

PHENOMENAL BODIES, PHENOMENAL GIRLS: HOW YOUNG ADOLESCENT GIRLS
EXPERIENCE BEING ENOUGH IN THEIR BODIES

by

HILARY ELIZABETH HUGHES

(Under the Direction of Mark D. Vagle)

ABSTRACT

Drawing on philosophers (Ahmed, 2006; Fanon, 1986; Heidegger, 1927, 1962, 1992; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and social science scholars (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008; Vagle, 2009, 2010, 2011; van Manen, 1990, 2000) for this phenomenological study, I asked what it was like for the seventh grade girls who participated with me in a year-long writing group to experience moments where they found themselves in *bodily-not-enoughness*: moments when someone or something was telling them they were not enough *of something* in their bodies. Using a multigenre magazine format for the dissertation, I describe how *I* learned—as an adult, a qualitative researcher, a middle grades teacher, and a teacher educator—from these seventh grade girls how to be-enough in my own body, by illustrating various moments when some of the girls seemed to *talk-back-TO* those societal messages telling them they were not pretty-enough, thin-enough, English-speaking-enough, white-enough, popular-enough, or smart-enough by *embodying some kind of resistance-to* those messages. I then suggest that if we as adults, qualitative researchers, middle grades educators, and teacher educators wish to try and understand better how female young adolescents of color experience living in their bodies, we should begin listening *differently* so that we can begin seeing/knowing/thinking the *bodies* of

young adolescents, and more specifically young adolescents of color, as something other than problems. Finally, I suggest that the Cartesian mind/body dualism that continues to permeate American education leaves little-to-no room for Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notions of *the body* being our anchorage in the world—that the surrounding world only becomes meaningful for us because of our bodies and bodily experiences; and if we continue living as if there is *no body* in education as seen through the profound absence of bodytalk in K-12 and teacher education, we will continue to close off spaces for children, young adolescents, and preservice teacher education students to (re)envision living in their bodies as anything other than not-enough.

INDEX WORDS: Phenomenology, Bodies, Bodies in education, Middle school, Young adolescent girls, Young adolescent girls of color, Feminist phenomenology, Qualitative methodologies, Multigenre writing, Mixed-theory projects, Cartesian mind/body dualism in education

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HILARY ELIZABETH HUGHES

B.A., Mercer University, 1995

M.Ed., Colorado State University, 2001

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HILARY ELIZABETH HUGHES

Major Professor: Mark D. Vagle

Committee: Hilary Conklin
Corey Johnson
Stephanie Jones

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

For my grandmothers, Eloise Hughes and Henrietta Elms

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*Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody,
Can make it out here alone.
--Maya Angelou*

I offer a most humble thank you to many people for helping me during this process so that I was not alone; know that these words *hardly* convey the boundless gratitude and admiration I have for you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO *RETHINKING GIRLS* MAGAZINE

Dear Readers

In the pages that follow, I invite you to become willing to suspend your disbelief(s) if only briefly (or, a few hundred pages at least). Not because what you will be reading is fiction, science fiction, or even fantasy; rather, it is a compellation of what could be, of what is possible. It is a story of *adolescents*, not *adolescence*; it is a story of bodies and of girls. Therefore, like all of the categories just named, it is a story that is messy.¹ The “messiness” of this story is not meant to be “chaotic,” like a stereotypical 14-year-old bedroom where old food grows new life and clothes are sometimes abandoned, never to be seen again; rather, it is paradoxical and uncertain: it is beautiful and disheartening; exasperating and humbling. This story is complex in ways I never imagined complexity to exist, because it is about bodies—girls’ bodies: girls experiencing their bodies as they move through the world just trying to figure shit out. Most importantly, it is a story of an incredible group of girls who embodied some kind of agency in resistance-TO the disciplined parameters our culture puts on their bodies every day. This is not a story that is complete, but one just beginning. Or even more, it is a story that never begins but always has been, “and I slip into it over and over again in different places, and it is as if I too have always been there” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 182).

It is a story of life, not *actual life*, because it is told as all less-than-actual-life-stories are told: selectively, partially, and contextually constructed, because the lives in this story are not over yet (Richardson, 1997). Hopefully, though, you read this story as more than a story of girls’

¹ See “Messy Texts” in “Lexicon”

bodies, because of the contours and meanings that could allegorically extend toward you, toward you seeing yourself and knowing yourself through others' stories, re-visioning your own life, arriving where you started and knowing that place for the first time (Richardson, 1997, p. 6).

As I have always believed that there is nothing conventional about young adolescent girls, I have also recently discovered that there is nothing conventional in the ways I like to write about them (see Hughes, 2010). Therefore, while you are becoming willing to suspend your disbelief(s), I invite you to also stretch that suspension so that it seeps into all areas of the text with which you are about to engage: suspension of conventional thought regarding young adolescents, young adolescent girls, and more specifically, young adolescent girls of color; traditions which persuade the labyrinth of qualitative research methods in existence, and the varying epistemologies from which we are “allowed” to draw according to the non-existent-but-existent qualitative continuum; and those traditions which influence the ways in which we are “allowed” to write the genre of “dissertation” within the academy.

There are multiple reasons for the formatting I chose to present this story to you—as a magazine—but the most significant reason is because I wanted the writing to mirror the ways in which I have come to understand (and completely admire) young adolescents over the past fifteen years: incongruent, multifaceted and complex, theoretical, pragmatic, thoughtful, shallow, playful, extreme, funny, profane, intelligent, naïve, uninformed, and well-informed. Another motivation for the magazine format was I wanted to work within and against the very same technique of power that regulates and maintains (Walkerdine, 1997) young adolescent girls' bodies in such limited ways (white, middle-class, heterosexual/asexual, and skinny). Teen and Tween magazines that leave the bodies who read those magazines extremely limited in how they are to perceive their bodies as anything other than not-enough. Popular Culture magazines were

also the most influential mediums for any kind of bodytalk that came into being when I was with the girls in my dissertation study each week; so my use of the magazine format is another way for me to acknowledge and honor the amazing girls who participated in my study.

Additionally, the magazine format provided more opportunity for me to utilize multigenre writing than a traditional dissertation format could allow, and I have found that multigenre writing takes me places traditional academic writing cannot. Do not get me wrong: I support those who engage solely in traditional academic writing, because I try to live in the world as “both/and” rather than “either/or.” But my passion lies with more unconventional writing, and more specifically multigenre writing, because multiple genres give me more access to create a story in the way stories are *lived*—fragmented, paradoxical, and with plenty of interruptions. While one of my primary goals is to illuminate the varied and fragmented subtle structures of the girls’ experiences of what I refer to as the phenomenon of bodily-not - enoughness, I also aim to use this text as a metaphor of the fantastic messiness of this whole process: trying to do research “with” and “on” young adolescents while acknowledging just how entangled I was both with the study and the phenomenon; trying to (re)conceptualize bodies and bodied-experiences in ways that are useful and applicable to middle grades, teacher education research, and qualitative inquiry; trying to think outside of traditional and dominant discourses surrounding the body and body image(s), young adolescenTS and young adolescenCE (Vagle, under review), and girls of color; and trying to find my way as a budding phenomenologist who likes to dabble in other people’s theory playgrounds in a world of positivistic and postmodern critique. All fantastically messy.

