of the day-to-day experience of female cadets, so the means justified the actions. And besides that, she had a legal responsibility as an officer of the Coast Guard to report such incidents. I also rationalized that she had a moral obligation to other females in the Coast Guard to report such an incident. It is known that sexual harasser don't just stop harassing.

But even after these rationalizations, I still felt horrible about my self. I could not justify away her feelings that she expressed and that I had violated her trust. But it was not until further reflection and



discussion with my wife, a retired female Army officer, and a male friend of mine who was a minority working at the Academy, that I understood and accepted that I had also taken away her agency and that she would inevitably suffer some negative experiences because of her having to report the incidents. The Coast Guard would not be able to protect her from suffering retribution - whether it wanted to or not.

I now know/admit that my actions were paternalistic in their outcome, if not it intent. I also know I do not fit the definition of a pro-feminist - "...a school of thought developed by men that supports the feminist analysis of patriarchy as a system that privileges men over women, and also men over other men. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchy#Pro-feminism\\_and\\_patriarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchy#Pro-feminism_and_patriarchy), January 18, 2007)." My actions were paternalistic; they were part of the underlying problem. Rather than violating her trust, I should have put more effort towards expressing my thoughts as to why I believed that it was important for her to report such an incident. But I should have left that decision to her. I thought that I knew what was best for her than she did for herself. I took her agency away. If she did not want to report what had happened to her, I was determined to find some oblique way to do it. I wanted justice to be done.

Most often, not only "good" comes from speaking the truth, especially for the victim of sexual harassment. In a hegemonic masculine system/culture such as the Academy, even if its official regulations do not permit sexual harassment, the system does not adequately protect the victims of sexual harassment after the perpetrator has been justly prosecuted.

This experience has been very painful in that I had to face my self, and who I saw was not to my liking. I had betrayed the trust of a friend and took her agency away. I probably lost her as a friend.

Thus, my understanding of my relationship to feminism is constantly changing based on my actions as they unfold through time and space. After this incident, I don't feel like doing any more gender research. I feel as if I can't tell when I am doing "good" or "bad," whether I am doing something based on my self-interest or to help others. I am emotionally drained from over the years fighting with the institutions that I have been a part, especially after my certainty about doing "good" has been shaken.

I was not a scientist objectively researching the topic of feminism. I researched the topic for personal reasons, some of which I am probably still not aware. I subjectively inquired into gender issues at the academy. What I realize now is that my research activities and engagement with feminism scholarship and the female cadets have profoundly affected who I am and how I understand my self. My self affected/determined my feminist scholarship and my engagement in feminist scholarship has profoundly affected my sense of self

Wanda:

My conversations with Matthew on the feminism theme for the Sc'Moi's conference encouraged me to reflect on my own motivations for working within the fields of diversity, cross-cultural management, and leadership in both university and professional environments. My work as a university professor and consultant in the corporate world has been deeply influenced by my rich and complex experiences growing up as a female on a small island with a traditional Hispanic environment and culture and as the daughter of a very independent, professional, and intelligent woman in this milieu.

Because of my mother's strong influence, I learned to question from an early age the traditional expectations that are placed on women in many Latin countries and to desire to do and see much more than I could ever see within the borders of our



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small island. Because of her courage, I had the opportunity to move to the United States for high school and go on to obtain a Ph.D., travel to many countries around the world, work across a wide variety of industries, and teach at the university level, all by the age of 28. Through all of this and through my interactions with similar others, I have gained a profound appreciation for and strong commitment to helping people from diverse backgrounds and walks of life who have a very strong potential but are limited by the environments in which they live and/or work. This focus is at the heart of my passion and my work.

