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THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION:
A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. I would like to thank my mom, Kimberly Lane. Your encouragement and support has helped me achieve this goal. I would not have finished without you. My grandparents, Bobby and Gladys Lane, taught me about unconditional love and the importance of hard work. My twin sister, Jennifer, you were there to remind me that I belonged here whenever I needed the encouragement. My brilliant and beautiful niece, Lilly, you are the best part of my world and I love you forever and always. My husband, Tomas Ramirez, thank you for understanding my commitment to this dissertation and for your support. Dwayne Hess, you may have been my uncle, but you were my "real father" and I love and miss you so much. You aren't here to see my graduation, but your selfless love and unfailing encouragement helped me get here. Uncle Greg Lane, you were another "real father" for me and I'm thankful for all of the time you have given me throughout my life. I've always been able to count on you. Lachrisha Hess, I love you so much. You have always been another parent for me and you're always willing to listen and help me when I need you. Charity Garner, Stephanie Hess, Tammy Lane, Rachael Lane and Adrian Lane I love you all and I'm blessed to have you in my family. You are a part of the reason that I was able to complete this task.

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Abstract

This paper examines the experiences and context in the directional relationship between education and the life course. Using the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, the experiences of educated individuals who do not appear to reap the full social and cultural benefits of their education are examined with a focus on the reasons these individuals have not sought to make changes that would elevate their standards of living. The discussion concludes with a determination on whether current policies are correct in their suggestions educational attainment can improve life trajectories and lessen the gap present within the levels of socioeconomic status. It is possible to gain valuable information about the purpose and success of education through examining the experiences of women who have attained post-secondary education and remained actively involved in working-class lives and neighborhoods.

Preface

Hermeneutic phenomenology appeals to me as a methodology due to its storytelling nature. It is my desire to use this study as a means of telling the stories of the individual participants. I believe their lived experiences are valuable. I want their voices to become part of the collective conversation relating to the purpose of education. The ability of the researcher to become part of the story through reflection and reflexivity is essential to this study. I cannot tell the stories of the women in the study without telling my own story because they are connected.

I was reared in a rural working-class neighborhood. My twin sister and I resided in a multigenerational home. Our father died when we were less than two years old. His fatal car accident was the result of having worked both a day shift and night shift at his job for two consecutive days. He fell asleep returning home and struck another vehicle. He was killed instantly. He did not have any type of life insurance. His upper middle-class family rejected his personal and professional choices and did not assist our mother. However, our maternal grandparents did not hesitate to allow us to live in their home.

The income level earned by my single mother placed our family solidly below the poverty line. While many of my high school classmates did not attend college, it was never a question for my family whether or not my twin and I would attend college. My grandfather saved his change in a jar my entire senior year of high school to be able to provide us with enough gas to move to the Norman campus of the University of Oklahoma. It became an unspoken assumption my sister and I would go to college and return home to find work near our small town.

I completed my bachelor's degree in sociology and finished a master's in human relations two years later. I began work on my Ph.D. in educational studies immediately after completing my master's. During my first semester of my doctoral work, I made the decision to return home. Initially, I was unable to find a suitable professional position. I returned to working as a server at the small café at which I worked during my junior and high school years.

Eventually, I accepted a position at a local college. While it was in my field, the income was significantly below the amount I could have earned with my credentials in a different neighborhood. The position allowed me to remain living in the farmhouse where I grew up. My comfort level with the area and my willingness to remain despite the bleak job market caused me to question the experiences of other women in similar situations. The majority of academic work surrounding working-class women and education focused on the purpose of education as a means for working-class women to achieve social and economic mobility. I learned working-class women who did not seek to mirror their middle-class peers or become part of the middle-class culture were absent from the literature.

This study was developed as a way to fill that void. It serves as a means of contributing to the field of education in a way that presents the value of the experiences of working-class women with educational attainment who do not reject or advance from their working-class background. Before moving forward, it is efficacious to discuss briefly the academic dispositions of class.

Class Connections

Class within the United States reflects the social hierarchy. Middle-class culture is defined as the social values and norms associated with the group of people falling above working-class, but below the upper-class. Middle-class culture is viewed as the standard of measurement by which all members of society should adhere (Lauter, 2014).

Elite-culture is understood to reflect the values, norms and experiences of individuals who have a socioeconomic status that places them in the wealthiest group of individuals within their region. Elite groups are more likely to have the highest levels of political power as well as financial wealth. This culture is used as a goal leveraged against middle-class individuals as a means of increasing their productivity (Lauter, 2014). Subsequent portions of this study will refer to the term "elite women." The term reflects women who are part of the elite culture.

The characteristics of working-class individuals (as defined by their position in relation to other class groups) serve as a basis for defining the culture. The use of the comparison definition highlights the perceived disparities of working-class culture. The positioning of elite culture as the ideal has left working-class culture unfairly labeled deficient (Parfitt, 2016).

The impact of social class on cultural development extends to physical space, emotional development and interpersonal communication. Individuals within each class develop their own form of capital that is beneficial within their communities. Middle-class families develop and perpetuate the type of cultural capital that allows for them to maintain their social position and in some cases to advance into more elite levels.

Working-class individuals are often unable to participate in the type of networking and personal cultural development that produces the ability to advance in professional or socio-cultural areas (Bourdieu, 2018). Concrete examples of the barriers that exist between working-class individuals and their middle-class peers exist in the form of highways, railroad tracks and strategically planted trees. While neighborhoods often require certain elements in order to function properly, the placement of geographic dividers also serve as a reminder of the socio-cultural barriers that exist to keep working-class individuals out of middle-class areas. Middle-class culture excludes working-class individuals (Chekhov, 2009).

Working-class Culture

Individuals.

United States culture typically considers individuals to be within the working-class if their income is above the level determined to be the poverty level, but below the median income. The term blue-collar reflects the physical aspect of the culture by referencing the color of the shirts used frequently within service jobs. Blue-collar workers fill service industry roles. They are typically paid on an hourly scale and complete tasks that serve to increase profit for others. They become a product in that they sell their time and labor for a fee (Parfitt, 2016). The manner society views working-class individuals and the internalized self-view comes from the judgement of others influences working-class people. Working-class culture is simultaneously demonized and romanticized through the perception working-class men and women are either lacking in work ethic or possess a higher level of morality and compassion than middle-class and above people. The reality of working-class culture is somewhere in the

middle of the two extremes. The tendency to either elevate or ostracize the culture depends on the framing of the situation and the reason for analysis.

Material and Non-Material Culture.

Culture is a fluid concept that encompasses material goods, services, social traditions and belief systems. Working-class culture is not immune from the pressures of marketing and brand recognition. The artifacts are valued within the culture are typically different from those in wealthier classes. Most of the goods and services desired within a social class reflect the shared interests and commonalities present within the class culture (Sheehan, 2010).

Psychological Development.

Social institutions function to socialize working-class individuals to follow the predetermined social rules. The socialization process fosters the outcome of placing a higher value on social interactions than material gain. The system of education within working-class schools perpetuates the role of the working-class to be the 'doers' of society and not those who make the rules. Students learn to memorize facts rather than exercise critical thinking skills. The internalized outcome of the socialization process is working-class people are less likely to assert their preferences. Instead, working-class people prefer to blend with the thoughts of those around them. The desire to promote harmony and secure group inclusion is central to the definition of what constitutes a positive person (Ellis, 1992).

Perceptions vs Reality.

The media depicts the working-class as lazy or unethical. The general lack of education requirements within the industries working-class people work contributes to

the notion all working-class people are lacking in civility and communication skills. There is a duality present within working-class communities. Many individuals pride themselves on their working-class values and willingness to complete work they have defined as worthy or real. The level of difficulty connected with physical labor is often deemed more valuable than white-collar work. The rejection of middle-class and elite culture is finite and complete. This group recognizes the differences in their lifestyles and those of other cultures but choose to celebrate their choices rather than strive to mimic the other groups (Sheehan, 2010).

The physical and emotional barriers between working-class neighborhoods and their middle-class counterparts have had an impact in the way which some working-class individuals define themselves. Many families falling below the income lines required for inclusion in the middle-class still define themselves under that label. They attempt to hold the same values and adhere to the same set of norms and ideals. The desire to remain rooted within a system that does not value them can prove detrimental (Sheehan, 2010).

Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States positions education as an effective means for lessening the levels of inequality present at social and economic levels (Slowey & Watson, 2003). The reduction in spending levels for education is blamed for the shrinking middle-class. (Fuller, 2007). While there is a correlation between income and, for the purposes of this study, higher educational attainment for many (Choshen-Hillel, 2011), there are those who do not experience the increases in standards of living that are suggested to be equated with their educational attainment. They do not have lifestyles equal to the expectations for their levels of education. They remain in economically depressed areas either by choice or through social pressures.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study examines working-class women who attained higher education but choose to remain living and working in a working-class neighborhood. Their stories add insights into the lack of connection between education and success. While the field of academia has long understood the value of education in nonmonetary terms, it has remained defined as such by the broader level of society. The association between education and economic advancement is a central theme of this study.

In American culture, success is defined in terms of consumption and ownership. The value of individuals is based on the type and quality of material goods. Human capital is expressed not by personal characteristics or traits, rather by the amount of goods and services able to be amassed. While there are other definitions of education, most often it is considered in relation to its ability to increase wealth, power and privilege (Turpin, 2016). Under such terms the educational journey becomes relegated

to its simplest terms. It becomes a means to an end. It is nothing more than a path to financial success. Learning from the lived experiences of working-class women who have deviated from social expectations can provide educators with alternative ways to expand their vision and goals for all students and, especially for groups outside of the elite. Learning from those individuals who have not experienced the expected outcomes associated with their educational attainment can help answer the research question, "What can be learned about the motivations for educational attainment from the lived experiences of working-class women who earned a degree, but remain living or working in working-class neighborhoods?"

Background

As stated, my study examines the lived experiences of educated working-class women. It seeks to present their experiences as an alternative to the experiences of the elite. Elite experiences often suggest the economic benefit to education is considered the most valuable. However, it is possible for working-class women, educational attainment alone is the sole goal. In those terms, education is sought not for cultural advancement, rather individual desires to gain knowledge.

In addition, this study has merit because it examines the lived experiences of a group of women who are often excluded from research. The findings from the study could increase our understanding of individual definitions of success and the factors that influence certain individuals to reject the definition of success as achieving an education to gain advancement in socioeconomic status. Past studies have typically focused on elite women and lack this key component (Fuller, 2007).

As noted in the preface, distinctions exist between class levels. Working-class

culture is different from middle- and elite-class experiences. The norms and values of each class have an impact on the social, economic and educational development of those who comprise it. Working-class culture consists of a distinctive value system. The lived experiences of these women as born and reared within this socioeconomic group tell a valuable story.

Social Purpose of Education

Individual experiences within the system of education differs on social factors and demographics. The promises made by institutions of higher education are deeply connected to the social ideas held by the institution as they relate to the purpose of education within society. The model of education on which the institution is developed impacts the function of the school from initial student recruitment efforts, program and course development and after graduation assistance efforts (Grogan, 2000). It is important to examine the connection between the socio-economic classification of students and their experiences seeking higher education because it offers a richer foundation context for this study. This context is accomplished by examining the differences in experiences of students who are part of different social classifications. It continues with material on the recruitment efforts and messages constructed by vocational schools/technical institutions, public colleges and universities, private colleges and universities, private faith-based institutions, historically black colleges and universities, and for-profit institutions. It concludes with an analysis on the impact of the ability of institutions to successfully keep the promises made to students during recruitment throughout the educational journey.

Education has many roles within society. At the primary level, it maintains order and allows for the continuation of traditions through the socialization process by providing students with instruction on the norms and values of their environment (Turpin, 2016). The primary education system reflects a connection to both the public and private spheres through the ability of education to provide the basic skills required to fill necessary roles (Sullivan, 2014).

Higher education continues on the foundation built by the primary education system. The students who attain higher education are able to fill leadership roles on the social belief they are suited for it due to their education level. They believe to be worthy of leadership positions and expect additional education will provide them with the tools, knowledge and connections to achieve higher levels of success (Smith, 2013). Students receive exposure to higher education throughout their primary school experience. Educational tracking serves to place select students into educational trajectories that prepare them specifically for higher education (Hewett, 2013). Early readiness programs provide select schools with information on colleges and universities before students have entered high school (Smith, 2013). Higher education is viewed as the key to success. It is the means by which students can achieve their dreams. It is the avenue that prepares them to fully achieve their potential. It is the way to advance socioeconomic status (Morgan, 2015).

The system of public education in the United States exists as a means of providing all students with a basic level of knowledge. The information taught in primary and secondary school systems is designed to create well-informed citizens who are capable of filling necessary social roles. Public education is an investment in the

future of a community. It is a means of maintaining the social contract by creating a foundation individuals can build through work experience or additional training and education. Institutions of higher education are tasked with providing students with additional educational opportunities beyond those provided through the curriculums of high schools. Educational attainment in the postsecondary setting offers students the ability to choose specific fields. Higher education is not compulsory and students are free to direct their educational journeys in many ways. However, there exists a kind of tracking system within various categories of institutions (Shadinger, 2016).

The recruitment efforts of universities, colleges and vocational schools are reflective of their mission and purpose as well as the type of students sought by the institution. The most successful institutions are those that are able to build their message around the goals and expectations of the desired student populations. The defined mission of the school, the demographic characteristics of the geographic area of services and the targeted student population all impact both the recruitment plans of institutions as well as the ability of the schools to successfully maintain the promises made to students (Shadinger, 2016).

Private Colleges/Universities

Private colleges do not boast the affordability factor associated with public colleges. Rather, they opt to market the value of their degree options. Scholarship students are typically the exception to the marketing trend. Private colleges offer prospective students the opportunity to follow their dreams. They suggest their college will afford their students with increased confidence upon graduation. The prestige of the institutions is often tied to the selectivity of the campuses (Rainey, 2006).