Impassioned Academic Texts

Where might someone's passion for writing find its place in the academy, you ask? Especially when the tradition of "writing up" academic writing like the dissertation is such "an enduring part of American doctoral training" (Duke & Beck, 1999); and seen as a "strongly disciplined activity" that we have to "gear ourselves up for" (Woods, 1999). According to scholars like Woods (1999), research writing is "nothing like writing 'delightful' junior school essays or turning out 'cathartic bits of biography, diary, or magazine articles'" (Badley, 2009, p. 211), so this magazine—with all of its cathartic bits—might not have a place in the spaces of traditional academia. Actually, I *know* it will not have a place in my current institution's library, as I sent them a few sample pages from the Publisher© version of the magazine with questions about what they considered acceptable formatting, and this was the response:

I'm sorry, but you are correct that you will not be able to submit the dissertation formatted in columns like the "sample page." We don't even allow people using published journal articles as chapters to use this format (it says this in our guidelines under 'journal articles'). You are also correct that the table of contents must use the traditional format as in our guide.

Romano (1995) posits that passion is often misread, "seen as raw, dangerous emotion with no intellect behind it, no critical stance" (p. 25). I imagine this, too, is how unorthodox dissertations or other unconventional academic pieces might sometimes be perceived—as raw, dangerous emotion with no intellect behind it, no critical space, and I would add for some critics, no 'scientific objectivity.' But as Fisher (1984), proposed (when I was eleven), reasoning does not need to be bound to prose, nor does it need to be expressed in clear-cut structures; reasoning can be discovered in all sorts of "symbolic action—nondiscursive as well as discursive" (as cited in Markham, 2005, p. 816). Although scholars have been arguing for alternative ways to write

and think about research for at least fifteen years,² the traditions of how we “write up” dissertations seem to be stuck on the bottom of our academic shoes, like those traditions of adolescence we can’t seem to shake-off either.

Arguing twenty years ago that poetic representation was a viable method for seeing beyond social scientific conventions and discursive practices, Richardson (1991) suggested how we write has consequences for our discipline, the public we serve, and for ourselves. Additionally, how we are expected to write in the academy affects what we can write about, and the form shapes the content. Richardson held that “prose is the form in which social researchers are expected to represent interview material. Prose, however, is simply a literary technique, a convention, and not the sole legitimate carrier of knowledge” (p. 877). I like to think about all academic writing in this same way, and for the purposes of these next few hundred pages, especially the dissertation: “writing up” research does not have to be eternally bound to traditional scientific/academic prose, because “prose” is a literary technique, a convention or structure of writing that has been repeated in so many journals, textbooks, handbooks, and dissertations over the years, “we now believe it is true and real. *We’ve forgotten we made it up*” [emphasis original] (St. Pierre, in press, p. 7).

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) suggest that the meaning in qualitative work comes from its entire text, unlike quantitative work that presents its meaning in tables and summaries; thus, Richardson suggests that it might be more beneficial to read the whole of a qualitative text rather than skimming or scanning it for the “findings” or the “discussion section” (which I do when I read any quantitative studies). But I have to admit that I often find it difficult to snuggle up by a fire with a nice glass of wine or a cup of hot chai and my favorite qualitative study on a

² see Badley, 2009, 2011; Bahar, 2007; Barone, 2001; Bridges-Rhoads, forthcoming; Cahnmann, 2003; Cahnmann-Taylor, Siegesmund, 2008; Duke & Beck, 1999; Hankins, 2003; Holbrook, 2010; Richardson, 1991, 1994, 1997; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005

Friday night to read in its entirety. I understand that qualitative work puts much more pressure on the researcher than in quantitative work, because the validity of the work comes from the researcher—the person—rather than the questionnaire or the survey (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), and there are some really smart people doing some extraordinary qualitative projects all around the world, but *damn* some of those things are so b.o.r.i.n.g to read!

Multigenre Writing as My Comfort Food Rather than Your Dis/comfort Text

Multigenre pushes convention,
 challenges, "This is the way writing is done," and
 "Hey, wait a minute, you can't do that in a piece of writing."
 Multigenre speaks, "How come I read imaginative literature
 but I have to write about it in an essay that is
 thesis driven, argumentative, and exactly five you-know-whats
 (each you-know-what, of course, of the 3.8 variety),
 an essay in which the writer overpowers readers,
 beats them into submission,
 and concludes with a summative
 you-know-what that restates the thesis?"
 Not that there's anything wrong with that.
 But writing that way
 is not what multigenre is about.

Multigenre removes the lid of Pandora's Rhetorical Box.
 Multigenre twirls you
 and spins you
 and you hope the steps the writer asks you to follow
 lead to fulfillment.

Multigenre knows that *feeling* is first.
 Multigenre grooves on pulse,
 has flushed cheeks,
 hair on the back of the neck that stands on end.
 Multigenre makes readers sit up in their chairs.
 Multigenre is not roast beef;
 it is cioppino.
 It is less like mashed potatoes,
 and more like red beans and rice.
 --Tom Romano³

³ enlearn.eastnoble.net/.../Penny%20Kittle%20Multi%20Genre.pdf

I began using multigenre research projects in my 7th and 8th grade language arts class in 2002 after I met Tom Romano at a conference. Actually, I did not “meet” him; I got to the room where he was presenting early to get a seat up front, he approached me and told me he needed a few readers to introduce his topic and asked if I would be willing, and before I could answer or introduce myself, he handed me a script and said, “Good, just read the highlighted lines.” Unfortunately, there was a word right there in the first line that I had never seen before; nor could I even speculate what it meant or how to pronounce it, so I approached Tom and said, “Excuse me, Tom, what is an ‘On-dat-a-jee’?” And every-so-kindly, he replied, “Oh, that’s pronounced *on-DĀT-chē*; *Michael Ondaatje*—he was the author of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*.” Awesome. I knew that. Great first impression. Romano had read Ondaatje’s (1996) work and discovered that he was telling the story of Billy the Kid through a “complex, multilayered, multivoiced blend of genres, each revealing information about his topic, each self-contained, making a point of its own, unconnected to the other genres by conventional transitional devices” (Romano, 2000, p. 4). Romano thus decided he could do what Ondaatje had done with Billy the Kid and not only intertwine his own research with narrative voice, but teach his undergraduate students to do the same (Hughes, 2009).

After I saw the presentation on multigenre research projects, I bought and read every book Romano had written⁴ about the subject (before the beginning of the next semester—compulsive? Yes.), and adjusted my curriculum accordingly. Multigenre research projects then became my passion—and my students’ passion—in language arts. This is one of those moments when language is so limiting in how we can represent meaning, because when I tell you that multigenre projects “changed” many of my students’ views about research, it will not do justice

⁴ *Writing with Passion* (1995); *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers* (2000); as well as Camille Allen’s (2001), *The Multigenre Research Paper: Voice, Passion, and Discovery in Grades 4-6*.

to the experience. I have written about multigenre research projects elsewhere, so I will not take up any more space here (see Hughes, 2009), but please know that eleven and twelve and thirteen and fourteen-year-olds who had once loathed writing became poets, and comedians, and journalists, and song writers; and students who had accommodations for writing on their IEP's (individual education plans), literally begged for more multigenre units, because the artwork or plays or music they composed (and performed, mind you) were so meaningful to them. It was almost surreal.