As a child, I was surrounded by many women who were intelligent and talented, but who were unable to pursue their own goals and dreams due to strong cultural and social norms and pressures. I watched them focus all their time and energy on helping others (i.e. their husbands, children, and other extended family members) achieve their goals as they neglected their own desires and dreams day after day while they tried to convince themselves that they were truly happy. I was constantly told by my grandmother and other older women in my family and community that I needed to learn how to cook, iron, and gain some weight, if I wanted to find a man who would want me for a wife and love me. I experienced many moments of anger and frustration, even at my young age, as I repeatedly heard comments like this and observed the double standards that prevailed and were allowed to continue by the women in our culture. I often felt like I did not belong. I kept dreaming of all the things I wanted to do with my life and all the places I would go in the world. I wanted to attend a high school in the U.S. with a real football team!, study French and Italian, take art and dance classes, meet and help people from around the world, and become a teacher, maybe even a university professor! All this, I shared with my amazing mother who dreamed right along with me and who told me that everything I wanted to do and see was possible.

When I was 15, my mother decided that she needed to move my sister and I to the U.S. To this day, I still thank my mother for doing so. I would not be the person and woman I am today if my mother had not had the courage to leave everything behind to move us to the U.S. That short two and a half hour flight ended up opening the world and countless possibilities up for me.

Even once I had moved to the U.S., however, prior to my earning my Ph.D., I encountered others who were trying to be "helpful" in helping me to set realistic expectations for myself. I once had the chair of one of the departments in which I took courses for my Ph.D. tell me that I needed to be prepared for how tough life would be since I was "too pretty, a woman, Hispanic, and so young looking". A few years later, I also had a well meaning manager advise me that I should hire an image consultant to make me look ten years older if I wanted to succeed in the professional world. I sadly wondered how many other people had been held back by these two individuals and by the many others who are like them out there. At the time, I was outraged and angered. But then I decided to turn my anger into action, and I made it my goal to educate and inspire others to help people to grow and live up to their potential.

I guess I would call my approach a quiet revolution. I have never chosen to engage the feminist literature directly. The reasons for my decision are two-fold. Firstly, having experienced the complex dynamics of being a woman as well as Hispanic, I wanted to help others from many different backgrounds not focus solely on gender; therefore, I chose to focus on diversity more broadly. And secondly, I had watched many women over the years lose credibility and their voice after being labeled a 'feminist'. I did not want to take that risk and hinder the impact that I wanted to make. I wanted to make a statement and a difference via the way I lived my life. And I wanted to help others from all backgrounds, not just

women, who are held back by their culture, societal expectations, or their own beliefs and fears. This continues to be one of my main purposes in life... to help individuals to see that the world is out there waiting and to not allow "well meaning" others to define how much they are capable of achieving. I do so in my work as a mentor with students and with leaders in the business world who are in a position to recognize and develop the potential in others and help them to grow and succeed.

Today, my grandmother calls and says to me "I guess it is too late. You will never get married at your age". Little does she know, that internally I laugh inside, unaffected, thirty something years later, as I plan my next university course or professional project and pack for my next exciting trip to India, Israel, or Turkey.

Sanjiv:

The Lion Hearted: Samson and Sanjiv

I was reading the myth of Samson (Grossman, David, 2006) and found how his betrayal by all the women in his life, from his mother to Delilah, is inherently a framing of a moral journey that transpires upon his body; the site of his felt experience, where he finally brings the house down on himself.

As I narrate my "I" in terms of Samson, I re-enact the self I'm trying to describe. I act out, in real time and space, the story of Samson and within this set of norms, I self-craft the story of Sanjiv and his Other (Dugal & Eriksen).

I re-enact my story with the Other every time. It is the performative and non-narrative act that is essential to the narrative itself.

*The concept of 'girlfriend' was new to me, just as the concept of 'gentleman' was a bit of an anachronism over here. I found myself operating in a situation where the signs and symbols were unknown to me and I was at a loss in the mating game.*

And here may be found something of an

answer to the question I posed earlier-How ought I treat you, the Other, when I re-enact, again and again, precisely the same feelings I have ever experienced from the start? Or in other words, why do we compulsively repeat experiences, re-creating in the course of our lives, the relationships and situations that arouse those feelings? Is it because it is precisely here at the very center of our framing that we feel the most 'self' as we 'really are,' in other words, as we were at the origin of our lives, at the very beginning?