Private colleges thrive on providing their students with unique opportunities are not provided at other institutions. Private colleges do not receive funding directly from state and local governments in the same manner public colleges are funded. They are often funded through private foundations or organizations. The type of financial backing afforded to the institution can impact the messages found within their recruitment materials (Rainey, 2006). These colleges are able to suggest enrollment at their institutions will provide students a higher competitive advantage once they join the workforce. The globalized nature of the economy have students working harder to be noticed. Private colleges promise not only the ability to be noticed on campus, but within career fields upon graduation.

Private Faith-based Institutions

Private colleges which are associated with particular religious' faiths differ from other types of private colleges. These schools market their efforts as an opportunity for students to study with like-minded individuals. The degree program options, course offerings and curriculum are adjusted to include the doctrine of the sponsoring church. Courses in biblical theology are mandated for students as part of the general education requirements of all degree programs. The reasons provided by institutions fall into this classification of why students should enroll often have more to do with the character and personal characteristics of the students as well as the school. The messages often include references to the ability of students to grow stronger in their faith while attaining their educational goals (Grogan, 2000).

Private faith-based colleges focus on the ability of their organization to serve a dual purpose for students. Prospective students become aware of the ability for the

college to provide traditional learning opportunities without sacrificing the core tenants of their particular belief system. The connection between the faith-based knowledge and the secular information presented is used as a means of hierarchical ranking. Faith-based organizations often view themselves and their students as more highly committed to living their faith due to their decision to center their educational experience around it (Tolbert, 2015).

Public Colleges/Universities

Public colleges and universities encourage students to learn in an environment that provides them with additional program opportunities in comparison to vocational schools, while still maintaining affordability for students. Students are given the opportunity to learn from experts and experience opportunities for educational development will provide them with a firm foundation for continued study or career fields. Public colleges promote their connection to cutting edge research (Rainey, 2016). For example, professors are encouraged and required to engage in new research. The ability of professors to publish new work allows for the institution to receive recognition and increase the brand awareness of the college among both potential students and sources of funding (Bock, 2014).

State colleges and universities foster inclusive communities. Students are free to experience their educational journey in an environment that allows them to remain true to their identities while experiencing exposure to other cultures in a safe and supportive atmosphere. Inclusion is a term used frequently among the academic and social areas of public colleges. While the true level of commitment to diversity on campus can be questioned for some institutions, the broad assumption is these colleges are committed

to including majority and minority groups in a way that is not oppressive (George, 2000). The idea of community extends beyond the type of community connected to multiculturalism. State universities pride themselves on their ability to create spaces within academia that creates lasting bonds among students. Campuses are more than just places to gain knowledge. They are a place to gain relationships and connections which will last a lifetime. Colleges encourage an active connection with their campus brand out of a desire to maintain good community relations, positive recruitment opportunities and development opportunities once students become alumni.

Historically Black College/Universities

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are public or private. These institutions reflect the historical segregation within the system of higher education. Many of the noteworthy HBCUs began as land grant schools. Historically, the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 created the ability for states to sell federally controlled land as a means of raising funds to start state-controlled colleges. The purpose of the colleges was to focus on teaching practical aspects of science, agriculture, military science and engineering. While classical studies were not excluded from the list of subjects, the primary purpose of the school was to create programs that would effectively meet the need for the changing social landscape due to the industrial revolution (Esters, 2013).

The creation of the land-grant colleges mirrored the philosophy of Booker T. Washington who believed the best way for African Americans to challenge oppression was through educational attainment and entrepreneurship. He rejected a direct approach at challenging unfair standards due to his belief such an approach would alienate

members of the dominant group and hinder further success. The land-grant colleges were created as a means for allowing the children of working-class parents to gain a practical education. The training provided them an opportunity to enter careers which would possibly advance them beyond the economic status of their parents and still remain within the realm of what was viewed as appropriate for their current class status (Greenfield, 2015).

HBCUs do not often directly reference their prior connection to the land-grant process. However, those which have developed into A&M colleges promote the ideology suggesting earning a practical education is the most valuable option available for students. The primary reasons for attendance connects to ideas of inclusion, history and legacy. Prospective students are given information related to the wealth of history connected with the educational institutions. The long-standing traditions of excellence are used as an incentive for students. High-achieving or widely known alumni are used as proof of the ability of the school to produce great leaders. The desire to become part of a legacy that has lasted for decades or centuries impact the decision of students to enroll (Wilson, 2012).

HBCUs stand against stereotypes. The institutions offer hope and belonging to groups who have often been excluded from mainstream institutions. For many students, the ability to view other ethnic minority students succeed while engaging in meaningful interaction with ethnic minority faculty members gives them the self-esteem required to pursue their dreams. Minority students are allowed to reclaim areas of study that have for too long been reserved for other students. The benefits of HBCUs are not limited to ethnic minority students. All students benefit from the structure of these institutions

because of the opportunity to learn how to see past barriers and preconceived conceptions. Students are able to learn in an environment that is different from the structure of other institutions and the lack of isolation of minority students allows for more fulfilling interactions among students. The increased exchange of ideas and experiences between white and nonwhite students creates a space for students to develop at a higher rate (Stewart, 2014).

For-profit Institutions

Colleges and universities typically target high school juniors and seniors as their primary audience. Adult students who have never previously attended any institution of higher education or those who attempted but did not complete the requirements for earning a degree were overlooked as prospective students for several years. Increases in technology and the shifting job market changed the dynamic of many institutions. Adult learners became the primary target for many colleges. Colleges recognize both the need for adult education and degree completion programs and the benefits provided to the schools by adult students in terms of maturity and lived experiences (Caterino, 2014).

For-profit colleges recognize the trend toward older adult learners and adjust their marketing strategies to fit the needs of adult students. While public colleges receive government support and private schools often have foundation support, for-profit institutions rely on the tuition of their students to provide financial security for their institutions. Many institutions adapt to the needs of adult students through changes in their course requirements and increases in options for course completion.

Physical classrooms are merged with online resources or entirely with online lectures. The sixteen-week semester is replaced with eight-week block courses.

Prospective students are provided with information on the flexibility of degree completion options. They are promised a college experience that fits with the responsibilities and expectations associated with adult life. Successful adult education marketing creates a narrative of encouragement through offering support for students. Often institutions promise to provide support, guidance and direction for students. The perceived responsiveness of institutions to the needs of students is among the most influential messages used in recruitment (Morey, 2004). Adult students are often drawn to start or complete a degree program due to a desire to advance within their current professional field or to begin a career in another area. For-profit colleges target this desire through integrating a message of upward mobility or job security throughout their advertisements. Slogans reflect the desires of students to achieve success and appeal to the emotional aspect of prospective students (Morey, 2004).

Vocational/Technical Institutions

Vocational and technical institutes exist to provide the workforce with qualified individuals. The average student hails from working-class areas more than those attending other types of higher educational establishments These organizations provide students with specific and specialized training for particular jobs or fields of interest. Students are not usually provided with general education (transferable) courses. The structure of the schools and many of the programs within them is geared toward prompt completion of requirements and attaining mastery of required job skills (Mulder, 2015). The recruitment efforts of these schools are targeted around a population that desires to

enter the workforce quickly. The schools promote their ability to provide job placement. The educational opportunities provided by these schools serve practical purposes. They are specific in their training. Publications and recruitment material reflect the ability of the programs to provide real world preparation for careers that have meaning.

Students are drawn to these programs because of a desire to maximize their earning potential in a short amount of time. Job placement programs offer an additional level of security for those who seek to either make a career change or begin a career immediately after high school. Two and four-year degree programs represent a delayed reward. Students who are more geared towards an immediate reward find vocational programs appealing (Mulder, 2015). The ability to be taught by individuals with real work and world experience is a selling point. Instructors have the ability to give students more than just a theoretical view of the material. They are able to provide a deeper insight that can come only from lived experiences.

Promises Kept

Technology and Labor Trends.

Increases in technology and shifts in the labor market are directly related to the recruitment messages promoted within the academic arena. Florida (2015) and Freidman (2016) approach the issue of the social and educational impact of technological advancements. Each author offers insight into information which could help those who seek to understand social changes and desire to craft accurate projections. Friedman suggests technological increases allow for an increase in competition in the workforce. His suggestion is based on the idea individuals will

follow “the path of least resistance.” He further suggests anyone with access to the Internet could potentially showcase their skills to secure employment. His belief is the world is flat and technology is an equalizer. Physical migration no longer is needed due to the ability of individuals to secure work through the Internet. In short, his suggestion is the workforce has been permanently altered by technological increases and the logical solution for the United States is to set higher standards to retain control of certain sectors (Martin, 2015).

Florida (2016) asserts Friedman is incorrect. He suggests the world is indeed not flat. Rather, there are many hills and valleys in the workforce. Therefore, he suggests the world is spikey. He cites increases in the population concentration within cities. If technology is able to produce employment opportunities sufficient for those who had the basic skills to use them, it is not needful for them to move into highly concentrated areas (Winslow, 2016). Freidman and Florida are essentially opposite sides of a coin. Friedman’s hypothesis the world is flat is a simplistic conclusion based on a series of social and cultural changes. While his observations are true in some regards, they fail to consider additional outcomes and factors. Florida raises fair and valid objections to the suggestion the world is flat. Through a thought provoking and effective analysis of multiple factors, Florida is able to consider the impact of globalization on inequality.

Florida (2016) explains while technology did change the landscape of the labor market, the trends are superficial in some regards. In order for progress to happen in some areas, it is needful it be limited in others. The result is peak areas or “the haves” grow higher while the valleys or the “have nots” grow deeper. The inequality comes as

a result of the process of progress widens as time goes on (Florida, 2005). Following the ideology of Freidman, college administration will best serve their students through providing them with opportunities for skill development and degree options that allows them to maximize their potential in a global labor market.

Colleges and universities have been successful in keeping the promises made to students during the recruitment phase are able to recognize the connection between technology and social change. Regardless of whether the institution views the world as flat or as spikey, those that attempt to maintain a support structure for students include appropriate technology are better able to prepare students for success (Winslow, 2016).

Flexibility.

The ability to provide the highest level of flexibility in degree options or course offerings is proven crucial for the success of institutions using the work/life balance equation as part of their recruitment message. The ability for students to take courses in ways that fit best with their lifestyle is an important aspect of flexibility. The structure of each course is equally important. Accommodations for different learning styles can help students feel encouraged and empowered (Kirkpatrick, 2015). Many institutions have increased their online presence. Courses once limited to a physical building at a specified time are open across virtual venues. Students are able to experience their education in a customized way through online interactions. The ability to engage with classmates and instructors in a personalized manner helps to hinder any limitations caused from the lack of direct contact. Courses that mix online meetings with in-person class time are extremely popular. The mixed methods course offerings provide students with the best of both formats. Students are able to build a physical connection within

their academic community while having the ability to tailor the time spent in class around what works specifically for them (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Teaching for Multiculturalism/Social Justice.

For any institution to properly maintain a high level of inclusion or a space for cultural expansion or exploration, it first displays a deep commitment to the promotion of diversity. The actions of the institution go beyond superficial attempts at minority involvement. Colleges must extend to active efforts at eliminating the exclusion of minority groups from specific spaces or programs on campus (Elkins, 2013). Diversity among faculty and staff is an important component in creating lasting multiculturalism. It is essential for diverse students to share characteristics with instructors and administration. Institutions that lack diversity lack the ability to understand the shared experiences of students. Variability among the lived experiences of faculty helps to bring different types of knowledge and information to the institution.

Increased diversity helps alleviate the isolation of minority students can experience within particular fields. Students are given implicit and explicit messages during their college experience. Single culture institutions are implicitly informing their students there is a defined standard for inclusion. Often students become discouraged or disengaged when they understand they are not included in that definition (Dodge, 2013). Multicultural institutions provide their students with support and encouragement when the narrative changes through diverse faculty and staff members. Students at these institutions are able to view themselves in positive terms. They are free to challenge barriers and stereotypes. They are more easily integrated into the community of the college (Selmer, 2014).

Honesty, Integrity and Honor Codes.

Students are held to high standards of integrity within the spectrum of their roles as learners. There is an expectation students will be actively engaged with the content in their courses. Students are expected to do more than learn material. They are called to understand and apply it to other areas of their academic and personal lives. Academic misconduct is to be avoided. Students accused of giving or receiving inappropriate assistance on their work risk punishment from the institution can range from a failing grade to expulsion. The integrity of the college is tied to the ability of students to be viewed as honorable and truthful (Mills-Senn, 2015)

Successful colleges and universities are able to expand on the concepts of integrity. The concept of an honor code goes beyond inclusion of misconduct guidelines for faculty and staff. Comprehensive codes include promoting actions at the macro-organizational level will serve to benefit all students while limiting the oppression or exclusion of particular groups. Programs in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) are a visible area that supports the need for a redefinition of integrity at the institutional level. STEM programs are typically filled by male students. The tracking of male and female students often happens early in their educational experiences.

Post-secondary institutions that take an active role in abolishing gender stereotypes and barriers are acting with a level of integrity that is necessary to fully respond to the needs of students. The same deconstruction actions are required along racial lines and class levels. It is the responsibility of institutions to change the conversation and culture surrounding divisions among students of different racial

classifications, gender identities and socioeconomic status (Chapman, 2016). The integrity of organizations is tied to the quality of experiences and educational opportunities offered to students. It is important students feel as though they benefitted from good training and quality engagement. Current and engaging course material is useful in fulfilling the needs of the students (Mahmud, 2013).

Connection with Students/Reciprocity.