What I soon realized about my own writing was that I had been using multigenre writing my whole life; I just did not have a name for it (similar to my relationship with phenomenology). I wrote poetry and vignettes, creative nonfiction,⁵ and fiction; I wrote poetry in the midst of my prose because that moment or that feeling or that meaning called for it; I created dictionary definitions with my students, where we would write a word as it would be found in a dictionary (like the "Lexicon" in this magazine), but we would create imaginative and creative definitions about the word—e.g., I always modeled the example: "crazy" and then I would put "my sister-in-law on any random day." All of those genres have continuously allowed me to represent different aspects of the meaning I wanted to convey, because how I live-in-the-world and make meaning with/about/in life is not quite as, um, eloquent, shall we say, as others I know. Romano (1995) seems to know where I am coming from when he writes,

Sometimes I see the world through poetry: a bit of cadenced language suddenly saying
itself in my head, an indelible image ever sharp, a surprising metaphor with extensions

⁵ Creative nonfiction is a genre of writing that has been around since about the 1970's, and is circulated more in popular culture books/novels than it is in academic writing. Lee Gutkind, who is the editor of the *Creative Nonfiction Journal*, as well as several books about creative nonfiction, says creative nonfiction writers do not make things up; they make ideas and information that already exist more interesting, and often, more accessible. Additionally, in *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, Cheney (2001) writes that creative nonfiction tells a story using facts, but uses many of the techniques of fiction for its compelling qualities and emotional vibrancy.

following close behind. Sometimes I see the world through prose . . . sometimes I see the world through dramatic encounters. . . each genre offers me ways of seeing that others do not. I perceive the world through multiple genres. They shape my seeing. They define who I am.” (Romano, 1995, p. 109)

Multigenre Writing in Academia: Traitors, *Textors*, and Those of Us Who Just Want to Write

When I set out to find scholars who had already written about using multigenre writing, specifically, in the academy, there were not many who I came across who have engaged *multigenre writing* how I understand and use it outside of arts-based-research.⁶ There are a few who have referenced it when trying to bust up traditional academic writing, but those folks seem to have a different agenda than I do: they seem to want to make it about making you, the reader, *uncomfortable* when you are snuggling up to a fire and a glass of wine or a cup of hot chai to read your traditional qualitative research articles or dissertations. Holbrook (2010), for instance, recently suggested we should become ‘ability traitors’ (co-opting the race traitor figurative) and question the privilege we give writing in the academy that “ranks and categorizes individuals with troubling effects.” Committing three betrayals: “multigenre writing that undermines the authoritative text; assemblage as a method of analysis that deprivileges the written word; and a gesture toward a dis/comfort text intended to take up Lather’s example of challenging the ‘usual ways of making sense’” (p. 171)—all in order to ‘subvert writing from within,’ and also make you feel *uncomfortable* as a reader because she is using unconventional styles and you are used to reading more traditional academic writing.

Holbrook (2010) suggests that multigenre writing “can be used to evince validity. But it can also disrupt the notion of a unified integrity of written language by dispersing meaning

⁶ Refer to footnote #1 for those trying to argue for alternative forms of presenting and thinking about research.

through a variety of related texts” (2010, p. 178). Multiple genres used to express some common meaning can “startle the authorial ‘view from nowhere’ (Nagel) that persists in leaving untroubled the notion of an objective writing form relaying a ‘value-free inquiry’ (p. 178). In response to Holbrook’s three betrayals to subvert writing from within, Badley (2011) spends a committed amount of time providing ‘firmer grounds for Holbrook’s impeachment,’ because he agrees with Holbrook’s argument against writing as an abuse of power. “She is right. . . when she urges her readers to become cotraitors, ‘to give up the soothing familiarity of a progressively flowing text’ in an attempt ‘to upset assumptions about what academic writing is’” (Badley, 2011, p. 94). Long story, longer, Badley suggests Holbrook is simply doing what we all should be doing in the academy, checking ourselves before we wreck ourselves—acknowledging our privilege as academics and even more, academic writers; acknowledge that writing is a privileged way to communicate information in the world—that none of us are ‘original authors,’ and then move on. He gives a few theoretical reasons for his denial of Holbrook’s self-impeachment, drawing on Derrida, Levi-Strauss, and Montaigne—who “invented the *essai* as a literary form” (Badley, 2011, p. 94), and he reminds Holbrook and the rest of us that everything we do is all “academic scribbling” anyway; that “*all* writing is a matter of *weaving* and *reweaving*, *shaping* and *reshaping*” [emphasis original] (p. 94).

Another scholar who (kind of) writes about multigenre texts, but as *fragmented texts*—Markham (2005)—does not really want to make you feel uncomfortable as much as help us as readers and writers realize how we so often take-for-granted our patterns of sense-making (A.K.A. traditional academic writing) by using these fragmented texts instead of traditional texts. Markham suggests fragmented texts that are juxtaposed help authors see “through disjuncture—their own habits of interpretation, to reveal, or at least question, taken-for-granted patterns of

sense-making” (pp. 815-816). Fragmented texts also reveal the fissures of reading, so that you, the reader, are once again, not assured any kind of comfort as you read them; the reader does not experience the “single line of argument, the form of which is transparent in its smooth familiarity. Multiplicity is made more possible” (p. 816). And you are made to feel more uncomfortable. . .

So here is my thing, people: I did not just spend the past twelve months of my life conceptualizing/reconceptualizing/re-re-conceptualizing this magazine format with all of its multiple genres and all of the writing I had to do for this alternative format (knowing I would not be using *any* of my comprehensive exams or my prospectus as a “cut-and-paste-chapters-one-two-three,” because all of that writing, while helpful to get me where I needed to get *then*, was not as helpful in getting me to what you are reading *now*); only to find as I continued writing my way through each genre that I needed another genre, or another article because my original ‘table of contents’ I laid out as an ‘outline’ looked NOTHING like what you see before you; so I could then beg my friend Natalie in Fort Collins, Colorado to do some artwork for the magazine; to then have a (minor) breakdown because I had booked a flight to Colorado so I could work on the magazine layout with Natalie back in January 2010, but had to cancel the flight, because I was nowhere near the place I needed to be in the writing to consider thinking about the layout of my (essentially) second dissertation in Publisher©; to then have a (major) breakdown because I had to first tell my advisor that I would not be able to make the deadline I had set for myself twelve months prior to defend my dissertation because I was (eternally) behind in the writing, and then tell the rest of my committee I was behind and ask them to reschedule my dissertation defense; to then up my physical therapy appointments to once a week so I could “really” hunker-down (as if I had been watching TV during the months prior?) and write (even more?) hours during the

day—all-the-while—trying to keep my brand new marriage intact, because I had become the girl who cried because she couldn't find the thing that holds her iPod so she could go on a walk with her husband; to then complete/edit/print/format two dissertations, simultaneously—to MAKE YOU *uncomfortable*. I mean, really? That's why some people don't want to write traditional academic texts? Not this girl.