*In 1980, I arrived in New England from the old country's commonwealth territory, the jewel in its crown, British-Colonial India. I was recently divorced and my wife and had left the 'administrative system' that I'd belonged to: a Brown Sahib in the shoes of the white English Man, Ralph Lauren style. It was all that I knew.*

As I narrate my "I," I form myself in relation to a set of codes, prescriptions or norms and, I do so in ways that reveal self-constitution to be a kind of poiesis. Martin Heidegger refers to poiesis as a 'bringing-forth', using this term in its widest sense. He explained poiesis as the blooming of the blossom, the coming-out of a butterfly from a cocoon, the plummeting of a waterfall when the snow begins to melt. The last two analogies underline Heidegger's example of a threshold occasion: a moment of ecstasis when something moves away from its standing as one thing to become another.

In other words, my relationship with the Other is brought forth within the context of a set of norms that precede and exceed me. There is no making of oneself (poiesis) outside of a mode of subjectivation and, hence, no self-making outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that a subject may take.

*To understand my experience of betrayal by Woman, it became compelling to go back to the beginning...with the death of my mother, so early in my life that her*

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*memory is a non- happening.*

My purpose in writing in such a fashion is to expose those limits and in this way to engage in an aesthetics of the self that maintains a critical relation to the existing norms operating upon me. According to Foucault (UP, 28) this requires us to act upon ourselves, to monitor, test, improve, and transform ourselves.

### Our Response to Each Other

From Wanda:

My Response, Reactions to You...

*To Angela:*

I must start by saying you inspire me. Reading your account of self made me question and reflect on my own path and experiences in my life. Have I not been courageous enough to step out and voice my thoughts and anger more openly? Have I been hiding behind the "diversity" word instead of more honestly admitting to myself and others how I often feel as a woman? Could I be making more of an impact on others if I were to wrestle with and clarify some of my feelings and focus more on the experience of women specifically, versus that of the broader group? Could I live an even more fulfilling life, personally and professionally?

Questions I have for you:

*Do you express yourself as openly with others in the military as you have in your account of self?* In many ways, the male dominated business world is much like the military, and many women, including myself, struggle with expressing, as you so beautifully state it, their "own divine feminine" and instead conform and "constrict (their) will and suffocate (their) soul(s)" in order to survive and be accepted. *What advice would you give them?*

*Were you purposely not addressing how you felt prior to taking the Feminist*

*Theology course in graduate school because of your position in the military and your wish to succeed? Was this a conscious decision on your part?*

*How exactly do you "subvert and infiltrate patriarchal pollution"? And how do you maintain the "maneuverability" to do so?*

We share very similar backgrounds in terms of our Catholic background and the parallels between the Greek and Hispanic cultures so I highly relate to your account and value learning about your experiences and your journey. You have given me much to think about and have encouraged me to honestly and openly revisit some tough questions I have asked myself only privately in the past.

*To Sanjiv:*

Your account of self, and its title, is poetic and beautifully written. But you discuss your experiences and feelings primarily in the third person from a removed position, in an impersonal, academic way. *Why is this?*

My questions for you:

*Are you saying that, as Samson, you have been betrayed by all the women in your life?*

*What has caused you to not understand the concept of "girlfriend" or "gentleman"? Is it yourself that you are referring to when you write of this lack of understanding?*

*What exactly have you done or are you doing "to act upon (yourself), to monitor, test, improve, and transform (yourself)"? Are you personally at a threshold "moment of ecstasies" in your life? Or are you simply writing about the "coming-out of a butterfly from a cocoon" occasions for the purpose of analyzing such occasions?*

*Why do you do this work? What has been your own personal journey that has brought you here?*

*To Matthew:*

I appreciate the honesty and level of insight that you share in your account of self. I was impressed by your ability to be vulnerable in sharing your journey, particularly the difficult parts of it, with us.

After reading through your account several times, I find myself still struggling with the question "What would I have done in a similar situation?" As a woman, I am outraged by the thought of not being given a choice, of having, as you say, my "agency" away. I would want to be shown the high level of respect that I deserve to make my own decision about how to handle the difficult situations in my life. It is my right to decide how I want to proceed or not proceed.

However, as an outsider, I ask myself "Where do we draw the line?" If we are a witness to injustices of any kind, should we stay quiet and allow them to continue? Is it not our responsibility to bring these injustices to light and to put a stop to them?