There is a current model of education that has shifted away from the theoretical framework and was once associated with the institution of education. Prior generations viewed education as a formal means of providing students with knowledge and wisdom developed by experts. The previous model viewed teachers or instructors as the experts and valuable component of the relationship. Students were recipients only. Currently, educational institutions are successful in meeting the needs of their students and work for social justice in more collaborative terms. Students are part of a shared leadership team in charge of directing their educational pursuits. Teachers and instructors are still viewed as the primary authority and experts within the classroom, but new space is for student engagement and input. Knowledge is viewed as something developed through interaction. The decrease in the absolutism of education has created the ability for students to develop better critical thinking and critical literacy skills (Cook-Sather, 2015).

Successful colleges and universities build an academic community that allows students to exercise their social agency. The subjectivity of grading scales and ranking systems can limit the ability of students to experience meaningful learning. Those institutions make structured attempts at encouraging students to challenge hierarchy and

question ideology are better able to reflect a lasting connection with students (Kahn, 2014). The participants in this study may or may not be products of such missions. The goal of this study is to ask why.

Conclusion

Student engagement during the recruitment process is connected to the messages of the institutions. Prospective students are drawn to become enrolled students based on the ability of the schools to create a message that resonates with their target audience. The institutions are tasked with understanding the motivations of students to seek higher education and creating material that connects with the motivation of the students. While the general trend is for working-class individuals to respond to the messages of vocational schools to fill a role within their communities, the women in this study did not. All of the five attended a four-year institution with one attending graduate school and another earning her degree from a private college.

The responsibility of the institution shifts once students become enrolled. The primary function of the institution becomes finding ways to create experiences, opportunities and engagement options for students that matches the messages presented during recruitment. Institutions that have successfully kept their promises to students are those that recognize the evolution of students and are prepared to create new plans or programs to match their earlier messages.

Prospective students choose to enroll in institutions when the messages promoted by the institutions meet the needs or expectations of students. The recruitment of students does not stop once they become enrolled. It is a process that continues throughout their educational experience (Saichaie, 2014). Successful colleges

and universities remain committed to their promises throughout the time of enrollment and beyond.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Introduction

The theoretical framework serves as a guide for understanding the themes related to the study. While not exclusively limited to the content of the theoretical framework, the literature review serves as a means of presenting the literature that has affected the researcher's view of education in preparation for the study. A review of literature on the topics of education, gender and class forms themes around social inequality, concepts of femininity, respectability and social reproduction and the various meaning of the elite. Several of the themes are included in this section as a lens to view this study. The section is not an exhaustive literature review but serves as an additional layer of allowing the reader to understand some of the social forces that have influenced the need for the study as well as the experiences of the participants. It further supports the need for this study as there are key concepts within this dissertation that are missing from the body of knowledge that relates to the concept of education and the relationships between the system of education and the social experience of the working-class and women within the United States. Previous studies have focused on the goal of education as a means for achieving advancement. The experiences of working-class women are often absent from representation as are individuals who are not actively benefitting financially from their educational attainment.

Life Course Theory and Choice

Key concepts within this study are choice, culture and the life course. Choice can be understood to mean the ability of an individual to make rational decisions that can be expected to produce desired outcomes (Baldus, 2015). Culture is defined as the

material and nonmaterial components of the social structure and is reflective of the norms and values of the area (Cooke, 2016). As a concept, the term *life course* is reflective of the shared experiences and changes that occur between cohorts as they advance across age ranges. In simpler terms, the life course is the idea life is experienced in a trajectory. Decisions and actions at one stage of life can impact outcomes at another stage using the life course model (Bask, 2015).

Most scholars recognize there are factors which influence the life trajectories of individuals (Benson, 2012). Individual freedom of choice is often limited by these factors. It is important to recognize the underlying issues that may or may not constitute "choice." There are multiple studies which focus on the concept of education and the connection to rational choice and the life course. The important connection between the concept of choice and this study is that the participants believe they have acted rationally and without limitation to remain living and/or laboring in working-class neighborhoods.

The life course theory is an important element of the framework because it explains the connection between the choices of the women and their experiences in earlier stages of their lives. In the literature review that follows, the life course theory was so pervasive I decided to use it as a theoretical framework because it is a means of recognizing and understanding the themes within this study. It accounts for the connection between choices, experiences and identity. The roles and rules of femininity, education and stratification, choice, class and culture are all key concepts of this study. Literature relating to each concept was reviewed and is included based on the belief each piece reflects an important connection to the lived experiences of the

participants. Four primary studies served as a basis for looking at class. The literature review begins with an analysis of each study before presenting the more general concepts stated previously.

Macleod (2008) examines the cross-generational reproduction of social inequality. His research followes a group of individuals who inhabit a housing division in New York. His longitudinal study shows cultural capital helps individuals express their social agency. He describes culture as a means to achieve a desired result. His study frames education as an independent variable for the dependent variable of culture. He posits education influences cultural capital whether defined as human interactions, wealth or consumerism. Those who were able to attain higher levels of education are better able to advance to higher levels of culture. He further suggests the desires of those individuals in achieving education are able to achieve the increases in cultural advancement (MacLeod, 2008).

Budd (2009) examines the purpose of higher education and focuses on the organizational structure of the system of higher education. Budd (2009) suggests the purpose of education is to advance the intellect and social interactions of those who sought to consume it. His study highlights the need for integrity within the system due in part to the social connections of the institution (Budd, 2009). Budd concludes by suggesting the system of higher education evolving over time to mirror the needs of the population. Social progress will always be a key component of education. As an institution for socialization, education exists to promote social identities or ideas and to maintain social boundaries (Budd, 2009).

The autobiographical work by Davis, Jenkins and Hunt (2002) takes a unique

view on educational attainment as a source of community building. The three authors make a pact with one another to achieve a level of education higher than typical of their neighborhood. Each of the young men is able to achieve their goal of becoming a medical doctor. Their autobiography situates educational attainment as a form of identity development. The authors define themselves in relation to their desire for knowledge and attainment of credentials. For them, education is valuable in social terms. While they value the outside benefits associated with becoming doctors, their primary motivations are not economic (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2002).

Kahlenberg (2010) evaluates the impact of race on life course issues in his research and examines issues that influence life trajectory. He identifies that race and gender continue to have social significance. Racial oppression and social disparity results in a widening gap in educational attainment (Kahlenberg, 2010. The presence of social privilege is an important framework for understanding the social purpose of education for working-class women.

Rules and Roles of Femininity

Understanding the changes of the place of women and their connection to social change and perception within the public sphere is particularly important to this study since it could potentially offer an explanation for the occurrence of *unused* educational attainment. The social atmosphere which surrounds the women who have attained an education provides limitations both visible and invisible in shaping their choices (Sheilds, 2015). The roles of women have changed significantly over time. Historically, women are not seen as full citizens. Their achievements and accomplishments are attributed to their husbands. Any social privilege or responsibility is trickled down to women through the station of their husband. Elite women fare better

in the public sphere than women who are of a lower station. Those elite women benefit from the power, prestige and often the wealth held by their husbands. Elite women often hold a great deal more power than is attributed to them. For example, Martha Custis Washington was able to accomplish a great deal. Washington often held social gatherings referred to as the Republican Court which were essentially a means of advocacy for political change hidden through the guise of socialization. Social expectations and definitions were able to be altered, pushed and broken by elite women during this time.

While women without significant position are often unable to defend their beliefs or voice their opinions, elite women are able to create change, even if it is achieved through the agency of their husbands.

Religiosity is closely associated with gender roles. Individuals who are highly engaged in conservative faiths are more likely to strictly adhere to long held traditional gender roles. Women in these groups are more likely to be viewed as inferior to men. Their roles are expected to remain limited to those associated with home and family. Churches serve as conduits for socialization. They are viewed as an extension of the family unit. Churches offer society the opportunity to impose and perpetuate desired beliefs, actions and values across generations. Churches provide an additional source of social support and the benefits associated with positive socializing experiences.

There is a suggestion elite women might experience faith differently than elite men (Page, 2017). Studies show women are likely to be more religious than men (Ozorak, 2003). However, the difference is not apparent when considering elite men and women. Elite women who have been highly educated at top universities and derive

meaning from success with their professional and educational goals are less likely to report a religious connection (Page, 2017). Elite men are more likely to report higher rates of religiosity than women. The difference could how men and women in the elite group experience support from churches and other faith institutions (Haddad, 2014). It is possible churches respond more positively to men who have achieved the expected role associated with being male and reject women who assume positions which are expected to be held by men. Perhaps elite women are replacing the social support once given by the church with factors associated with their work or education. It is further possible elite women who have careers lack the additional time to devote to faith endeavors if they also participate in family activities (Hastings, 2013).

The concept of respectability has different definitions depending on the circumstances surrounding the term. The term is often used in current research to reflect the expectations and cultural assumptions associated with minority racial groups. However, respectability is used to address the proper actions, attitudes and behaviors associated with socioeconomic status. Ownership of physical space has long been used as a means of both determining and exerting social control and domination. Historically, those who had access to land ownership also had access to the means of production during the pre-industrial revolution era society and had the ability to control the economics of their area. The use of space to define status extends beyond privately held land ownership and expands into public spaces. Exclusion from public space is exclusion from society. It is a means of silencing groups and their opinions by limiting their ability to express their feelings in a manner which allows for public consumption.

Elite women in the South during the 1700s and through the 1800s (and indeed throughout current times) were able to expand their own social mobility through the racialization of space. The totem pole effect is useful in understanding the process by which elite, Southern, White women were able to grow their own political power and ability to exercise their social agency. While such women were not viewed as equal to their husbands or indeed any male, they were viewed as better than ethnic minority men and women. Their ability to reserve spaces through exclusion provided them with the ability to congregate in spaces solely for the purpose of promoting their own agendas (Bachand, 2015). The consumption practices of elite women have long been of interest to historians due to its direct link to the success of a capitalist society. The continued belief women are an extension of men and the perpetual idea of men as the financial decision maker has resulted in the prevalence of married women as the subjects of consumption analysis.

The rate at which elite women consume goods varies based on their age. Consumption practices relate to the requirement for women to appropriately fill the roles associated with their gender. Regardless of marital status, class expectations constrain women across all stages of the life course. The constraints are harsher for elite women. Consumer habits are linked to family expectations and needs and to the social expectations associated with the class of the elite woman (Stobart, 2015). Family constraints for married women impact their consumption habits in expected manners. Purchases are made reflecting the needs of a family over the needs of a single individual. The consumption practices also ref the desire to maintain expectations associated with the family unit as part of an elite society as a whole and for each

individual to maintain their status as an individual unit of the elite. There is a connection between socialization, status discontent and elite cues. The gender attitudes of men are highly linked to cues from elite groups. Elite groups perpetuate the definition of leadership in masculine terms (Morgan, 2013).

Education and Stratification

Elite colleges in the twenty-first century function in a global perspective. Highly ranked institutions provide students with the ability to function in a competitive open economy. Those institutions which are able to provide the highest level of global engagement are often reserved for students who come from privileged backgrounds. Legacy enrollments and scholarships for the children of alumni help to promote an elite pairing between universities and upper socioeconomic classes. The ruling elite are able to maintain their positions and secure their children through this beneficial coupling (Weis, 2014). Men and women who reside in the United States physically live in the same nation, but they have significantly different experiences within it. For example, straight and gay men do not reside in the same United States in any terms beyond their feet walking on the same earth. White men and any person who is not white have historically lived in a country fragmented by racial lines and those boundaries persist today.

While the dominant group may work and live among other parts of society, their walk is not the same. Through control of the media and ownership of the rights and means of production, the hegemony and patriarchy has created the current levels of social oppression continues to limit deep understanding of the experiences of minority groups and women by the dominant group (Perry, 2014). It becomes easier to maintain

class distinctions and to legitimize inequality and oppression as natural once difference has been created. Construction of difference among groups can be used to maintain power if those who have power are able to make others believe the differences are legitimate and significant. The use of cultural capital to maintain control is an important factor in cultural diffusion (Gondal, 2015).

There is a dichotomy of inequality present within the United States. The economic inequality created through the hoarding of wealth by the elite has resulted in the creation of two Americas. The America inhabited by the rich is dramatically different from the America experienced by the poor. American elite have the ability to experience agency among their social position. They have advancement within their group and respect extends beyond that group. They are able to experience social benefits that accumulate based on their social status. Those who are not part of the elite group are limited in their ability to experience social agency. Intergroup advancement is limited, but present. Advancement into higher social classifications is rare if not nonexistent (Ferguson, 2012).

Conclusion

It has become socially acceptable to pretend to be blind to class. The impact of class barriers on social advancement and identity development are ignored in an effort to suggest class, like race, no longer matter in terms of life outcomes (Newman, 2015). The desire to hasten the advancement of the goal of equality has resulted in a false belief such equality exists. Class and race both continue to have a significant impact on society within the United States. Policy efforts geared at eliminating or lessening the

disparities are present among privileged groups and those labeled disadvantaged are often well meaning, but lack impact.

Class does not exist in a vacuum. The decisions made by the dominant group impact those with less power and resources. The elite-class group's social development has both a direct and indirect impact on the development of the culture of the working-class. Often the impact occurs because the ruling class sets the norms and values of a culture. The working-class members of society have little to no input on the development of what is considered valuable within the structure, but must conform on some level to the end goals. The ability for inequity to continue is related to the desire for the dominant group to reject the significance of social privilege.

The problem with such an approach is that it ignores the obvious differences in experience that are held between groups. White people have a significantly different social experience than minority groups. Men experience life differently than women. The considerations and consciousness of working-class or working poor families are not the same as those held by middle-class families. Identity development occurs as a result of continued exposure to in-and-out cultures. The development of self is an internal reaction to external stimuli. Individuals learn how to view themselves based on how others view them. Women learn to behave in ways deemed appropriate for their gender both by watching the behaviors of other women and by observing the interaction between women and men. Development is also affected by the media and other macro-level impacts (Freie, 2014).