What no one seems to touch on as much in those highly theoretical texts where they are drawing on Roland Barthes or Jacques Derrida or Patti Lather or whomever their philosopher or theorist is that is helping them theorize why you the reader should be more “uncomfortable” when you are reading alternative formats, is that it's pretty freaking challenging to write/create this way: challenging, demanding, exhausting, and even UN/comfortable for me, *the writer*. And you want to talk about validity? Try explaining to a room full of academics who don't know you or your writing that you are writing a dissertation about some middle school girls and their bodies and it's going to be in a magazine format. Do you think I looked back at those perplexed and blank faces staring at me in silence and said, “What? I wanted to use a magazine format to make you feel uncomfortable when you read it, because I don't like to write in traditional dissertation formats.” Absolutely not; because for me, it is not about you! It *never* begins with you, the reader—it begins with *me*, the writer. Solipsistic? If that is how you want to ‘read’ it. However, I would rather you read it like Tierney (1998) suggested: that we should

Refrain from the temptation of either placing our work in relation to traditions or offering a defensive response. I increase my capacity neither for understanding nor originality by a defensive posture. To seek new epistemological and methodological avenues demands that we chart new paths rather than constantly

return to well-worn roads and point out that they will not take us where we want to go. (as cited in Clough, 1999, p. 442)

It is not just “writing” that I call upon in my life to make meaning; multigenre writing is how I write to find my way; it is how I write to learn more about myself, about you, and about life. It is always personal and it is always narrative, even when I am quoting Barthes or Derrida or Lather or Heidegger. It of course eventually becomes about you, because I always have to consider “my audience,” so I choose audiences who might be more comfortable (open to) reading my “dis/comfort” texts. If I wrote for an audience member over the years who squirmed in her/his seat a bit when I asked if I could submit/turn in a piece in an alternative format, then I made sure to have what she/he needed to feel comfortable as a reader, and what I needed to feel comfortable as a writer—remember, “both/and” rather than “either/or” girl. I don’t write like this to turn the academy on itself—I write like this, because that is just what comes out. I imagine my problem—unlike those who are trying to make you feel “uncomfortable” when you read—is that I think I have to work even harder to constantly prove that I can write like this and still convey some kind of intellectual/trustworthy/valid/ethical/comprehensible/lasting/meaning. If I need to acknowledge that I am a privileged writer, then I have no problem doing so. I understand that I *intuitively* write in ways some people cannot even think about writing, but still appreciate when others can.

Embodied writing (Banks, 2003) *is* my way to think and theorize and learn and consider and reconsider and calm my spirit—it just happens to come out onto the page in multiple genres. I wonder sometimes why those who are spending time acknowledging their privilege as writers and the privilege writing has in academia so they can then argue for alternative formats or “dis/comfort texts” to present their research, are not spending as much time acknowledging that

even being able to think—much less create—in this way is an incredible privilege and privileges traditional academic writing in ways that almost seem. . . elitist? Unconventional thinking and creating is incredibly difficult because tradition is what we know, it is how we are schooled, it is how we are disciplined. And to be able to create something that brings people to tears, or laugh out loud, or evokes ‘goose pimples’ or ‘chill bumps’ (or whatever you call those moments when your body *viscerally reacts* to another’s or your own piece of writing or art because you are so moved)—to be able to experience embodied writing in this way—that is a an extreme privilege for both the reader/interpreter and the writer/creator.

Rethinking Girls

Because I want you to feel as comfortable as you can while reading the next few hundred pages, I want to point to various genres that are in this magazine and my purpose for choosing them. I took the liberty to “ghost write” a few sections called “The Scoop,” for instance, which introduce different aspects of the study and the different ways I was writing through my analysis. To write “The Scoop” sections, I borrowed from the voices of some of the girls in the study by compiling direct excerpts from a specific girl in the writing group transcripts; in this way, the monologues that appear by ‘Alice,’ ‘Buttercup,’ ‘Blossom,’ and ‘Luna’ came from actual statements made by that specific girl who I “ghost wrote” so that I could give you different points of view. I refer to these genres as the “creative nonfiction” genres, because I used facts, but I also used many of the techniques of fiction for its compelling qualities and emotional vibrancy (Cheney, 2001). Writing ‘as’ Alice, for example, in the introduction that follows shortly, I collected excerpts from eight different meeting transcripts of Alice’s talk and weaved them into a creative non-fiction monologue that allows her to explain how I started the writing group, to introduce the girls to you, and to give you brief insight on how I perceived Alice’s

being-in-the-world. By doing this, my hope was to also bring you into the text so you have the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the girls as I perceived them and as I believe they perceived me.

Because I was not just observing the girls during this process, but was so entangled as a facilitator and member of the writing group, as well as entangled in the phenomenon of bodily-not-enoughness, I wanted to write as the multiple versions of my *selves* that were present during the year I spent with the girls. I included my theoretical selves (feminist, critical, phenomenological, pseudo-poststructural), my researcher self, my writer self, my teacher self, my bodied and embodied self, and my not-enough self, as they were all moving in and out of those weekly meetings when the girls and I talked, wrote, and theorized bodies and life together. For example, I included my feminist self into the text by creating an “interview” between Linda Fisher, Linda Martin Alcoff, and me. I did not actually interview “the Linda’s,” as I now refer to them, but I wanted to include large chunks of text from each of their book chapters in *Feminist Phenomenology* (Fisher, 2010) and write about that text differently, so an “interview” allowed me to do that. Some of the things I say to each of them in the interview are actually phrases of text one of them wrote that I connected to and wanted to convey in the magazine, so I used those ‘citations’ from their chapters as my interview questions.

Additionally, because I wanted to approach “analysis” differently (than conventional—Husserlian—phenomenology might ‘allow’), I chose to write as a ‘beginning’ phenomenological researcher who wrote to the magazine asking questions in “Racialized Bodies,” and I responded to that article in “Response to ‘Racialized Bodies’: A Phenomenologist Talks Back” as a “more seasoned” phenomenological researcher who read different philosophers, so I could help ‘my other self’ think about my phenomenon differently. Other genres I used to think/write about the

phenomenon differently were ‘found poems,’ and ‘multi-voiced found poems’ where I took large chunks of data from transcripts and pulled out words and phrases that illuminated the incredible ways I perceived the girls working within and against bodily-not-enoughness; and then I wrote as a researcher in response to those poems. Genres like “Out on the Street,” where I pretended to be a phenomenological intern asking random girls on the street about their bodies allowed me to include an amazing meeting I had with the girls where we had a conversation about bodies. It is basically a ‘found poem’ illustrating their bravery and positive acknowledgement of their bodies, as well as my lack of bravery when talking about my own body with them. The (limited) information in ‘Book reviews’ or ‘Next Issue Previews’ were large parts of my writing as a method of inquiry that took me to amazing places of analysis, but I did not have time to flush out those sections in the dissertation, so in order to at least give them a nod (with the help of others who helped me brainstorm magazine genres), I called upon genres that would not expect extended explanations. As for the ads inserted randomly throughout the magazine, they are all bits of literature and statistics that should be in the text but did not warrant their own article.