I agree that the best approach would have been to speak directly with her and to encourage her to step forward and report the incident, for her own sake as well as for all women, and others, in the military and elsewhere who have dealt with similar harassment.

But what if she did not want to step forward? Should we stay quiet and respect her wishes, although it would allow many others to be exposed to the same potential abuse? Where do we draw the line? Could there have been another way to bring the situation to light without violating her trust and confidentiality?

I see this as a critical question to personally address. Where do I draw the line between what would be best for me, as one woman (either as the insider or as the outside witness) and what would be best for all women (or for that matter, all

individuals who are not treated fairly or justly)?

I also wonder:

*Have your experiences at the Academy changed how you interact with the women in your personal and professional life?*

From Angela:

Sanjiv: Two statements caught my attention loud and clear in your piece. The part when you talk about the poesies (which I had to look up on dictionary.com at first). This is a good way for me to make sense of how I became transformed after taking feminist theology at BU. I changed from the caterpillar into the butterfly because I transformed myself in the sense that I was able to acknowledge and even embrace my own misogyny, racism, heterosexism etc. Everyday I make a concerted effort to unlearn and uncreate the social norms which perpetuate social injustice. I accepted my own complicity and evil-making...then I took Action. I think this is essential to transformation. To give an example... I identify as a heterosexual. I took a Queer theology class to learn more about my own heterosexism and try to un-heterosexize myself. It was an amazing experience that allowed me to become aware of my own privilege.

The second was when you make the statement: "I find that I am caught up in a struggle with norms. But could it also be true that I would not be in this struggle with norms if it were not for a desire to offer recognition to you? How do we understand this desire?" This statement and these questions were very though provoking for me in relation to my understanding of the Subject and the Other and where I fit in when dealing with practical feminism.

Normativity is nihilistic, constricting, and antithetical to that which is (pro)creative and life-giving. By using the term (pro)creative, I am not alluding to an evolutionary understanding of the word but I am referring to anything which brings forth creativity,

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imagination, life, zest, love. Anyone who struggles with normativity or another name for this which I will use from here on-heteronormativity-is actualizing their will to power. Heteronormativity pertains to systems and structures which denounce fluidity, alternatives to reason and rationality, and Others' bodies-specifically the movement of them in space and time. I use the concept "will to power" in the sense of how Nietzsche uses it. He argues that the will to power inherent in "man" is also his desire to dominate (nihilism) and to attain his highest value. It is a drive to reject nihilism or that which happens when the highest value starts to lose its value. Despite the fact that he was a raging misogynist, something can be taken from this. The Subject and the Other are both striving to reach their "highest values"-whatever that term means. Heteronormativity benefits the Subject in this regard...or does it really? Is this a phallacy? Is the Subject truly actualizing his will to power when he internalizes and subscribes to the white-male system? I ask you what does it mean to reach our highest values whether as a white male or a nonwhite male or a (non-white) woman?

The Subject and the Other are caught in a complicated pretzel of power relations. When I met Matthew, right away, we both said no to normalcy and we transcended the norms. Still, we are constantly engaging these norms and saying no to them. This is our will to power. This struggle and constant saying NO is constantly changing and evolving because it involves finding new and different ways to say NO. As a theologian, I wonder if it is possible to redeem systems and institutions so that there can be a time when we do not have to say NO? Or is this inherent struggle necessary in order to have hope and a zest for life. Without a struggle...our will to power becomes a mute point. Do we write to each other about these things just to feel like we are alive?

The inherent struggle with

heteronormativity is predicated upon our will-our drive to become "infinite" in the way Irigaray uses the term "infinite" in *Divine Women*. In my experience I have come to the realization that my desire to recognize the Other-and the Other for me is the translesbigay person or the African American woman or the working class Arab male--comes from a desire to know myself and to seek the "highest value" of myself. I realize this: I am the African American woman, the FTM, the Arab male. They are me. We are interconnected in ways that are impossible to explain through reason and rationality. The theological writings of feminist theologians and theologians who write on the topic of nonviolence such as Marjorie Suchocki, Walter Wink, and Yoder have informed my understanding of humanity as interrelated. To make this more aesthetic-I imagine a puzzle in which each piece makes up the whole.... The puzzle is made up of pieces that fit perfectly with Other pieces because it is part of the same picture.