The benefit of the stories included within this study is based on the ability of the experiences to add to the body of knowledge as it relates to the purpose of education

within society. Femininity, respectability and social reproduction are key concepts in connecting social experiences with outcomes. Often working-class women are excluded from studies due to the narrow definitions associated with the role of women or the respectability of class (Freie, 2014). Understanding the differences in definition that exist between socioeconomic status levels in terms of gender roles and social expectations is an important aspect of this study and is featured within this section.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 introduces the selected methodology. The constructivist paradigm generates new understandings from the complexities within the lived experiences of the participants. This section provides an introduction to the philosophy and methodological application of phenomenology. It continues with information on van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology and compares it with his recently expanded 2014 publication. The chapter addresses the specifics of this research design before offering a conclusion based on the significance of the study and the importance of the selected methodology. The purpose of this interpretivist study is to add to a cultural body of knowledge as it relates to the lived experiences of women who have attained higher education, but fail to experience the full level of upward class mobility associated with their education.

Interpretivist research is a type of qualitative research that examines the meaning-making behaviors of individuals. The framework of constructivist theory as an umbrella for hermeneutic phenomenology situates the focus on understanding and interpreting the meaning developed by the participants through their experiences rather than creating a definition for it. The goal of research using the hermeneutic methodology is to allow findings to develop from the interactions between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 1998).

Van Manen's use of a combination of American and European phenomenological ideas allows for a greater use of the advantages of the nuances associated with the methodology (Creswell, 1998). This methodology provides a

relevant way to bring the voices of working-class women who have attained higher education but have not fully benefitted from their education in economic terms. The ability of the methodology to allow for the collection and organization of data, theme identification and knowledge development in a way that does not disrupt the rich textural value of the experiences of the participants contributes to its selection.

To this point, only a basic definition of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach is provided. Subsequent pages provide a more detailed definition. An overview of the development of the methodology is followed by an explanation of each of the components and their use in gathering information. The section closes with specific insight on how each component is used to search for the information required to develop an answer to the research question.

The Beginnings of Phenomenology

Phenomenology begins to gain ground in the field of philosophy in the United States in the early 1900s. A rift develops among philosophers and academics at the time over the application of the increasingly popular concept. Different ideas and viewpoints result in two opposite schools of thought. Transcendental phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology individually remain connected to the overarching theme of allowing the researcher to discover the meaning attached to individual experiences through the voice of the participant. However, each type fosters different aspects, perspectives and approaches to understanding the process of how individuals construct meaning through their lived experiences (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

Transcendental Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl is credited with conceiving the concept of phenomenology in the late 19th century. The German philosopher states the ability to objectively measure truth cannot be completed without considering the subjectivity of the human experience. His belief leads to the conceptualization of transcendental phenomenology to describe phenomenon as it is observed through consciousness. The observation does not consider questions of its cause (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Observations are considered by transcendental researchers through the process of synthesis which allows them to gain expressed themes from the data contained within interviews by carefully examining details of interview responses to view exactly what is said by respondents. The purpose of the synthesis is to reduce the interviews in a way that reveals commonalities and cross-themes present across interviews (Creswell, 1998). Researchers in this methodology do not interpret results until after the synthesis process is completed.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Existentialism

Martin Heidegger, a philosopher during the late 19th century and early 20th century and a student of Husserl, did not completely agree with the Husserl's definition of phenomenology as a form of science completely free from all presuppositions. Instead, Heidegger places focus on concepts as they appear, instead of how they truly are. He further asserts this method is most appropriate when used only to describe a given phenomenon, rather than an attempt to define it. Heidegger suggests the act of consciousness is not separate from the human experience and an existential adjustment is necessary to Husserl's writings on interpreting human experiences (Harman, 2007).

Heidegger also argues for the existence of a concept he calls pre-understanding. Pre-understanding refers to the awareness of the meanings of culture or structures that exist prior to full understanding or inclusion within it. The socialization process and the continued significance of historical occurrences makes it impossible to step completely outside of the context of the participant's structure of inclusion because it is deeply rooted within them and impacts their understanding of the world. (Harman, 2007)

Interpretation is critical in Heidegger's approach to the methodology. Heidegger adds to his dissent from Husserl by suggesting not only that interpretation is part of the human condition, but every encounter experienced by individuals is impacted by the development of an interpretation which is influenced by their background and experiences (Heidegger, 1927, 1962). Heidegger additionally suggests human life must be observed in its state of being. Such observation allows for the interpretation of existence (Harmon, 2007).

Consciousness is deemed by Heidegger to be not separate from the world but formed from the amalgamation of lived experiences. Individual experiences, backgrounds and cultures greatly impact the ability and manner of an individual to assign meaning to experiences or develop a worldview (Laverty, 2003). Intersubjectivity as created through the aforementioned development produces a circular process involving interpretation and understanding known as the hermeneutic circle (Smith, 2011).

Hermeneutic Circle

The hermeneutic circle encompasses a process of interpretation in which an individual develops broad level understanding shaped by their personal reality. The

macro-level understanding held by the individual is determined from the detailed experience of their daily existence (Smith, 2011). Gadamer (2006) further explains the hermeneutic circle during the 20th century by adding any valid understanding of the whole requires an acknowledgement of the horizons, or ranges of vision includes everything seen from a particular vantage point, between the interpreter and the researcher.

The addition of the horizontal acknowledgement moves the hermeneutic process towards a dialogical method that merges the vantage points of the interpreter and the phenomenon being studied together to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Dowling, 2007). An in-depth analysis of the lived experiences is required to fully understand the reciprocal connection between each perspective. The hermeneutic circle is used as a tool both to interpret the research phenomenon and provide meaning to the information. Ajjawai and Higgs (2007) state the hermeneutic circle is defined as "a metaphor for understanding and interpretation, which is viewed as a movement between parts (data) and whole (evolving understanding of the phenomenon), each giving meaning to the other such that understanding is circular and iterative" (p. 623). The significance of the connection between parts and the whole of experiences and interpretation warrants the use of the hermeneutic circle as a means of helping this researcher with future reflections on emerging themes and interpretations within the process of writing and conducting the interviews (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

The ability for researchers to acknowledge the biases and preferences present within their horizon is not the only challenge associated with the hermeneutic phenomenological approach. It is necessary to have the ability to pull out the themes

from the research while bracketing the results. The use of the hermeneutic circle assists with the process of making sense of the data. The ability of the circle to help bring meaning to the data is created by its ability to provide a buffer between the immediate judgements of the researcher and the emergent trends within the data.

Van Manen's Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a Methodology

Van Manen (1990) introduces a hermeneutic approach to phenomenology that is grounded in individual daily experiences. He suggests the phenomenological approach allows for the researcher to use their consciousness to interpret phenomena as they are presented. He further defines the purpose of phenomenological research as borrowing the collected experiences and interpretations of another human, without removing the situation from the setting of human existence as a whole and developing a greater understanding of the experiences through filtering and interpreting them through personal reflection. This individual consciousness is the primary connection individuals have with the world.

The ability to observe consciousness as a means of developing an understanding of experiences as they are lived is a unique component of phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). The purpose of phenomenology is understood to create a descriptive expression out of a lived experience. The subsequent derived text serves as a reflexive form of a meaningful experience (van Manen, 1990).

This study uses van Manen's approach. Hermeneutic phenomenology is used to guide the methodology through the formation of questions, plan for data collection and description, and through the completion of the analysis. The ability to interpret the

meaning of consciousness through the lived experiences of the suggested participants is a significant benefit of the selected methodology.

The first publication of van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological methodology presents six systemic structures of research that serve as a methodological map for those attempting to gain insight into the lived experience of individuals (Smith, 2011). These six structures are turning to the nature of lived experience, investigating experiences as lived, reflecting on essential themes, engaging in the art of writing and rewriting, maintaining a strong and oriented relation, and balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (van Manen, 1990).

Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience

The desire to study a particular societal phenomenon leads researchers to undertake phenomenological research. This methodology allows the researcher to internalize and reflect on information collected during the research process. It further allows for researchers to use their own knowledge and experiences to decipher meaning from the process. The researcher is required to think openly about the information to understand the whole and not merely the individual parts (van Manen, 1990, 2014).

Investigating Experience as We Live It

Van Manen presents phenomenological research as creating connection with a lived experience through the investigation process. This methodology creates research that provides an understanding of the nature of specific lived experiences (Smith, 2011). The process does not exist as a separate event from the lived experience, but reflects a synthesis of it.

Reflecting on Essential Themes

It is important to note the concept of themes within hermeneutic phenomenology differs from the definition used by other forms of qualitative research. Many other forms of qualitative methodologies define the presence of themes by using coding from interview transcripts or breaking the information down into a measurable format so as to almost quantify the frequency of appearance.

Van Manen theorizes a true understanding of some lived experience phenomenon cannot occur until after the experiences have been brought to consciousness through thought and then in written format. Reduction is an important concept involved with the development of themes. It involves developing meaning from experiences through peeling back layers of consciousness in a reflective practice to expose the meaning of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). The ability to use reflective techniques to convey meaning is beneficial in instances where it is difficult to interpret obscure meaning. The information might otherwise be lost if not for the ability of the process to help researchers distinguish themes within lived experiences. The writing and interpretation process facilitates the formation of phenomenological themes (Smith, 2011).

Existential themes exist as general overarching themes help to find meaning in individual world-view. Existential themes provide an avenue for understanding how they react with specific phenomena. The additional level of exploration provides a stronger connection with the meaning of the specific lived experiences. For this study, they aid in exploring the lived experiences of working-class women with educational attainment who continue to live or work in working-class neighborhoods. Researchers using this approach make sense of the lived experience without closing themselves off

from the discovery of additional or alternative meanings. Van Manen supports the process by suggesting developing a thematic understanding is not a process that is regulated, rather a freedom to see meaning. While the existential themes provide assistance with developing an understanding in a way not overly restrictive for the researcher, there are guidelines that serve as the fundamental foundations for guiding existential inquiry.

The most recent version of van Manen's work situates the four as topics on their own, rather than using them as subheadings for the overarching topic of existential themes. The shift moves the focus away from the original version which focuses more on the aspect of writing and onto the process of observations gathered during the interview process. The ability to gather rich textural details of the experience from the participant's process of reflective inquiry translates into more vivid levels of understanding. Relationality (lived relation), corporeality (lived body), spatiality (lived space), temporality (lived time), materiality (lived things), and technology (lived cyborg) are used as lenses for exploring phenomena in a heuristic manner (van Manen, 1990, 2014).

Temporality

Temporality is the reflection of the lived time of the participant. It includes the participant's reflection and perceptions of time while experiencing the world. Temporal reflections are an important aspect in terms of consciousness and in regards to emergent themes.

Individual horizons impact the experience of time during events and during reflections. The subjectivity of temporality is present within the connection between

the concepts of space and time. Concepts of time connect with experiences to frame world-view and individual responses to experiences and perspectives (van Manen, 1990). The experience of time depends greatly on the nature of the experience and the way the individual feels about the event.

Spatiality

Spatiality reflects more than just the way individuals order or conceptualize space. It reflects the manner individuals relate to others in shared spaces. The concept is considered in a global perspective in terms of how individuals relate to others around the globe or in a less physical sense in relation to felt space. Individuals develop group dynamics and rules for inclusion. Group definition and inclusion overlaps with the concept of spatiality due to the ability of groups to define elements of psychosocial belonging (Adsheed, 2008).

Relationality

Relational reflections focus on the lived connection maintained between individuals during interpersonal interaction. The ability to transcend individual self occurs during the development of a conversational relation during interactions with others in interpersonal spaces (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (2014) expands the concept by adding Lived Self-Other to the term, Relationality. This update allows for additional exploration involving the manner individuals are connected to one another or within their community. This is especially relevant to the purpose of this study.

Corporeality

Corporeality refers to the individual physical or bodily presence. The diversity of body types and differences present and levels of aware connection between

emotional and physical levels makes an impact on the manner individuals experience an event. The manner individuals are defined stems from how they are viewed by outsiders and in term how those experiences shape their internalized view of themselves.

Corporeality reveals a great deal about the meaning associated to particular events or actions. The feelings or emotions experienced by individuals can be expressed in physical terms. There are involuntary ways the body can relay unspoken feelings or nuanced responses to phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, 2014). It is possible individuals are completely unaware of the connection between their corporeality and the experience if the body is physically engaged in a separate activity at the time of the experience. Corporeal reflection allows for the ability to purposefully and intentionally consider the impact of the physical component on the phenomenon and the bodily consequences of the event.

Materiality

The materialistic element of life guides reflection in understanding the experience of the phenomenon. Discovering the level of attachment individuals hold to material artifacts combined with information regarding the type of material goods and the levels of importance assigned to them by individuals provide insight into the consciousness of the individual. Materiality provides understanding about the horizon of the individual. Material connection is a reflection of lived experiences. Conversely, lived experiences are reflected through material goods (van Manen, 2014).

Technology

Technology is a pervasive component of modern culture. It is essential to consider the concept as it relates to consciousness and lived experiences. There is almost no element of life that is not impacted by technology. The ability to remain easily connected to vast amounts of information without limit has impacted the ability of individuals to experience certain elements of life. It creates a space that promotes other elements of experience (van Manen, 2014).

Writing and Rewriting

In keeping with the methodology, once the research is completed, it is possible to bring the transition of consciousness of lived experiences to a meaningful construct through the writing and rewriting process. Meaning is developed using the process of moving back and forth between the parts and whole of the information. Multiple writing sessions are completed to fully facilitate the process (van Manen, 2014).

Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Relation

The process is completed with the level of integrity demanded by the methodology. Special efforts are taken to ensure the study remains the highest importance to ensure a solid connection with the work. The ability to remain connected and focused provides for a higher quality of completed work (van Manen, 1990).

Balancing the Research Context by Considering Parts and Whole

There is the potential for any researcher using this methodology to lose sight of the larger story within the research because of a tendency to become overwhelmed with the smaller details. Effort are made to keep the primary focus of the research during the process and to maintain the integrity of the study throughout the process. Elements of

the refocusing process requires stepping away so the researcher can gain a different perspective and maintain progress toward completion (van Manen, 1990).

Rigor of Study

Quantitative studies are often viewed as more reliable or of greater value than qualitative studies due to the precise nature of measurement tools associated with the research designs. While quantitative studies are of value, their significance does not diminish the benefits of qualitative studies. The rich and detailed information from qualitative studies provides a level of insight not possible in larger scale studies. The inability of human experiences to be completely standardized adds to the need for qualitative studies.

Hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology provides a set of guidelines used to provide balance to a study. The process begins with an observation or examination of a phenomenon and continues to fully explore the nature of the research project. The process of data collection occurs with a focus on understanding the phenomenon. The ability of the researcher to reflect through writing is essential to this approach because it allows for the development of essential meaning of a phenomenon through the themes that emerge from the interview data (van Manen, 1990). The rigor of the study is expressed in the level of alertness and attention required of the researcher to provide interpretive descriptions that completely detail the phenomenon being studied (Smith, 2011).

Research Methods

The structure and implementation of this research project is completed in a manner congruent with the selected methodology. Van Manen's publications are used to shape and organize the study design. The interviews are completed in a manner reflective of the nature of the process. The data is collected following the guidelines of the elements of the process. The rich texture of the experiences is maintained through proper documentation and through adherence to the writing/rewriting process.

Reflexivity and Positionality

A phenomenological study involving human participants begins in the lived experiences of the researcher. The processes of considering the responses of participants leads back to the researcher's lived experiences. Van Manen exerts lived experiences involve a pre-reflective and immediate consciousness. The level of self-given awareness is unaware of itself. This reflexive or self-given awareness is unaware of itself. Hermeneutic significance is given to lived experiences as a memory to them (Dilthey, 1985; van Manen, 1990). Meaning is assigned to the phenomena of a lived life through conversations, fantasies, meditations and comparisons (van Manen, 1990). Writing is used as an appropriate reflexive activity because it involves the combined use of the mental and physical elements of their existence (van Manen, 1990).

Continuing with the preface and situating a study within a methodology allows the methodological approach to give direction for the study as well as guidelines for the positionality of the researcher. Researcher positionality is an important concept because it defines the relationship between the researcher and the participants as well as the relationship between the researcher and the topic. Researcher positionality should be

transparent because it is critical in understanding the lens used to interpret the data (Jones et al., 2006).

As a working-class woman who has attained higher education and middle-class employment, I live in a mobile home park. As part of this study, I was interviewed using the same questions posed to the participants. This experience allowed me to evaluate memories that might have been forgotten. I live in close proximity to several women who meet most of the parameters of the study. While these individuals were not included in the study, they were interested in contributing. Two individuals were interviewed using the study questions. The interview contents were compared with my responses. The activity allowed for discussion among the women and me that involved study suggestions and experiences shared between these working-class women in attaining higher education. Hermeneutic significance is given to lived experiences as give memory to them and collect them. These activities helped me gain awareness and memory to personal lived experiences.

The benefit in hermeneutical phenomenology as a methodology for this study is not requiring the biases and assumptions of the researcher to be bracketed. Instead they are viewed as essential to the interpretive processes of the collected data. I am able to think in-depth about their own experiences and how they connect with the study topic. I track my reflections through keeping notes and a journal and interpret data as is suggested by others using the methodology (Laverty, 2003).

The completed study includes my individual views as the researcher along with the interpretation of the experiences found within the research data (Allen, 1996; Cotterill & Letherby, 1993; Laverty, 2003). The focus is placed on the lived

experiences of the participants by examining the details of daily life. The essential themes are revealed in detailed and rich descriptions. I did have to develop close relationships with participants to produce successful data. The time intensive nature of the process often results in hermeneutic studies having relatively small numbers of participants (Jones et al., 2006). Prior to recruitment of participants, the University of Oklahoma's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study. All researchers and their faculty sponsors completed and passed the Collaborative Institutional Training (CITI).

Sample Selection

The participants for this study are selected using the stratified non-random sampling method. The nature of the study requires participants fit within the definition included in the research question. The population of the sample includes women residing in Oklahoma who identify as working-class, have attained higher education and then remained living in or working in a working-class neighborhood. The selected sample includes women who learned of the study through word of mouth or prior knowledge of the researcher. The sample is limited to White women because of the potential for the continued significance of race and the impact of limited social agency of minority groups to impact life choices. It is believed learning from the limited sample can provide valuable insight. Future studies will benefit from the inclusion of minority groups to more fully understand the phenomenon.

Research Participation Inclusion Criteria

Participation in the study is voluntary. Participants are White, working-class women living in Oklahoma. They are required to have attained higher education while

included in the socioeconomic status would be labeled as working-class. The final requirement is the participants returned to or remained in working-class neighborhoods, whether through working in a position typically reserved for individuals within the class base or through working in a middle-class profession but residing in a working-class neighborhood.

Description of Participants

This study includes five women who met the requirements of having lived or labored in a working-class neighborhood prior to and after attaining higher education. While not all five of the participants work in a blue-collar position, they all remain engrained in the working-class culture of their neighborhoods. The following geographic locations and names are pseudonyms.

Wanda.

Wanda is a sixty-year-old home-maker in Yukon, Oklahoma and holds a bachelor's degree in journalism. She works part-time as a receptionist for her husband's mechanic shop, cleans houses and frequently provides childcare for family within her church. Wanda previously worked as a journalist for a newspaper but has not worked in the field for greater than 20 years.

Lee.

Lee is a 60-year-old tire shop receptionist living in Tulsa, Oklahoma and has three adult children all of whom hold professional positions. She is unmarried and lives alone in her mobile home located within a mobile home community on the outskirts of town. Lee earned a bachelor's degree in education in her 30s, but never pursued teaching as a profession. In her late 40s, she earned an MBA and a certificate in non-

profit accounting. Lee accepted an accounting position for less than a year before returning to the waitressing job she held for five years before moving to the tire-shop.

Margaret.

Margaret is a fifty-seven-year-old resident of Davidson, Oklahoma. One of her four children remain living in the home she shares with her husband. The home Margaret and her family reside was built in the 1940s and faces many of the issues connected with homes of that era. Margaret holds a bachelor's degree in library science and a position as a library assistant at the elementary school near her home.

Molly.

Molly is thirty-nine years old and resides in Oklahoma City. She holds a master's degree in education and journalism. She lives in a shared apartment in Moore, Oklahoma and works as an online grader for the SATs. She is primary an author and is focused on continuing to publish her novels.

Cindi.

Cindi is thirty-one years old. She resides in Seminole, Oklahoma with her son and husband. Cindi currently works as an EMT. In addition to her basic-EMT licensure, Cindi is a certified public accountant.

Interview Setting

It is important for the interview process participants are all comfortable with the researcher and with the setting. In order to maintain both confidentiality and the comfort of participants, they are contacted prior to meeting to schedule a time and place for the interview. Four of the five participants select their homes as the desired meeting

location. The fifth and final participant allows the researcher to meet her at her office which is visible from her home.

Data Collection Methods

The researcher collects the data for this study through interviewing the participants in person. Participants provide permission to audio record their interviews. Field notes are used as a tool for generating additional data during the interviews. Interviews are transcribed prior to analysis. Below is the protocol used.

Interview Protocol

- Can you tell me about the neighborhood in which you were reared?
- Why did you decide to attain higher education?
- What year did you start your degree?
- How old were you when you started your degree? When you finished?
- How do/did people in the community view you? Did your educational attainment change that?
- Tell me about your relationship with your current neighbors or community.
- Has your educational attainment ever had negative social outcomes for you? Elaborate.
- Why did you apply for your current position?
- How do you use your education in your current career?

- Are you happy with your life? Would you change anything? Please elaborate.

These questions are essential in extracting the meanings of the lived experiences of working-class women who have attained higher education but remain living or working in working-class neighborhoods. The strengths of the selected methodology are apparent in the researcher's ability to remain open to the richness of interpretation which develops through the emergence of sub-questions over the course of interviews. The researcher's ability to keep participants oriented to the material of the question without closing the question off promotes the interpretive circle element of the methodology.

Data Synthesis

The researcher synthesizes the data using the appropriate measures outlined within the methodology upon completion of the data collection. The process of personal reflection to the themes and the researcher's individual biases and experiences occurs. Themes emerge after analysis based on comparison across all participants.

Conclusion

Hermeneutics is concerned with the study of human cultural activity with an emphasis on the ability of interpretation to help find intended or expressed meaning within the process (Laverty, 2003). The process is facilitated through the hermeneutic circle by moving from the parts of the experience to the sum of the experiences over and over to increase the level of understanding of information (Annells, 1996; Heidegger, 1927, 1962; Laverty, 2003). The hermeneutic approach requires researchers

to engage in a self-reflection (Laverty, 2003). The ability of the researcher to actively engage in the process will increase the quality of the eventual findings.

The lived experiences of working-class women who have earned higher education and remain living or laboring in working-class culture have value. The importance of hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology within the area of education is supported by the ability of the methodology to effectively present the stories of women in this study. Hermeneutic phenomenology is aware of the theoretical philosophies of both hermeneutics and phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990). It is described as a type of research "aimed at producing rich textural descriptions of the experiencing of select phenomena in the life world of individuals who are able to connect with the experience of all of us collectively (Smith, 1997, p. 80). The identification of the experienced phenomena is required prior to any analysis of the phenomena. Once identified, the phenomena were examined deeply through the use of layered reflection and descriptive language (Smith, 1997).

The research question is deeply rooted in one's cultural values and is best examined through hermeneutic phenomenology to understand the participants' perceived connections of culture (material and nonmaterial components of the norms and values of a particular group). In this case, the information is gained through a series of personal interviews and reflections. The methodology allows the researcher to interpret and examine the experiences of participants while keeping with the goal of increasing the body of cultural knowledge. The research is meant to contribute to a body of knowledge that has long viewed education as a tool for achievement.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This section is filled with the data which resulted from the interview questions previously listed. The results are transcribed using the researcher's interpretive analysis and are presented using van Manen's (1990, 2014) structure for analysis which includes the six existential life-worlds: relationality (lived self-other), corporeality (lived body), spatiality (lived space), temporality (lived time), materiality (lived things), and technology (lived cyborg relations). Short introduction paragraphs include the basic information for each of the women in the study serve to introduce the participants. The subsequent portions explore the experiences of each individual which creates a way for the researcher to analyze the experiences and interpret the narratives. There are five women in this study. Two of the women have master's degrees and three have bachelor's degrees. All of the women currently reside in working class neighborhoods and none of them are currently employed in a field related to their educational attainment. Of the two women with graduate degrees only one held a position for a short time was directly related to her field of education.

Phenomenological Narratives: Presentation of Findings

Wanda

Relationality reflection (lived self-other): relationality-lived self-other.

Wanda was a high energy, thin woman who was nearing the end of middle-age. She was energetic and engaged throughout the interview. She had been married for 25 years and worked as a part-time receptionist for her husband's mechanic shop for the last 15 years. Wanda began her career in the newspaper industry and worked as a reporter. She once wanted to become an editor before she married. Her husband

suggested she stop working outside of the home after marriage, so she could focus on helping to raise his young children from a previous relationship.

The pastor at the church the young couple attended also suggested Wanda remain in the home. The church culture encouraged large families and Wanda attempted to grow her family. She was never able to carry a child to full-term and faced seven late-term miscarriages. She explained, "I'd still love to have a baby. I know some people think I'm too old, but I still long to hold my own baby in my arms. Someday. In His time, I'll hold all seven of mine. While I'm still waiting to go to that heavenly home, this old shop keeps me pretty busy."

Wanda talked about the connection to her neighbors who come into the shop and how she is able to use the computer to write letters to her family and the semi-annual letters she sends to extended family and other church and community members. She recently began to assist with a student newspaper through the home-school cooperative supported through her church. She outlined,

> The kids love putting together the newspaper. They take such pride in it and it always looks so good. They do a good job. I've learned when to go and interrupt Chris and when to just sit and talk. Sometimes the neighbors stop by with a question, but what they really want is someone to talk to them. I'm happy to do it instead of pulling him out from under a car for someone that really just wants a cup of coffee and some time. The grandkids are getting old enough now that they come in and help around the shop. Those days I can usually find some time to be alone in here with God and the computer and I have time to write out my thoughts to send to family. I used to do a monthly letter to let everyone know

how we were doing, but mostly now everyone knows within a few minutes of things happening. I like the feel of intentional letters though, so I still send them. I just usually only send them out one or two times time a year now.

Corporeality reflection (lived body): corporeality-lived body.

Wanda was a tall, thin woman who dressed modestly in second-hand clothing. She attempted to shrink herself further by sitting with her shoulders rounded forward and her legs tucked beneath her. She continually looked in the direction of the shop where her husband worked throughout the interview, saying, "I try to keep an eye out for him in case he needs me. I don't want him to have to come all the way in here to ask for something. I've learned to be efficient and save my old bones." Her responses were bubbly in comparison to her physical demeanor and did not seem to reflect the same level of uncertainty.

While answering questions during the interview, Wanda made several jokes about preferring to be the one asking the questions rather than the one answering them, she said, "I'm happy to help you. I know this is so important. I'm fighting the urge to take over though. I want to ask you questions. If I start getting too bossy, just tell me to hush." She also fidgeted with her jewelry as she thought through answers. She twirled her rings around and around on her fingers and removed and replaced her bright bracelets several times.