Just like the phenomenon of bodily-not enoughness was always shifting and was never fixed, this text with its multiple genres is also meant to be a fragmented process of shift and change: of thinking, questioning, wondering, writing, re-writing, and most importantly, talking-back. Not because I want to make you uncomfortable, mind you; because this kind of format allows for this kind of meaning and writing. I chose genres that allowed me to spend time sketching phenomenological philosophy onto those bodied-experiences in order to construct animating and evocative descriptions, and I spent an equal amount of time questioning what it was that this philosophy was doing for me, for the girls in the study, for bodies in our culture, for education; as well as what my metaphysical scope was on what phenomenology was claiming to

‘know’ and could do for me in my analyses. As theoretical friends ⁷ in psychoanalysis reminded me, I had to think about specific bodies, with their own individual histories and inscriptions, rather than thinking about the body in some abstract way “that always remains at the macro level or exists only in textual representation” (Alcoff, 2010, p. 47). Therefore, I purposefully squeezed everything I could from phenomenology and all it allowed for when interpretively describing ⁸ the open-ended, plural, fragmented, and shifting structures of bodily-not-enoughness as it was experienced by the girls in the study (Alcoff, 2010); and when my limits were reached phenomenologically, I could use the genres to turn to other theoretical friends in the critical, queer, feminist, and poststructural camps to help me elucidate even more rings of potentialities of bodily-not-enoughness.

The questions at the end of this comfort or dis/comfort text—however you read it—are multifaceted: they will ask you to ask yourself if the story I invented, what I “made up from and out of my data” (Sandelowski, 1994, p. 61) appealed to your heart; if you could place yourself within any of the text, within any of the experiences and nod to those experiences in some way or another. If I have described this lived experience in ways that you could see yourself in that experience, or just outside of it at least; if you could nod your head and think, *Yes, I have had that, or I could have that* (van Manen, 1990), I have done my job. And then I will write to you, this story is not a lie; and it is not the truth. And it will not matter to me whether or not you

⁷ I borrow the term “theoretical friends” from Hilary Conklin. I believe its inferred meaning summarizes nicely the idea that when doing qualitative work, sometimes the theories/philosophies we take up, admire, and employ reach certain epistemological or ontological limits that hinder us from exploring phenomena further, in more complex ways. Therefore, I follow others who have engaged in mixed-theory practices (Ahmed, 2006; Alcoff, 2010; Koro-Ljungberg, 2010; Levesque-Lopman, 2010; Vagle, 2010).

⁸ Dahlberg (2006) believes that we should bridle as much theory and interpretation as we can so we can stay true to the ‘things themselves,’ and while I respect this point of view, I fall more in line with Gadamer (1998) and Heidegger’s (1960) belief that we come to every experience/text with our past, present, and future influencing all thought; so even when I am “describing” moments where resistance seemed to manifest, these descriptions, to me, will always be laden with my own interpretations, no matter how much and how ‘hard’ I bridle.

believe it to be true; it just matters that you had a moment, *one moment*, where you nodded your head in agreement.

Welcome from the Editor: Why Phenomenology and Bodies?

The multifarious/post-dualistic/feminist/biological/natural/non-neutral/culturally-inscribed/socially-constructed/phenomenology of the body.

Why phenomenology and the body, you ask? Great question! *Rethinking Girls* decided it was time we started some *serious* conversations around the body because body-conversations are loooooong overdue! Have you noticed that wherever you go, bodies are *EVERYWHERE*? Splashed all over television and movie screens, on *every* page of *any* magazine, billboard after billboard after billboard, *all over* the Internet—BODIES, BODIES, BODIES! But do you hear anyone *talking* about bodies *anywhere* you go? Not really? Us either. We decided we'd get some bodytalk going and see what happens. Why phenomenology? Another good question! Our managing editor is quite the enthusiast of that rather unconventional philosophy called phenomenology; and she decided that the current frameworks and epistemologies around bodies and “body image(s)” are old and tired—that we need new meanings, other ways to think about your body, my body, young adolescent bodies, young adolescent bodies of color, *all* bodies⁹—so she suggested we do a series of special issues on the body, kicking off this first one with *a phenomenology of the body*. Skeptical of bodytalk? Push yourself to read-on sisters and brothers! Skeptical of phenomenology? Push that doubt to the side and read-on, valued and loyal supporters! It's going to be quite the pedagogical journey, *phenomenologically-speaking*, so get comfy, grab some snacks and your favorite beverage, and suspend that natural attitude for a momentary phenomenological one, as our managing editor, Hilary Hughes-Decatur, kicks off

⁹ Orner, 2002

the issue by answering a few of the questions you Tweeted us for this special issue: these first two coming from Panama City, Florida!

Why choose a philosophy with such a long name that you have to write over and over?

--Brady Hughes, Panama City, Florida

Phenomenology *is* a long and maddening name—and trying to type it continuously, over the span of a few hundred pages is not what I would like to do with my ‘free’ time (if there ever was such a thing). However, I have found that the philosophy attached to the name is worth the short pauses I have to take—*every single time*—I type it, sounding it out in my head (*phen-om-en-ol-ogy*) to see what letter(s) I have left out or scrambled-up in order to make that damned red line disappear. And even though some have asked, what’s in a name (“that which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet”),¹⁰ suggesting that names are just meaning-less words, I would argue otherwise; names carry truckloads of meaning with them, and phenomenology is a good example of this.¹¹ Grumet (1988) illustrates this beautifully when she describes a phenomenological *wince* (not to be confused with the phenomenological ‘nod’):

You may have noticed that people wince when a colleague announces an interest in phenomenology. Sometimes they wince because they do not know what the word means and, confusing it with phrenology, they fear a laying on of hands. Sometimes they wince at the effort of not losing one of its many middle syllables along the way of utterance.

But when our colleagues know what the word is they never wince. For a wince is an involuntary expression of pain, a crinkle of vulnerability around the eyes, a fleeting

¹⁰ Shakespeare’s Juliet asks this when trying to negotiate her unabashed love for Romeo, a boy who is not of her same station, and therefore not intended for her to love by her snobby, bigoted family.

¹¹ If you would like an example of how truckloads of meaning is attached to names/words *outside* of philosophy, just ask someone with a Muslim or Muslim-sounding last name how delightful her experience is NOT these days when traveling by air or across country borders. For more on this, see Ahmed (2006).

impulse to fold up your face like an accordion. Those in the know rarely wince.

Forewarned and defended, they act as if they have nothing to fear and open their eyes and raise their eyebrows as if phenomenology were merely an amusing, if oddly irrelevant, distraction. (p. 61)

I too, have experienced the wince in these ways from different people, both in the academy and the 'real world' when I say the word 'phenomenology'; it can come from the person trying to figure out the root of the word so he/she can quickly understand what the hell I just said, or it can come from the complete void of meaning that is attached to that alien, 'academic jargon' I just threw out. I even thought it to be quite a strange philosophy when I first learned about it, and I did not think twice about ever engaging with it until my (now) major professor (then) asked me to join him in a phenomenological study he was conducting about cultivating tact in teacher education.ⁱ The wince I most often receive, consequently, is the one Grumet suggests she rarely receives when people 'in the know' hear the word *phenomenology*. The phenomenological wince I perceive on others' bodies with whom I sometimes interact in the academy, at least, when I say I use phenomenology does not come from them being 'terrified' because "what phenomenologists do is not only an assault on the methodology of the social sciences; phenomenology displaces the very world that social science addresses" (p. 61); I would say it comes from a different place, or even perhaps a different 'kind' of fear: that of misunderstandings? Either way, it's still a difficult damned word to constantly type!