Matthew: To you I say I wish I had been born your sister. You are more amazing than you give yourself credit for. About your problem with your friend...: The man who sexually harassed her took her agency away. The system which favors predators over women regardless of whether you said anything or not took her agency away. Yes you may have made it harder for her to reclaim this agency but her grave was dug long before you came along. This is coming from me-a survivor of military sexual trauma.

I also say to you: Accept your complicity and your own evil-making. It is in us all. Embrace it. Embrace the brokenness you are feeling now so that you can let it go. At the same time, know that you have made such a difference in the lives of many young women....a difference that not even other women can evoke from women. I am as sexist as you are and as patriarchal as you are. You and I both say NO to the system all the time but sometimes it is not possible because it is also part of who we are. Don't

hate that part of yourself. If you had not come in my life, I would not be on the path I am now on. I never would have found Heather and Albert and Jean Mills. I have been steered in a direction through your entrance into my life. I am grateful for this. If we take a seesaw, I am quite sure that your sexist behaviors and evil doings cannot bring down the other side.

If you are burnt out from working on gender issues, then don't do it anymore. Or better yet...focus on them with your beautiful girls. However, in another sense, you will always be working on gender issues by the "little things" you do and say or don't say on a day to day basis. Ok I will stop my preaching now.

Your narrative made me think of how different it is for me as the Other working on issues on behalf of the Other than for you as the Subject working on issues for the Other. It reminds me of a conversation I once had with a dear friend. He raised the point of how it is one thing for a woman to work on women's issues. In a sense, this is self-motivated. It is another when a man is working for the advancement of women. This is in my words seeking our highest value. It is not a selfish motivation because it simultaneously involves seeking the highest value of Other.

The profeminist thing...

It is interesting how people "name" you. What would you call yourself? Do you agree with this assessment? Is pro-feminism another name for men who are feminist inclined? I have mixed reactions with the term. The idea of a feminist is someone who believes in the rights in women...to call yourself a feminist implies you are including yourself in a group. It is not necessarily for the rights of women but for the rights of feminists. So okay I can understand and appreciate that. However, it is a very abstracted and disembodied term as well as theory-based. This is where my disconnect is because words are remarkably powerful

and political. In my experience, I would not call myself a feminist for fear of persecution...the first few times I uttered the word in social gatherings...it was very difficult. Now naming myself a feminist has been very powerful for me. While it is good not to get too stuck in the "words", the word feminist and BEING one are powerful. I guess I might be projecting my experience onto those who call themselves profeminists. Why can't they just call themselves feminists? I know you say you would not name yourself as a profeminist ...as people hail you. I wonder if why you don't has anything to do with what I have said. I am curious what you're thoughts are.

Wanda: I am happy to be dialoging with you. I am excited to meet you in person. Your account makes me think of my own personal experiences in a male dominated world. I too have been made to feel inadequate or not white-male enough in many of my jobs and experiences. Now I just take the insults as compliments. I appreciate your quiet revolution. Your quiet approach makes me reflect and contemplate my approach. As I mentioned my approach is more of a loud revolution. Matthew has referred to me as on fire before. Perhaps it is a phase and maybe when I join the academic world I will alter my methods and approach. Secretly I hope not...and I hope to find a way to call myself a feminist openly....I want to be out of the closet completely.

I guess I may see myself as someone who keeps feminists motivated within the academic world and probably perceived as a "crazy" woman by non-feminists. Outside of academia, in the day-to-day, I think I can be good at engaging people to discover non-sexist lifestyles. There is still much for me to figure out and experience.

I am actually going to attend a PhD program in Management that is outside the US precisely because in the US I will not be encouraged to do research using post-

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positivist methods and feminist methods for the most part. I am doing this because I need to rebuild my soul. My time in the military and even at Boston University School of Theology have been filled with constant struggles and headaches. I want to be in a place where I can be appreciated for my alternative viewpoints and understandings.