Spatiality reflection (lived space): **spatiality-lived space.**

Wanda wanted to be interviewed in her office within the shop. The office was a small, but tidy area connected to the shop area where her husband repairs cars. Her desk was in the middle of the space and faced the front entry. The room was decorated

with a rustic theme and the sheetrock interior hid the fact the building was made of tin. There was a pet door that allowed her cats to enter from the shop area and they came and went throughout the interview. She remarked, “I had him put that door in for Lizzy years ago. She thinks she owns the place. We just work around her stretched out there on the floor.” The environment matched the calming rural feel of the community it was situated. The environment was very relaxed and welcoming. The coffee pot in the corner was full of fresh coffee and her home-made cookies were available for any entrants to eat. “Feel free to have some coffee and those cookies are fresh if you want any of them,” she said. “Oh wait, you don’t like coffee or is that your sister? I can’t seem to tell you two apart even now.”

Temporality (lived time).

Wanda was a prompt person and prepared to begin the interview on time. Her energy was high and made the time pass quickly. She was easily able to flow between talking about her recent past and many years ago. She had a level of consciousness that was almost unnerving. She joked about being able to remember important details from long ago events as being the key to a good reporter. Ruminating, she explained, “It’s funny how the memory works. I can remember exactly how I felt during certain moments of college and I can still close my eyes and remember the smell of the rooms when I took final exams. My papa used to say that my memory would make me a good reporter.”

In other ways, she appeared to be timeless. While her clothing was stylish, she was dressed modesty that might have been appropriate in the early 1900s. Her long denim skirts and high collared shirts were at odds with her slim features and the

otherwise modern tone to her interactions. She dated herself when she mentioned typewriters during her time in college and lamented the difficulty in formatting for editing with technology which has not been used within the industry for years, explaining, “I’ve gotten so used to working with this computer that I’ve forgotten how much more work it took to use that typewriter. I still remember how excited I was to get my first one though. It was a big purchase back then and papa saved up to help me buy it. It had to be done just right in order to come out straight.” Wanda moved her hands in a motion mirroring the ones she used on her old typewriter and smiled when she realized what she was doing, expounding, “I’ve always talked with my hands as much as my mouth. I guess I should have taken up sign language. It would have been useful on the mission trips.”

Materiality (lived things).

Many of the material things around Wanda also appeared to belong to the past. Unasked, she mentioned her affinity for thrift stores and her desire to limit waste through the consumption of previously owned goods. She exemplified, “I love taking my grand-daughters with me to Goodwill. I’m not sure my husband is as fond of it as I am. Pastor jokes that we should have a church yard sell, but we’ve all bought so much stuff from each other already, we’d just end up buying back things we’d sold at garage sales already.”

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Wanda has a complicated relationship with technology. While she enjoyed using the computer to simplify work orders and create letter templates, she hated

outsiders to cause harm. She recently went through an issue with malware which caused her to lose several months of work orders and receipts. She explained,

> I got a message on the screen that said there was a virus and to click submit in order to be able to clear it off. As soon as I did, I could see the files on the screen just disappearing. I tried to make it stop, but I couldn't. I didn't know where it was going or if the financial information on the computer was going to be taken by someone, so I just unplugged it. I took it up to the shop in town, but they said it was gone and there wasn't anything they could do about it. It was awful trying to get everything back in order in time for taxes, but it also hurt me to lose all the stories I'd been writing for the grandkids. I just don't understand why people put things like that out there to destroy another people's work. What if I'd have had precious pictures saved there?"

The shop was in a remote area of a rural town and there were currently two options for Internet providers. The speed was slow, and the technology outdated. She elucidated, "I've started backing everything up now using a website, but it takes so long because the internet is so slow. I know once I start the back- up process, I'm going to be waiting for at least an hour or more."

Wanda was a very morally guided woman who thinks through her decisions and actions closely. She had an active Facebook page, but was aware of the potential for her social media presence to detract from her work and her desire to serve within her church. She limited her use of Facebook and did not use the application on her phone.

Lee

Corporeality reflection (lived body): corporeality-lived body.

Lee was a spirited, curvy woman who had a positive outlook on life. She was a trendy woman and dressed fashionably. Her make-up and hair style made her appear younger than her chronological age. She was a self-assured stylish woman who dressed trendier than most women her age. She currently works at a tire shop but was a waitress for many years prior to accepting her current position.

Lee was quick to laugh during the interview and did not hesitate to answer questions. She often apologized for oversharing and lost her breath laughing at several intervals, clarifying, "I love my job but hate this dang uniform. It's too tight on my boobies. Oh, sorry. I can't say boobies can I? That'd be wrong for homework, right?" She was lively while discussing her career and educational experiences. For example, she said, "I guess not everyone agrees with me, but I'm happy where I am. I'd thought about teaching, but watching these teachers struggle for everything they have makes it seem less worth it. It used to be that teachers were respected, but they aren't anymore." Lee laughed when discussing details of her many divorces in a manner that reflected her ability to deal with changes in relationship status. For example, she recounted,

> How's it going with your husband? Oh wait, I'm not supposed to be the one asking questions, but how is it? I've always wondered what it would be like to be with someone a little darker. In all the years that I've been getting married and divorced, I've always just been with white men. Maybe that's my problem. Maybe I should have been more what's the word? Diverse?

Relationality reflection (lived self-other): relationality-lived self-other.

Lee's career started out as a billing clerk for a hospital. She met her first husband in the 1980s and eventually stopped working to care for the three children they

welcomed. After several years of marriage, Lee left her husband and resumed work as a unit clerk at a hospital in Tulsa, explaining, "It was hard to go back to work at first with the girls at home, but their grandmother helped a great deal. She was like a second parent for them. Lord knows their daddy didn't help much." Lee later remarried and moved to an area near her current home for several years. Her second husband was abusive, left the marriage and moved closer to her adult children. She earned her bachelor's degree during this time but did not seek employment due to her third marriage. She explained,

> I left Jay the last time he hit me. I'd told him that if he did it again, I'd be gone and I meant it. I met Paul right before my divorce was final and we just clicked. I thought I'd found my forever, but I think it was just the fear of uncertainty. What's that Reba song? Your mom always liked singing it. I don't know. The words were it's just the fear of being alone or something. Ask her. She'll know. Anyway, I think that's what it was because we got married the week I was able to do so after the waiting time from the divorce. We went to Arkansas. It was pretty.

After her third divorce, Lee had a series of short-term relationships which involved relocation to areas around the state. She said,

> I've never left Oklahoma, but I've lived just about everywhere inside it. I moved around a lot after Paul and I got our divorce. I'd at least left that one a little better than I went in to it with, but I just couldn't feel settled. I'd meet some guy that would talk real nice until I'd moved off with him and then it'd just go to shit.

Lee decided to seek a master's degree during an in-patient stay at a mental health hospital. Brutally honest, she stated,

> I checked myself in to try to deal with some of the issues I'd always had. My daddy was bi-polar. They called it manic-depressive in those days. I've always had struggles with depression, but I decided to get some help to work through it so maybe I could make better decisions.

Lee started her degree quickly upon her release from the inpatient program and completed it before marrying her fourth husband.

Temporality (lived time).

Lee was fast paced. She made decisions and changed her direction relative quickly. Her life seemed to reflect her speech patterns, quick short bursts that were tied loosely together. She shared, "my decision making with men hasn't always been the best, but once I make a decision to do something. I do it." Throughout the interview, she spoke directly and was on point. She mentioned the impact of her age on her educational attainment by saying, "I was an adult before I got my last degree. It was odd to be so much older than the other students. Hell. I might have been older than the professor."

Materiality (lived things).

Lee lived in a rather nice mobile home. She was a tidy housekeeper and did not have much clutter or many decorations. By way of explaining her living situation, she said, "I used to keep all the things the kids made and all of the presents my grandkids gave me, but it just got to be too much. When I moved out of my last house, I decided

to get rid of more and keep memories instead. Of course, Mark helped with that. When he knew I was leaving he tossed away a lot of my stuff just because he could."

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Lee had a Facebook page and used it to express her conservative views. She frequently commented on the political posts of her friends and engaged in discourse over issues relating to immigration, taxes and gun control. She used her phone as a way to stay connected with her children and their children. "I love Facebook," she said,

> I get to see everything my kids and grandkids are into and it's so nice to always have a way to get in touch with them. I don't have to worry about forgetting their school stuff, because I just set a reminder or create an event and it sends automatic reminders. I can use that live part to be able to watch things if I can't actually be there.

Therefore, Lee appeared to be comfortable with technology and discussed how it helped her overcome some of her mental health issues. She illustrated,

> I tell you this phone has so many good uses. I never really thought I'd want a smartphone until I got it. Now, I don't know how I ever lived without it. It has my shopping list, my calendar, my contacts and then I have this application on there that I can use to help myself relax. It's called chill-pill or some nonsense name like that, but it works so well. It has guided meditation practices and things to listen to while I'm sleeping. My subconscious mind must pick it up pretty well. I thought at first it might make me have odd dreams, but it didn't.

Margaret

Corporeality reflection (lived body): corporeality-lived body.

Margaret volunteered in several organizations within her community. She worked at her local elementary school as a library assistant. She verbalized pride in her ability to do work within the library system other assistants are not able to do. Margaret had been working in her current position for several years and was happy there. She once wanted to become a science teacher but decided to go into library science after her high school counselor guided her away from the field. She explained, "He told me that women weren't science teachers and that I'd never be able to find a job. He suggested I become a librarian, so I enrolled in the library science program at the community college near my hometown." She married her husband before graduation and completed her degree. They had their children soon after her graduation and she did not seek employment until her youngest child was in elementary school. Margaret said, "I was excited to work at the school when I first started. It was easy because the kids were close and I could be off when they were out of school to an extent. After they were all grown, I enjoyed being around the younger kids still."

Corporeality reflection (lived body): corporeality-lived body.

Margaret's personality was in stark contrast to her physical appearance. She was an extremely small woman with silver hair, but her voice was loud and she projected well when she spoke. She was able to change the dynamic of a room when she entered. She was easily noticed and often became the center of conversations around her. Margaret used her hands and gestures often when talking. Her bright smile did not leave her face even when she mentioned frustrations with some of the regulations within her school that limited the ability of children to access books at a rate they wanted.

Relationality reflection (lived self-other): relationality-lived self-other.

Margaret loved being around people, especially children. Her inclusive personality and joyful demeanor encouraged other people to seek her companionship. She was always positive and kept others around her motivated. She told me most of the teachers liked her because she could help them with lesson plans when they needed it and the kids loved her because she listened to them and sometimes brought them special treats.

Margaret said,

> I completed my degree after getting married which was hard. I didn't work outside my home at first because we had babies so quickly and I didn't want to miss out on those first years of their lives. Then I was settled in to the routine and there just didn't seem to be a good time to start looking for work until the youngest was in school. I was always volunteering at the school, so when the position opened for the library assistant, the teachers told me about it. It was a good fit. It let me work within my field even though it wasn't at a level that met with my bachelor's degree. I didn't mind. I like the work and I love the kids.

Spatiality reflection (lived space): spatiality-lived space.

Margaret was frustrated with the school's inability to update their library system. She worked is a rural area and the resources within the school were often put into other parts of the school. While the school recently updated the computer equipment in the math and science classrooms in the high school, the elementary library was not given any new equipment. She stated,

> The younger kids need access to newer stuff, too. I don't think they need the newest technology, but it isn't fair that they just get the left overs. There are books in here that have been here almost as long as I have and that reading room is upstairs. I know that I can go and get books for the kids that can't get up there, but it isn't the same experience for them and I just don't think that's fair. We need to put some money into this building so that we can make it accessible to all the kids.

Temporality (lived time).

Margaret flipped tenses throughout the interview. At times it was difficult to tell if she was referencing a past event that had happened a decade ago or within the last two weeks. More specifically, she said, "I just loved going to the school plays. I love the way the kids look when they sing and dance. They're always looking out into the audience to make sure they have someone watching them. I'm glad I can be there." She tended to view time as a fluid experience and it was interesting to reflect on her choices given this characteristic. Time was also significant to Margaret based on her connection to her family and her role as a wife and mother. She frequently used time with her family as a basis for keeping her current professional position, "I love what I do and I love that I can still have time for my real life with my family. I never wanted to be one of those women up at dawn to put on a suit and sit in some meeting all day. I want to be with my kids."

Materiality (lived things).

Margaret did not appear to foster a desire to have the most modern possessions. Her focus was on experiences rather than material goods. Her house was tidy but

appeared to be in need of some basic repairs. Her carpets were exceptionally clean but show frayed edges and worn parts near the doors. Her kitchen table was without crumbs but reflected the scratches that are a result of years of shared family meals and conversations. Upon greeting me, she welcomed me to a chair at the table and mentioned it by saying, "My husband built this years ago. It could probably give you a better interview about family life than I could."

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Margaret was comfortable with technology. She updated the check-out system within the library from the old card system to a new computerized system required she tag and log every single book within the system. She used technology in her volunteer positions which involved serving as an advocate for abused children.

Margaret maintained accounts on Facebook and Twitter. She used her social media accounts to advocate for causes within her community she supported. She was vocal about her political beliefs and proud of her liberal stance on many social issues.

Molly

Corporeality reflection (lived body): corporeality-lived body.

Molly was a tall and broad woman. Her hair was shaved closely to her head. She chose to wear men's clothing and did not wear make-up or jewelry. In her forties, she lamented her relationship status as single. She was comfortable in her space and leaned closely to me when she spoke emphatically about something. She was comfortable and to the point throughout the interview. She did not hold back her words or attempt to limit the physical space she occupied.

Relationality reflection (lived self-other): relationality-lived self-other.