You seem too critical [theory] for phenomenology. Why phenomenology?

--Dawson Hughes, Panama City, Florida

I am drawn to phenomenology because it allows us to at least try and understand a little better how complex we are as human beings living-in-the-world. Did you know there is a

contest every year where a panel of scientists chooses the ‘most human human’ from a group of humans and computers in which they engage in ‘live chat’? It is called the *Loebner Prize*. Brian Christian (2011) just wrote about it in his new book, *The Most Human Human: What Talking with Computers Teaches Us About What It Means To Be Alive*; and during a recent interview with John Stewart, Christian said the reason humans are ‘winning’ the ‘who is *more human*’ tests is because humans are emotional. One of the past-winners of the contest explained that in order to win he simply acted irrational and moody during the ‘live chats,’ something computers cannot (yet) be programmed to do: be emotional. Christian told John Stewart that what he found most interesting was the fact that computers—such as the IBM computer, “Watson,” used to compete against “Jeopardy” contestants like Ken Jennings and Brad Rutter¹²--are moving from what are considered to be areas of *expertise* (like “Jeopardy” or grand-master-chess) back towards the things that are considered to be the fundamentals of daily life (irritability, walking, talking, smiling, crying). People are often so impressed with how intellectual contestants on shows like “Jeopardy” are—like Ken Jennings and Brad Rutter—but we do not pay attention to simple things, like their ability to walk to the stage and have a conversation with Alex Trebek. It was the seemingly everyday things we take for granted, like walking down a sidewalk and sidestepping a puddle, or recognizing a friend and asking her or him how it is going, that Christian pointed out are “more computationally complex than playing grand-master-chess or factoring huge numbers.”¹³ *Enter phenomenology*.

Every day, taken for granted ways-of-being-in-the-world = phenomenology. A philosophy which “aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our

¹² Both are the longest running winners on Jeopardy; and both were beat by “Watson,” the IBM computer, in January 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/science/17jeopardy-watson.html>

¹³ <http://www.thedailyshow.com/full-episodes/tue-march-8-2011-brian-christian>

everyday experiences” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9)—those puddles we side step, those moments when we recognize someone walking down the street. Phenomenology asks, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Some of the original philosophers from phenomenology (e.g., Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty) posited that the epistemological and/or ontological¹⁴ goal of lifeworld research is to try and better understand the lived world so that we can in turn, better understand human beings and human experiences. And yes, because *understanding* is one of the main tenets of phenomenology, the question of meaning and how we make meaning in our intentional relationships with the world then becomes crucial (Ahmed, 2006; Caputo, 1988; Cerbone, 2006; Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008; van Manen, 1990). Those who practice phenomenology believe that we can never disentangle who we are from each other and the world; it opposes the Cartesian mind/body duality, and it suggests that through our consciousness—the wakeful cogito—we grasp hold of *intentional objects* (mental and/or physical) in order to make meaning (Ahmed, 2006; Caputo, 1988; Cerbone, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2008; Heidegger, 1962/2002; Husserl, 1970/2002, 1981/2002; Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002; van Manen, 1990).

The intentional object for Husserl—most often misunderstood and/or misrepresented as something that can be described in a “pure” fashion, is instead, always something interpreted. Caputo (1988) explains further.

Despite his own rhetoric, Husserl clearly rejected the idea of a ‘pure given’ and always understood intentionality as interpretation. The whole point of his many detailed investigations into intentional life was precisely to show that experience takes place only

¹⁴ Epistemological if you are reading Husserl and Merleau-Ponty and ontological if you are reading Heidegger.

under a subtle structuring and rendering on the part of consciousness which weaves the world into a unity of meaning. To perceive for him is to know how to take a thing, to know how to render it. (p. 41)

Husserl's notions of *intentionality*ⁱⁱ were contentious in the early 20th century because of the Cartesian mind/body duality which seemed to have a direct grip on 'scientific research;' and both intentionality and phenomenology continue to spark current debate in philosophical and academic discourse today because of the assumption that these ideas rely upon an essential subject, a concept seen as impossible by the poststructural turn. Though, essentialism is not the only idea under fire from phenomenology's critics; the historicity of masculinity that seems to be imprinted on much of phenomenology's thought is also a major point of contention with many feminist and poststructural-feminist scholars. Mostly though, these critics—while also finding use in his notions of the *subjective-body*—take aim with Merleau-Ponty, specifically, and his ideas about the anonymous and masculinized body;¹⁵ a *subjective-body*, mind you, which is the point of departure for this *Special Issue of Rethinking Girls: Phenomenology and the Body*.

Merleau-Ponty's Subject-Body in Phenomenology

Merleau-Ponty added to Husserl's existing phenomenological premise by positing that we are not to the world just as consciousness, we are to the world *as body*. "The body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002, p. 235). It is only through the body that we have access to the world, said Merleau-Ponty; and it is through the "body and bodily experiences that the surrounding world becomes meaningful for us" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 41). It is through my body that my thoughts and feelings 'make contact' with objects so there is a world for me at all: even something as subtle as when my

¹⁵ For critiques, see Alcoff, 2010; Butler, 1989; Fisher, 2010; Sullivan, 1997

hand, for instance, moves around the object it is touching (my trusted water bottle), anticipating the stimuli and itself tracing out the form that I am going to perceive (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2000). I do not make contact with the world just by thinking about it, according to Merleau-Ponty; I experience the world with my senses, “acting on it, in ways ranging from the most sophisticated technology to the most primitive unreflective movements, and having feelings about it, which again range in their complexity and subtlety” (Matthews, 2006, p. 89).

These ideas of the body from Merleau-Ponty disrupted (even more) the early 20th century Cartesian mind/body dualism, which regarded human beings as *body-objects*, because Merleau-Ponty proposed an “existent who lives ‘in between’ these extremes, and for whom nature and culture are primordially intertwined” (Moran, 2002, p. 423). An object, as Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002) described it, is something that exists *partes extra parte*—as something that can be divided into several parts and only has external and mechanical relationships between each of these parts—or relationships between itself and other objects. Scientific biology regarded human beings and other organic bodies through this objectivist framework, according to Merleau-Ponty—only considering bodies as “complex physic-chemical systems, whose behavior can ultimately be reduced to the physical movements of matter in space, or the chemical transformations of substances” (Matthews, 2006, p. 48). Within this limited notion, human beings and other organic bodies would all be governed by the same laws, and science could then only see human beings and other organic bodies from a detached point of view, from the “outside” (Bigwood, 1991; Matthews, 2006). Science then distances the body, permitting only the phenomena that can be “mathematized and objectified, and thereby ignores the body as it is *lived* by each of us” (Bigwood, 1991, p. 61).

Merleau-Ponty's (1962/2002) phenomenological *subjective-body* countered this problematic, scientific account of the body-object because he posited that our bodies do not just passively receive sense-data; they instead have a unique sensitivity to their environs. Bigwood elaborates on this idea.

[The body] genuinely experiences rather than merely records phenomena as empiricists claim, and it does this through an *openness* that is fundamental to its sentience. The body is actively in touch with its surroundings. It is directed outside itself, inextricably entangled in existence. [original italics] (1991, pp. 61-62)

Regarding the body in this way, as a body inextricably entangled in existence, Merleau-Ponty rejected the detached views science placed on the body-object and instead pushed philosophers, scientists, and psychologists alike, to think about our biological needs which create demands on our being-in-the-world as human beings, the needs we *feel* from 'the inside,' not just those dispassionately observed from 'the outside' (Bigwood, 1991; Matthews, 2006).