When you mention how you laugh to yourself when your grandmother looks down on you because you are not married...this gives me strength. My friend who is also a theology student with me has this particular quote on her website:

“... deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called marriage, nor god, nor an afterlife.”

~ Audre Lorde

Does this speak to you at all?

From Sanjiv:

Dear Angela,

I read your text and found it powerful because it resonates with my experience. I found Wanda and Matthew's text equally powerful. I have yet to present my text that represents my image of myself in movement (see Deleuze). My previous email to you was clearly patriarchal towards you, even when the literature one is citing and the site one is carving is jumping into the feminist debate.

I want to problematize our relationship so that we can talk about it some more, indeed, so that we can talk about it in a never-ending kind of way...

A couple of things I need to clarify, particularly because we barely know each

other.

(1) I'm positioned in my writing along the works of Deleuze and others of his ilk. Thus, I'm in the habit of generating text in the same way that you did, that is, by presenting moving images. So, it is a question of generating bypresentingmoving images. Personally, though, I've never used celluloid as my medium. Nonetheless, both Eriksen and I understand the 'moving image' part of ourselves. (Please see our presentation to the Research Methods Division of the Academy of Management in Lyon, France in 2005)

Eriksen's image as Dad is in movement; and what's more,

he gets to write the script and, I get the front row seat.

We're all an audience unto each other, in this way. And, it's a win-win situation.

Actor and Audience are One. This translates into “looking at you looking at me looking at you.” This was the cornerstone of Eriksen's dissertation and subsequently, the fishbowl.

So, without the use of celluloid you've generated an image of:

“It marks my transformation from a patriarchal woman into a woman self-defining.”

And, you embellish this image by:

“I took the jump off the cliff. I remember one particular day very clearly.”

And, you do this by presenting (in one swift and bold movement)

the moving image of your present/past trajectory:

“My feminist journey was and continues to be an embodied, spiritual endeavor, and healing my feminine wound is a never-ending process.”

(2) In general, I've taken an ethical stance of transparency in my writing where the goal is always to show where one is



'coming from.' Consequently, my sharing is done in a fishbowl consisting of people who I perceive as professional friends. Our exchange, which may be seen as an 'episode fragment' in a larger design, is:

of you and me, by you and me and, of you and me.

'Looking at oneself looking at oneself' requires being wary of the tendency of 'over-interpretation' and narcissism. I see your statement as caring-ness when you eloquently say: "The next part of my feminist journey will involve finding a way to articulate this middle path and place it into meaningful praxis in the day-to-day."

Finally, I hope you will excuse my patriarchal nature of my response. But then, we're getting there, so long as we are true to creating value and not just scoring points.

Sanjiv:

Ps: I have yet to respond to Wanda and Matthew's and write my own autobiographical journey. I have been very sick with cold and I've lost my voice because of dryness in the bitter cold. But by tomorrow I will be all caught up.

From Matthew:

Thank you everyone for sharing. Reading everyone's writing was quite illuminating. Below are the ideas that moved through my head as I read and contemplated your writings.

I could see a part of my self through reading everyone's writing. What struck me was the similarity and uniqueness of each of our narratives. The accounts of ourselves are a form of self-expression that represents each of us. An aspect of each of our narratives is concerned with being an outsider and of wanting to change the world within which we live. All our narratives are purposeful, as I feel we all want our lives to be. I felt that at least part of that purpose comes from trying to help people "like us." I use "like us" in a broad sense to capture individuals that share a similar defining

experience of being the Other. Each of these experiences is different in its manifestation, but each of us has been profoundly impacted by being an outsider at some point in our lives, and for whatever reason, this experience has become a defining experience in our lives and has greatly influenced our professional work. Our profession has become part of our self-expression. I believe because of this our work is authentic; it is who we are: the good and bad, the pretty and the ugly, and best and the worst. We bring our selves to the table.