Molly revealed she did not enjoy being around people outside of those she included in her circle of friends. She mentioned enjoying living with her roommate but she would like to move eventually. She was not exceptionally close to members of her family. Her brother never got over the fact Molly had married a woman. Her mother was more comfortable after Molly's wife underwent a female to male transition but was deeply hurt by her subsequent divorce. She stated,

> I enjoy working remotely because I don't have to go out and be around people. I want to do more and go out more, but then I don't really. I try to meet people, but I express myself better with writing, so it's an inevitable let down when I go from talking online to meeting in person. It was different with my partner. We could engage easily and it was comfortable until it wasn't. I loved him as my wife and I loved him as my husband, but there are some changes that are just too hard for a relationship to survive. I don't hate him. I just miss the way she used to be.

Spatiality reflection (lived space): spatiality-lived space.

Molly lived in Moore which allowed for a measure of acceptance due to the diverse nature of a campus environment from the nearby Norman campus of the University of Oklahoma. The neighborhood where she lives was working-class and tended to lean conservative politically. She mentioned her education changed the way she saw her community, expounding, "I don't know if it changed the way they saw me in any way, but it certainly changed my vision and awareness. I see the things that are wrong here. It's all about blaming all the negative on someone that is different from

them." She mentioned an increased awareness to the racism, sexism and homophobia present within her community, by saying,

> The way they treat women and people of color is not right. They act like anyone that isn't white has the same experience as anyone else and that the rates of police brutality are all the fault of minority groups. It astounds me how they can cling so stubbornly to a republican viewpoint when republicans are the very same group that wants to take everything away from working class people. It's easier to convince a broke white man that it's the way more broke black man's fault that he doesn't have two dimes to rub together than it is to get him to see that corporations are screwing over their workers. I don't get it.

She added, "They're good people. I know that. I believe a working-class person would give you their last dollar if they knew you needed it well before a rich person would even give you a quarter they'd never miss and probably didn't even know they had, but I just wish they could all see what's going on and work to change it, but they won't."

Temporality (lived time).

Molly was a writer and experienced time as it related to her writing. She was happy with the flexibility of her job because it allowed her the opportunity to spend more time writing and developing her characters. She was forward focused and lived time in a way that is future based. She was driven to achieve her goals and spend time taking steps to make them a reality. "I love my family," she said. "I love my neighbors. I don't think it makes me a bad person to want more than this though. I don't want to live my whole life here. I don't want a gated mansion, but I want to move out of here in the future."

Materiality (lived things).

Molly was not focused on material things. She vividly described her apartment as "run down. I don't have much because I don't want to move much with me whenever I go." The solid wood bookcase stood in the corner of her living room in stark contrast to the fragility of the rest of the furniture within the apartment. The shelves were lined with volumes ranging from Foucault to risqué erotic titles.

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Molly was connected with technology. She used it as a means of social engagement and as her primary source of income. She was active in various forms of social media and participated in pages and groups that supported her passion of writing as well as her identity in the LGBTQ community. She used her online access as a way to connect and create community and as a tool for engagement comfortable for her,

> I love having the ability to meet with people in a way that doesn't really cost me any extra money. I'm going to be paying the phone bill anyway. I have apps that let me post my writing and get real time feedback from an environment that protects me. I think it's amazing how far we've come and how much online communities aren't just an underground thing. These people are as much my family as any of my blood relatives and some I haven't met outside of our online communities.

Cindi

Corporeality reflection (lived body): Corporeality-lived body.

Cindi was an extremely thin woman with a bright personality. She bounced around throughout the interview almost unable to remain seated. She spoke of her

experiences in short chopped answers reflected her desire to move quickly from one task to the next. She was dressed comfortably in a pair of sweat pants and t-shirt. She mentioned she did not have much time to worry with her make-up or hair because her son was just starting to toddle and was into everything.

Her bright blue eyes shine with love when she mentioned her son and her family. She said, "He's the absolute best thing that has ever happened to me." She also spoke highly of her husband and the way he "helps out around the house and with the baby." She appeared to be at ease with the interview process but required frequent follow-up questions to keep her on topic.

Relationality reflection (lived self-other): Relationality-lived self-other.

Cindi frequently mentioned her shift partners, explaining, "They are really like a second family. Mike and Megan know me about as well as my actual brother and sister." She said, "It's nice to have that kind of connection. When we see something that is really tough, it's not like we are going through it alone. We are there for each other. It's a connection and when we are on top of it, we are on top together." While Cindi had a clear sense of self, she was tied closely to her community and her connection with the importance of her work. Of her educational experiences, she said, "My degree was spent completing with everyone else for the highest grades and the best internships. Then working in accounting as almost just spending days and days just looking for the ways in which someone else might have messed up in their jobs. It got to me."

Spatiality reflection (lived space): spatiality-lived space.

Cindi lived in a well-kept house with her family. Her husband inherited the house from an estranged uncle who never had children. The house seemed almost out of place among the neighborhood. It had a brick exterior and freshly painted window panes caught my attention when I first arrived for the interview. It seemed storybook in contrast to the disrepair present in the homes of the two nearest neighbors. Although her yard did not appear to be out of order, she said, "I'm sorry for our yard. I know it's high. I've been meaning to get my hubs to mow, but just haven't had time."

Temporality (lived time).

Cindi was fast paced and moved between topics quickly. She did everything quickly from completing her degrees which she was able to do in three years to starting her family. She met and married her husband within an eight-month period. She noted her desire to move fast by saying, "As an EMT, we are dealing with situations that require immediate action. If I don't start an IV and get medication started, we might lose the patient. If we don't get to a call on time, we might lose the patient. If I take too long to make a call…. we might lose a patient." She referenced the past by saying, "I think about what it would have been like to have lived during a time where women couldn't work outside the home. I don't think I'd have liked that very much, but then again it might be nice to not have anything to worry about other than baby. Then I might actually be able to get all of the laundry put away."

Materiality (lived things).

Cindi appeared to be a minimalist. Her house was not filled with many mementos. The visible possessions appeared to serve a purpose. She explained, "I don't want baby to have too many toys because he'll get overwhelmed and won't be as

appreciative of them as he grows up. I don't like seeing these entitled kids that run around demanding to have their parents buy them things. It's never too early to start good habits."

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Cindi had a moderate relationship with technology. She said, "I have a smartphone and I do the whole social media thing, but I really try to limit it. I don't want to live life looking down at my phone. There's so much I'd miss." She continued,

> I have to use it a lot at work. We use it to navigate calls and keep in touch with dispatch so I definitely think it has a place when it is used appropriately. I just don't like the way that it has isolated so many people. It's kind of rare to see people out and socializing and that makes me kind of sad to think about what kind of world it will be when baby is older.

Conclusion

Corporeality reflection (lived body): Corporeality-lived body

While each of the women had different body types and personalities, there was a shared connection between them. In each instance, they seemed aware of the space they occupied. Cindi mentioned, "not having time" for her grooming in a way that seemed apologetic. Molly was aware of the space she occupied. While she was not nearly as reserved as Wanda in her actions, she seemed content to make her space as small as possible in the manner she sat. Class-consciousness allowed me to view the corporeality of these women with an understanding of class. I felt in each case, the women had developed working-class mannerisms that fit within the expectations for women in their neighborhoods.

Relationality reflection (lived self-other): Relationality-lived self-other

Community was an important element in the lives of each woman. The ability to connect with others as a way of self-definition and connection was present in each case. Cindi, Molly, Wanda, Margaret, and Lee each had individual reasons for remaining in their communities. Each woman experienced their community in different meaningful ways, but it was clear throughout the interviews community connections had affected each of the women, with statements such as, “I like it here. These are my people.” Molly reflected the connection in a different, but no less significant manner by sharing, “I grew up with these people. I’ve not always agreed with them, but I feel like they complete me. They’ve made me who I am in a lot of ways.”

Spatiality reflection (lived space): spatiality-lived space

Working-class neighborhoods tended to share some basic characteristics. The neighborhoods where the participants lived or worked were similar in some ways. Working class neighborhoods were often excluded from community advancement initiatives. As such, the neighborhoods I visited to complete the interviews were older and/or in various states of disrepair. The individual homes/work spaces I visited did not have the feel of sterilization or standardization present in some middle-class neighborhoods. The homes were dated in a way that reflected the struggle to progress experienced by working-class people.

Temporality (lived time)

I visited working class neighborhoods in Oklahoma. It appeared as though the spaces were frozen in time in the 1980s. The decorations, the style of the infrastructures and the age of many of the appliances contributed to a sense of traveling through time.

The overall impact was one that left me wondering if time was experienced differently across class groups or if the hands of time just did not touch these neighborhoods. Wanda poignantly mentioned time discussing one of her many miscarriages. She said, "I think a lot about what my babies would be now. I wonder what they'd look like or what my grandkids from them might have been. Oh, what a joy it will be in heaven to see them again."

Materiality (lived things)

Media representations reflect working class people in an unflattering depiction of mullets and old beer cans. The reality of the experiences of the women I interviewed did not reflect that stereotype. The material things presented in the homes and work places were not usually expensive but held emotional significance. The material possessions Margaret brought my attention were those which held special meaning for her. In showing me a ring that once belonged to her grandmother she stated, "Look. This might be the only real diamond I've ever had, but I love it because it stayed on her finger. It was with her for all of her life once my papa put it on her hand and it feels like she is holding my hands when I wear it. I like having her close to me."

Technology (lived cyborg relations)

The slowed feeling of time was present in technology within these neighborhoods. Wanda typed from a huge desktop which took up half the space on her desk and looked as though it had seen better days. Lee's resistance to modern technology seemed in step with the apparent resistance to time in her neighborhood. The advancements in technology did not appear to have benefited working-class families or social interactions in the same way they have for middle-class and above

families. The technology seemed to be viewed internally as an additional level of control over the working-class.

Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine the purpose of education in the lived experiences of working-class women who had attained higher education but remained engrained in working-class environments. The five women participants contributed their stories in an effort to add their voices to the body of knowledge as it related to the purpose of education in society. Class specific cultural capital, community identity and belonging were important elements to this study (Craggs, 2018) A phenomenological design was used to understand and provide a description of the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of working-class women (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenological studies were used as a means of constructing interpretive descriptions of meanings by reflecting on the lived experiences of the sample (van Manen, 2014). Van Manen (2014) suggested "phenomenological research and writing tries to make intelligible the experiences that we explore in a feelingly understanding manner" (p. 390). The ability of the researcher to not only describe an experience, but also offer an interpretation allowed for a deeper level of connection between the researcher and the topic. The connection created meaning that would otherwise have been overlooked within an observational description (van Manen, 1990).

When I first began my journey into higher education, I often studied concepts that were familiar to me in experience, but not in a theoretical perspective. I frequently realized the impact of a topic by connecting it to my experiences as a way to build a meaningful engagement with the material. It was possible for me to recognize a theoretical perspective, but not fully realize the lived connection to the concept.

Excerpts from the interviews were included within this chapter as a way to reduce the disconnection between theory and lived experience. They served as a means of creating a better understanding of how these women were influenced throughout their educational journey and why they opted to remain in their social or professional settings.

Chapter 5 will include a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion, and analysis of each of the emergent themes: Community, Opportunity Availability, Belonging, Identity, Mentorship, Expectations and Freedom. It will continue with an examination of the connections with the study implications and the relevant literature and theory. The chapter concludes with a discussion of implications and recommendations for future research.

Analysis of Findings

Each theme reflected an essential component of understanding the lived experiences of the women included in the study. The community where one is reared shaped initial internalized self-concept and identity development (Turpin, 2016). Identity development was connected to the people and spaces where an individual felt a belonging (Elkins, 2013). Opportunity availability was affected by the geographic location of a community and determined whether or not mentorship opportunities were possible. Expectations were a personal value system derived from lived experiences and community norms and values. Education was viewed as a means for experiencing class mobility. Educational attainment was viewed as the key to unlocking the chains of oppression and providing freedom. This study presented the voices of working-class women who attained higher education but did not experience class mobility. Their

voices were used to determine if education was powerful enough to create significant changes in the lives of working-class women. The findings in this hermeneutic phenomenological study added to the foundation of current knowledge as it related to the purpose of education in society and the experiences of working-class women. Therefore, the results were useful for (a) institutions of higher education in the development of recruitment campaigns and in the development of student support programs (b) professional organizations that desire to increase class or gender diversity within their workforce and (c) working-class women who desire to attain higher education. Although these women view their educational attainment and professional positions as a conscious choice they made and gender oppression was not identified as an issue in this study, researchers need to continue to address the issues faced with discrimination in hiring practices.

Phenomenological Analysis

Like Gammil (2016), I organized the themes that emerged from the data using the Golden Triangle. The themes presented were as follows: Community, Opportunity Availability, Belonging, Identity, Mentorship, Expectations and Freedom. It was important to note each of the themes were connected and flowed into one another to create a framework. These themes were the invisible factors that influenced the life course of working-class women as they attained higher education. When taken together these themes allowed for the lived experiences of these working-class women who did not leave their work-class neighborhoods to add to the broader body of knowledge as it related to education within the United States.

Class status and community were closely related in the lives of these women. Their lived experiences allowed them to feel as though they belonged with their community. Their individual calls to connection were answered within their communities. The data suggested the desire to have a community outweighed the social pressure to advance economically. Opportunity availability connected to this piece because of the lack of opportunity in most working-class neighborhoods. The women felt at home within their community and they accepted positions that did not require them to relocate. A sense of belonging was difficult to separate from community, but it was a distinct element different from community. Belonging was the internal feeling that came from the answered call to connection from the broad community. For these women, their identity was connected to where they felt they belong. They viewed themselves in terms connected with their community and class status. The lack of mentorship within their experiences prevented them from attaining the cultural capital that might have otherwise shifted their identity into one which would have allowed them to step outside of their communities. The expectations these women held for themselves as well as those held for them within their community also contributed to their life choices. Women were expected to hold their families and communities together. It was often difficult for women to break the expectations to move past their role strain (Leitner, 2012). The final theme of freedom was among the most important because it spoke to the worldview of the participants. There was a social construct that defined freedom in monetary terms. Wealthy individuals were framed as having more freedom because they had the financial backing to make choices that reflected their desires (Elkins, 2013). However, these women viewed freedom as having the ability to

choose to not actively seek the definition of success widely accepted by the dominant element of society.