***Note to Self.** Hunger is something I feel right now, as I sit at my computer typing these words; it is not something I simply observe from the outside as a passerby. The soft grumbling deep in my belly which is probably contributing to the minor ache that has formed in the front of my head and the slight head-rush I get when I stand to buy some food is all a part of this hunger. A hunger which is giving certain meaning to the objects I observe around me, like the lemon bar that I have spotted, held captive in its plastic case across the room, beckoning me to eat it—a lemon bar that will satisfy my hunger in ways that the rock I just noticed outside in the parking lot beside my car will not.*

Our bodies are things from which we live inside, rather than merely observe from the outside. In addition to the hunger I feel inside, how I physically move my body and its parts are my own movements; and I move these body parts to achieve something—I move them for some purpose of my own (most times, anyway). These movements have meaning for me and (most

times) when I move some or all of my body parts for a reason, I (usually) know what that reason is, without having to “accumulate empirical evidence” as a detached observer (Matthews, 2006). When I need to take a break from this wretched computer, for example, I might go on a walk so I can stretch out my hips and back and neck; and if you ask me *why* I went on a walk once I return to my wretched computer, my answer will not come from the laws of physics or chemistry (though the laws of physics and chemistry would probably be helpful in explaining the ways in which my brain instructs the muscles in my legs to move so I can actually “walk.” And those same laws might be able to explain why my hips and back and neck act as if they reside in the body of my 90-year-old grandmother rather than this 37-year-old body in which I currently reside and obviously abuse by spending so much time on this wretched computer). My answer to your question of why I went on a walk, without any help from physics or chemistry, would be because I felt the *desire* to take a break from this intellectual hell. Of course, as Matthews (2006) reminds me, “I can only satisfy that need in this way because I have a brain and nervous system and functioning legs, but it does not follow that those facts about me explain why I am doing what I am doing” (p. 49).

I wrote about my body above as both object *and* subject, and also as *neither* subject *nor* object; it ambiguously exists as both, as what Merleau-Ponty referred to as a subject-body (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Because the experiences, desires, and bodily movements also referred to above are lived out through my subject-body (only of course, in those moments which they occur), I agree with Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002) that “I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except so far as I am a body which rises towards the world” (p. 428). In other words, my human subjectivity expresses itself through the body. Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002) regards subjectivity as bound up with that of the body and of the

world because “my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world” (as cited in Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 40). I could not have any kind of subjective response to the world unless I had a body through which to respond; and still, my body is not some mere Cartesian dualist ‘object’ or traditional materialist ‘object,’ “but something I ‘live,’ something I inhabit, as the vehicle of my subjective experience” (Matthews, 2006, p. 51).

This concept of the subjective-body is rather complex to consider at first, because it purports that one (body/psyche) cannot be in existence without the other (body/psyche), that our psycheⁱⁱⁱ and bodies move fluidly with one another, play off of one another. Merleau-Ponty wrote,

[Human] taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but a movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts. Psychological motives and bodily occasions may overlap because there is not a single impulse in a living body which is entirely fortuitous in relation to psychic intentions, not a single mental act which has not found at least its germ or its general outline in psychological tendencies. (as cited in Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 42)

This image of a movement to and fro of existence, that movement *between* and *sometimes overlapping* the corporeal and the psychic, is helpful when trying to comprehend Merleau-Ponty’s (1962/2002) resolve that our subjectivity is the way it is because we are a certain kind of embodied, biological beings. We could not have the thoughts and desires and wishes and hopes and dreams and feelings we have without our brains and nervous systems, which function in

ways explained to us by the biological sciences; but these biological systems are not what we draw on when asked to describe our experiences of those thoughts and desires and wishes and hopes and dreams and feelings (Matthews, 2006).

If you asked me my present state of mind while dissertating, for example, I would probably *not* describe the scientific processes of my brain sending messages to my fingers in order to move them around (hurriedly) to the correct keys on the keyboard while it (my brain) is simultaneously accessing the language files it needs in order for me to write the specific words that will (hopefully) convey the thoughts and information I am putting on this page. No, friends, I would instead, describe to you (in length if I could) the feelings of uneasiness and uncertainty I am experiencing during this dissertating process, along with the simultaneous feelings of delight, intellectual-stimulation, inspiration, and desire; and I would explain the reasons for feeling all of these emotions (and how each emotion is directed through my intentional relationships *with* each emotion). All of this because, according to Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002), we cannot step outside our bodies; instead, we experience our bodies both from the inside and the outside, simultaneously (Bigwood, 1991; Dahlberg et al., 2008; Matthews, 2006).

In this issue, you will read others who draw on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenal, subjective-body in order to continue theorizing the body in multiple ways. Various authors also draw on Ahmed (2006), who brought queer studies and phenomenology in a closer dialogue with one another to suggest that bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within what she refers to as the *bodily horizon*. Ahmed wrote that phenomenology offers a resource for queer studies "insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds" (p. 2). In "Response to

Racialized Bodies: A phenomenologist talks back,” for example, Hughes-Decatur enlists Ahmed’s orientation of bodies, along with Fanon’s (1986) racialized phenomenology, to discuss how the young adolescent bodies of color discussed in HEH’s “Unexpected Moments of (Dis)orientation: Learning How to Talk-Back in Order to Be Enough” and “Racialized Bodies” took shape and (re)oriented themselves on bodylines that were already ‘in front’ of them—the bodylines that are both created by being followed and followed by being created by white bodies that are more ‘at-home’ than bodies of color; and to argue that the background of racialized bodies continues to remain ‘hidden’ from public view while it constantly works on bodies of color.

There are several articles in this issue that we hope will start conversations around the body; articles that might help us think about new frameworks and epistemologies around bodies and body “image(s)”; articles that remind us that there are BODIES inhabiting educational spaces—teacher-bodies and student-bodies with desires, thoughts, and feelings—and just as those educational spaces *shape* the bodies that inhabit them, so too do those spaces *take the shape* of the bodies inhabiting them. There are articles that point to what we at *Rethinking Girls* believe needs to be a focal point in education: that young adolescents’ being-in-the-world is meaningful; and if we learn to listen *differently*, we will come to know these bodies differently. We want our readers—educators and researchers alike—to think about the notion that children’s *sensual understandings* are extremely important in the structuring of their being-in-the-world; and if we begin thinking about bodies as mediators of experience, then we might begin to see and live knowledge differently, as *embodied*. Perhaps we can begin to imagine those bodies in our classrooms—those physical and sensual beings that feel pain, joy, tiredness, frustration, love, possibility, and disappointment—those bodies that are so often ignored, marginalized, or

acknowledged as disconnected objects to be controlled, as *meaningful bodies in-the-world*.¹⁶

Finally, we hope these articles will ignite innovative thought and discourse around the phenomenal bodies we so often take for granted in our K-12 classrooms.