From Angela's writing about being a self-defining woman, it made me wonder whether this is actually possible. I imagine self-determination as a quest and constant struggle with Others to define our self. Since we are social creations, I believe that we can never fully escape the power of Others' influence on our self understanding. It seems that in our quests to be authentic, we are all in a struggle for self-determination in the wake of some powerful social Other that is always trying to wash over us, to define us, and who has been successful at doing so at times throughout our lives. Yet we continually struggle to keep from drowning in the interpellations of these social Others, discourses or ideologies - whatever one wants to call them. It is through interacting with each other and others like us that we find the strength to keep swimming and at times, merely treading water. What is so difficult is that we can never fully escape the power of these social Others because we live within these ideologies through our relationships with those that enact them. This influence is strong, powerful, and pervasive, and we struggle to grasp its influence on us and then to fight it off in an attempt to define who we want to be within the chaotic flux of our lived experience and actually be this person in our day-to-day lives.

The difference in our narratives helps me understand myself, as well as each one of you. Reading our narratives as a group

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creates additional meaning to reading each of them individually. It is through our differences that meaning is created: man/woman, American/Puerto Rican/Indian, different families, ethnicities, and cultural influences, etc.

In Sanjiv and Angela, I see the influence of your academic studies in your narratives and the employment of metaphor. Angela expresses her emotions and utilizes metaphor in describing her transformation when she became conscious in her Feminist Theology course. Wanda gives a personal chronological narrative. Angela and Wanda talk of the fight for self-determination against the force of paternalistic institutions. Sanjiv's writing seems to be, and my writing now that I look back at it, a struggle to make sense of him self and his reality in general and within a particular context - America for Sanjiv and the military for me.

I see how our relationships with people influence us: Sanjiv with his wife, Angela with her father, Wanda with her mother, and me with a female officer. Both Wanda and Angela were influenced by individuals enacting patriarchal cultures. But for Angela it was through men like her father, and Wanda through women like her grandmother and other women in her local community. We do not make sense of our selves based on theories alone but rather primarily through our lived experience with Others. Thus, our understanding of our selves is not so much an academic exercise but the consequence of our embodied experiences.

I realize that each of our positions with respect to feminism is unique, contingent, and in constant formation. We are not scientists doing objective research but embodied individuals expressing our selves through our scholarship.

### **Conclusion**

Through engaging in our community of critically reflexive feminist scholars, it

became clear to us that our engagement in [feminist] scholarship is not about finding some Truth that exist outside of us, but rather is about creating a particular truth between us. A truth that is dependent upon who we are and how we understand the topic that we are researching. The scholar is part of his or her scholarship, not something separate of it. Because of this, who the scholar is always affects his or her scholarship and research and its conclusion, and he or she is always changed by engaging in scholarship.

Within this process, as we explored and developed our selves, we also explored and developed our understanding of feminism. In creating an account of our self, we each deliberately wrestled with the fundamental question of why we engage in feminist scholarship by taking an honest look at our past, often painful and uncomfortable, experiences that have led us to our present feminist scholarship. Sharing our accounts with each other then allowed us to make further strides in our self understanding and development through reflecting on each other's paths and experiences and considering how they mirror or diverge from on our own. This enlarged the arena of possibilities for gaining deeper insights far beyond the insights we could have gained by engaging in the self-reflection in solitude. In sharing and responding to our accounts, we considered each other's, and then consequently our own, courage, fears, and alternative, expanded paths for our work and personal growth moving forward.

The benefit of our reflexivity within our community of inquiry is that it has allowed us to understand our subjectivity beyond our epistemological and ontological assumption. It made us realize our humanity as researchers and its effect on our research. Our research is not a scientific endeavor for Truth but rather a personal pursuit of meaning and self understanding and development. Also, our process points to the limitations of our research. This does not discredit the meaningfulness of our

research, but rather puts it in perspective.

56(8), 983-1003.

By giving an account of our selves, reading each other's account, responding to each other's account and sharing these responses, we consciously grappled with how we conceive of our selves. This created a shared space, a community, within which to imagine new possibilities of becoming and topics an approach to our feminist scholarship. Of course, these presentations of our selves are not the complete self that exists at a particular moment in time. Some parts we have consciously chosen not to expose, others lay hidden below our consciousness and others have yet to emerge. We engage with and honor each others humanity. Through this process, we have become more critically reflexive scholars and have been transformed by one another.

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*signifying practices* (pp. 223-290).

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS:**

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