Themes

Community.

Community impacted individual worldview and contributes to internalized self-talk (Selmer, 2014). Community was an important concept that emerged within each of the interviews. For good or bad, the women all appeared to be strongly connected to the people within their community of origin. While several continued to live in the same communities they were reared, those who had moved locations attempted to recreate the same type of lived community they were most comfortable. Even if the association with the neighborhood was less than perfect, it appeared the ability to fit in within the demographics was possible for even those with a heightened awareness of social factors.

Cindi said, “It’s good to be back home. I thought I wanted to do something different, but then when I got out there, it wasn’t what I’d expected. It just didn’t feel right. It’s just better here.” Lee added, “I wanted to teach. But then I got the last divorce and when I felt so lonely, my neighbors were there for me. I’d rather waitress or work at this tire shop than try to build new relationships. Jobs can come and go, but friendships are harder to maintain. I’ve had a few friends for thirty years. I’ve never had the same job that long.”

Working-class community’s culture was different from middle or upper-class cultures. The values, language and experiences often rejected either the values or goals of middle-class culture. The ability to share in the same struggles and feelings appeared

to be an important element in the decisions of these women to remain within their communities (Leitner, 2012). Margaret spoke of her community saying, "I love it here. I don't lock my doors. We don't have a lot, but we share what we do have." Wanda stated, "We're country folks at heart. We share the same thoughts on stuff and we like a lot of the same things."

Opportunity Availability.

Segregation within the housing market by race and class contributed to the measurable disparity in opportunities within minority, rural and working-class communities (Loveday, 2015). The community component connected into the next theme which was the availability of opportunities. Margaret mentioned, "I wouldn't have minded taking a higher paying job, but I might have had to drive further and when the kids were little it just wouldn't have worked." Often working-class communities were removed from areas that had higher levels of opportunities. The connection to technology may have affected the ability for community members who were isolated from opportunities to have the change to seek other forms of employment (Duncan, 2012). Lee mentioned not being able to apply for some options because, "They all refer you to different websites. It's hard to keep typing my resume into different websites on my phone. It takes too long and then I'm not going to get an interview anyway."

Belonging.

The drive to feel accepted within a community was an impactful element for women and minority groups affected by the privilege afforded to the dominant groups within the United States and subsequently kept from minority groups (MacLeod, 2008). The majority of the women in this study were willing to stay living and working in their

working-class neighborhoods because they felt comfortable there. Cindi stated she "felt connected to her neighborhood" and she wanted to stay living in the area. She revealed she wanted to help people and "being an EMT just fit with where I am in my life right now." Wanda shared the sentiment by saying, "My church is here. My family is here. I want to be here."

The participants fleshed out their complex relationships with class in their communities. Molly spoke candidly about how her education changed her connection with her working-class community.

> The few friends I had were neighbors, who were all older than me and usually friends of my parents, so I didn't hang out with the other high school kids and get into trouble or play sports or do anything but go to school. So, the community didn't really know me at all, except by name… I don't know if it changed how they saw me, but it changed how I saw them. I now saw the racism and the class differences and the homophobia and the lack of educated folks. I was alienated even more and knew I didn't fit. Coming back home from college made me really relate to Charley, from Flowers for Algernon. I, too, had to go away.

Lee added,

> I mean, I wouldn't want to live with the kinds of people you work with. I'm educated, but I'm not smart-smart like they are. I wouldn't fit in with them. I've never been the snooty kind of person that wants to live in a gated community. Why? So you don't have to see anyone that is beneath you? I've

> just never wanted to live like that all separated from other people. I doubt they even know their neighbors."

Identity.

The lived experiences of the women in this study shaped their life choices and the manner they viewed themselves. Their personal identities remained woven together with their class identity (Grossman, 2013). Wanda spoke of this connection by saying,

> I don't want to work in another community or in another job. I like knowing my people. I like knowing my work. I do not have what it takes to be in news anymore because things are so competitive. I do not want to have to push someone else down in order to get higher myself. I have a few friends that have made lots of money from investing well, but they aren't who they used to be. You really can't take it with you. They gave up friendships, families and a relationship with Christ to have all those worldly goods and it won't benefit them one bit in eternity. It's better to be here where I can reach out and connect with my neighbors. I like being where my grandkids can run in and help themselves to any food in my fridge. I'm able to be the best version of myself possible here in this house, in this job and in this church."

Margaret reflected on this concept, recounting, "I love my neighbors. I love my little house. I don't have to lock the doors and I know my neighbors are watching for me. I don't have to pretend to be something that I'm not." Molly's experience was slightly different but still reflected the connection between class and identity. "As a homosexual woman, I am often at odds with the ideologies within my community, but

those ideas still shaped who I am. I had to leave to find who I am. I still fit into the mold when I came back. I just saw more of the problems than I did."

Mentorship.

Mentorship was glaringly missing from the interviews with the participants. Mentorship was proven to help minority groups and working-class individuals thrive within organizations (Massango, 2011). The utter lack of experience of mentorship in the educational and professional experiences was an important concept to consider. The structure or design of many professional organizations were formatted in such a way it was needful for any newcomer to have been targeted for outreach from an established member to become a successful and contributing member within the organization. In my case, intentional mentorship completely changed the trajectory of my career and I was acutely aware of the importance of the concept in professional mobility.

I was able to be promoted from an entry- level position to a title which afforded me faculty ranking within nine months of accepting a position at a private college near my working-class community. I was acutely aware my advancement was due to the desire of the vice president to help me. He pulled me up the ranks of the male dominated organization by teaching me the expected behaviors and orchestrating opportunities for me to showcase my abilities in areas that garnered attention from other administrators. While I had the abilities to be successful on my own, I did not have the social or cultural capital required to navigate within the organization. The willingness of the individual to extend his cultural capital to me made the difference in whether or not I was able to remain in the position. I often wondered where I would be now if he had not taken me under his proverbial wing.

My educational attainment was the result of mentorship. I struggled as an undergraduate and my grade point average poor. My experience changed dramatically after one of my professors made a connection with me which caused me to feel included and encouraged. From that course onward, I did not have any grade lower than a B. If it had not been for the support from the professor and great letters of recommendation, I would not have been accepted into a master's program. The fear and struggles that plagued me as an undergraduate returned for the first semester of my graduate school career and my avenue into the doctoral program was based on my potential rather than my prior performance. I would not have had the courage to continue my educational journey if it had not been for the encouragement of interested individuals who were already established in the system.

Expectations.

The narrative of social mobility was as woven into the social fabric of the culture of the United States as the red, white and blue is within our national flag (Loveday, 2015). The idea any individual can attain success regardless of their class of origin was often promoted within primary and secondary schools. The social control achieved by suggesting life choices and work ethic were the contributing factors for life outcomes was successful because it ignored the limitations of social oppression and the benefits that came from the invisible privilege afforded to the dominant members within society (Lagenkamp, 2018).

It was apparent the women in this study felt it was expected they attend higher education or such attainment would dramatically improve their lives. Molly explained her reasons for attaining higher education by saying,

The short answer would be, I wanted to go. My family moved around a lot when I was growing up, as my father was often looking for work. From the time I was four (my earliest memory), until I graduated high school, we moved twelve times, between two different states, Illinois and Kentucky, respectively. Because of this, I went to seven different schools. That being said, all the neighborhoods had one thing in common: We were all some degree of poor. We lived in trailer parks, apartments, crummy houses, all in small towns of 1000 – 5000 people. When we lived in Kentucky the town we lived in was much larger, at least the size of Norman. It was the first time (at the age of ten) that I had gone to school with kids who were other than white. In most places I lived, the neighbors all knew each other and helped each other out, from babysitting each other's kids, to borrowing food when one family needed a hand. Often, the weekends were spent in someone's yard, sitting around a fire and drinking beer. Sounds idyllic, but it wasn't always. Those same people who depended on each other would turn a blind eye when the high school teacher who lived next door beat his wife, even though we could all hear it from our yards. Any kind of drug use and homosexuality was whispered about and frowned upon. The N word was prevalent. The long answer is that I couldn't see myself fitting in the world around me. Girls in my town either got married and had a family, worked in some dead end-job, or went to college and moved away. I knew I wasn't going to get married, at least not the way they thought, and the job prospects didn't appeal to me at all. I never felt like I belonged with those people. We just

> simply had little in common. I knew I didn't want to stay there, that it wasn't right for me.

Cindi illustrated her expectations,

> My parents always thought I'd go to college and my teachers said I was bright enough, so I went. I didn't think about where life would actually take me, but I knew I wanted to raise my son with people that would love and support him. I can't imagine having any other life or living anywhere else. It just wouldn't be right for me.

Lee shared a similar sentiment, "I don't think I ever had a conscious moment where I thought I needed to go to school to get out of where I am. I just wanted to do it to show that I could and then life just fell into place."

Freedom.

Working–class neighborhoods were controlled by the actions of other groups (Williams, 2006). The ability to define their own form of freedom was present within the words of the participants. **"**I like the freedom I have in my position. I prefer the ability to be able to be off if I need to be off or come in a little late if I need to be late." Margaret explained part of her choice to work in a position that did not meet the level of her education resulted from examining her desire to have a level of freedom she had not perceived possible in another field or in a different level. She further added she "wanted to be able to help and have a positive impact on kids without all of the responsibility and pressure." Lee referenced the concept of choice by saying, "I could have gone into teaching, but then I'd have to deal with all the bureaucracy that comes with it. Superintendents that have never been in the classroom are making decisions for

teachers that have been in the field for years and it just wasn't something I wanted to get into once I really thought about it." Molly said,

> I am happy, happiest I've been in years, but I would change a couple of things, and I'm working towards those goals. I currently live with a roommate and wish to move into my own place in a better building. I also want to make more money so that I no longer have to use public assistance for food and medical needs. And, lastly, I would like a relationship again, a much better one this time. But, all in all, I have good friends around me, I get to travel, and I'm doing what I love, which is writing, so how could I not be happy?" Lee reflected the theme by mentioning, "I love my job. I love my neighbors. I don't have to worry about trying to impress someone or be something that I'm not. It's easier to breathe when you don't have to think so much about what people might be thinking.

Implications

Recommendations for Future Research

The experiences of working-class women within the institution of higher education were an important element of learning about the purpose and effectiveness of the system in terms of creating social equity, promoting social mobility and teaching for social justice. While these women expressed happiness with their life choices and trajectory, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the benefit of educational attainment for working-class individuals and women.

Training and Career Preparation.

Future studies should examine the impact of specific job training on working-class populations. It is possible higher education prepares individuals for careers and opportunities that are less likely to be available for them. It is possible working-class individuals require an additional level of preparation to be better able to seek and attain higher levels of professional engagement within the fields associated with their degrees.

Communication Bias.

Bias plays a significant role in the ability of an individual to attain success. Working-class communication occurs in the informal register. The ability to connect with others is based on mutual need and benefits (Kahn, 2014). The formal register that is part of middle-class and above culture is the type of communication present within professional situations. It is easier for individuals who have fluency in the appropriate form of communication to have favorable outcomes in professional situations (Leitner, 2012).

Cultural Limitations.

Social inequality occurs through the hidden narrative of individual achievement. Class is perpetuated within primary and secondary school systems through the use of technology and teaching structures that promote leadership from students who are middle and upper-class and compliance from working-class and working poor students (Benson, 2012). Students continue the socialization process by enrolling in college. Those who come from privileged backgrounds have the economic security to choose majors that fit with their interests and often have the ability to focus completely on their education. Lower income students are tasked with choosing a path that will bring them

the greatest economic reward and they more likely struggle with balancing their studies with paid labor (Kahn, 2014).

Middle-class people are able to benefit from the shared cultural capital that allows for professional and personal gains. Working-class individuals are excluded from most cultural capital building due to the physical, emotional and adaptive limitations that perpetuate class distinction (Bourdieu, 2000; Chekhov, 2009). The intersectionality of race, class and gender can further complicate the ability of working-class women to adjust to social advancement (Kahn, 2014).

Conclusion

It was beneficial to connect the findings from this study with the concept of the life course theory. The life course theory suggested individuals carried the experiences of their lives from one stage of life to the next. Incidents and experiences were not isolated to the stages of development they occurred. Therefore, individuals and their choices were changed by previous experiences. The social expectations and social change occurred during the time period they lived at all stages of their lives had the ability to influence their lives at later stages of lives. The participants involved in this study shared their voices and their lived experiences. It was evident throughout engaging with their stories they did not simply stop identifying as working-class due to the added role of student or college graduate. The engagements and experiences that shaped their lives before, during and after they completed their degrees influenced their professional and personal choices after completion. Self-identity, comfort and opportunity were shaped by the manner these individuals first learned to navigate the world.

The themes present within the data gathered from the interviews of the five participants reflected the framework found within the review of literature. The educational experiences of the women were influenced by the type of institution they attended as well as their initial motivation for seeking higher education (David, 2015). The choices each woman made throughout their lives reflected to some degree the experiences and expectations held for them within their community (Cooper, 2013). Educational attainment did not erase the rules and expectations for femininity within the culture of the United States (Benson, 2012). The act of earning a degree, while beneficial in a variety of ways, did not fully prepare or equip working-class women for social mobility (Duncan, 2012).

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