Lexicon

BRIDLE

Bri-dle [brahyd-l] (v)

1. to hold back; curb your enthusiasm; check yourself before you wreck yourself
2. to scrutinize your involvement with the investigated phenomenon and its meaning(s)
3. to try and not understand too quickly, too carelessly, or too slovenly
4. to reflect upon the whole event when meaning comes to be^{iv}
5. to try and not make definite what is indefinite
6. to take a critical, reflective stance so that it that helps 'slacken' the firm intentional threads which tie us to the world^v
7. taking on the phenomenological attitude (reflexivity) rather than the natural attitude (little or no questioning)^{vi}
8. to try and create some distance from the phenomenon as to perceive it in multiple and different ways;
9. purposefully slowing down and interrogating what we take something to mean^{vii}

INJURIOUS LANGUAGE (in Bodytalk Discourse)

In-ju-ri-ous (adj) [in-joo-r-ee-uh s] Lan-guage (n) [lang-gwij]

1. system or set of signs and/or symbols used by a number of people that are harmful, hurtful, detrimental, insulting, abusive^{viii}
2. the elaborate institutional structures of racism, sexism, classism, and any other –isms, which are reduced to the scene of an utterance from one person; and invested with the power to establish and maintain the subordination of the group/person addressed^{ix}
3. the pejorative language that is endowed with historical, social, and cultural power which continues to support the ongoing production of racism, sexism, classism, and any other –isms that have been historically created within broader institutional structures^x

¹⁶ Shapiro, 1999

INENTIONALITY

In-ten-tion-al-it-y (n) [in-ten-shuh-nal-it-ee]

1. the ‘aboutness’ of things—our consciousness is always a consciousness *of* or *about* something;
2. the consciousness directing itself toward some intentional object in order to apprehend it in perception

MESSY TEXTS

Mess-y [mess-ee] (adj) Texts [teksts] (n)

1. a disordered condition within a text;
2. psychological uncertainty within a text ^{xi}
3. sensitive to how reality is socially constructed and understands writing is a way of ‘framing reality’ ^{xii}
4. announces its politics and incessantly interrogates the realities it invokes while folding the tellers’ stories into the multivoiced history that is written
5. many sited, intertextual, open-ended, and resistant to theoretical holism;
6. make readers work while resisting the temptation to think in terms of simplistic dichotomies
7. writer is part of the writing project rather than trying to remain hidden in the text, like an unobtrusive camera; ^{xiii}
8. attempts to break from realist writing forms as they are neither completely coherent nor completely linearly structured around one plot
9. an amalgam of separate—sometimes contradictory—fragments of memories, feelings, events, and ideas ^{xiv}

METAPHOR

Met-a-phor [met-uh-fawr] (n)

1. literary device that figuratively specifies that X (a target) is Y (a source), thus providing a map of one concept to another
2. foundation for human thought processes
3. guide our views of the world and our inquiry into its characteristics ^{xv}

OPENNESS

O-pun-ness [oh-puh n nes] (n)

1. not sticking blindly to our fore-meanings if we want to try and understand meaning of another;
2. situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings and ourselves in relation to it in order to try and understand it;
3. to foreground a prejudice so we can then suspend its validity for us; ^{xvi}
4. to ‘release’ or ‘throw away’ our knowledge because it is solid and blocks our understanding ^{xvii}

PHENOMENON

Phe-nom-e-non [fi-nom-uh-non, -nuhn] (n)
(philosophical denotations)

1. that which appears
2. the object(s) to be understood in a deliberately broad sense as including all forms of appearing, showing, manifesting, bearing witness;
3. the things themselves, as they show themselves to be; what is self-given and not something that is a representation of an outer world
4. what is given immediately in intuition (*Anschauung*)^{xviii}
5. consciousness that intuits something and values it to be actual^{xix}

Editor's Note:

We wanted to write generously about each of the words included in this "Lexicon," but we have instead chosen to give you just one extensive phenomenological contextualization written by our editor, Hilary Hughes-Decatur, because (dis)orientation is a significant theme running through this issue of Rethinking Girls: phenomenology and the body.

Figure 1. Lexicon.

(Dis)Orientated

Dis-or-i-en-ta-ted [dis-awr-ee-uh n-teyt-ud] (v)

I can't find my way out of a box. That's what I tell most people when they begin giving me directions, yet they still pause in wonderment as they see my face glaze over when they're still trying to give me 'quick' directions; or I hear the ever-so-slight change in tone of voice when I tell them to slow down if we're on the phone and ask them to explain it in "left and right" terms rather than "east and west." The big joke (one of them, anyway) with my hometown friends is that I lived in the same place for seventeen years and couldn't find my way around when I lived there, and 'how funny' it is still that I can't find my way around when I go home to visit. It's hilarious, really, to hear incessantly how "she's getting a PhD and she can't even find the Wal-Mart© that she went to her whole life."

If you're not a directions-abled person, then you, too might know that feeling of angst-in-disorientation when you're lost, when you have to keep turning around and trying different ways you think could possibly be the right way; and then you eventually end up in another town or at least another part of town—it is truly disorienting. Kind of like those 'really fun' games we used to have our middle school students play on field-day when you twirl around in circles about ten times with your head on the tip of a bat and then race the person next to you who has just done the same thing to a finish-line? That about sums it up. Living in the Colorado Rockies, though, that was a different story. Every time I went anywhere, I always knew that the mountains were west (I lived there eleven years, so I finally figured it out about year four, if we're keeping this honest). If someone said, "Just go west two blocks and then turn south," (which I cannot stand—you directions-abled people are so pretentious with all of your geographical jargon), then I would just head toward the Colorado Rockies for two blocks, stop, physically turn my body so the mountains were then on my left—placing myself on the map literally so it spelled "W-E," and then I'd know I was to turn. . . left. (I just had to stop typing and physically do that even for this example, if that gives you any insight into my disability.)

When I am oriented in some kind of space, however, I hardly think twice about it: when my body is familiar with its surroundings, I might not even think "to think" about how I am oriented in that familiar setting or space. Getting up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, driving to school, going on my daily 'theory walks,' driving to my parents' house for the weekend—these are all familiar spaces of orientation for my body now, and when my body inhabits these spaces I do not have to think about where I am, or maybe even where I am going next, because it is implicit knowledge: my body feels "at home" (Ahmed, 2006). But like I said before, if you have been lost, truly lost, then you too might have experienced that almost

frightening or at least extremely frustrating disorientation, because in that moment, you are acutely aware that orientation is something you do not have (Ahmed, 2006).

Heidegger (1973) wrote about being blindfolded and walking into a dark room; and the difference between being blindfolded in a dark room, which is already familiar to me, and walking into a dark room blindfolded that I do not know. In the familiar space, he wrote, “I necessarily orient myself both in and from my being already alongside a world which is ‘familiar’” (as cited in Ahmed, 2006, p. 7). In that room I already know, my body has already *extended itself out* prior to the blindfolded moment, so I can reach out and feel for the bedside table or the corner of the dining room table and figure out which way I am facing (not exactly which way I am facing, mind you; like I wouldn’t be able to feel the dining room table and think, *Oh, I must be facing south*—because I wouldn’t know that in broad daylight, with no blindfold). In this way, “orientation involves aligning body and space: we only know which way to turn *once we know which way we are facing*” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 7). [emphasis original]

If I enter an unfamiliar room blindfolded, however, those contours are not part of my existing memory map, so if I reach out, what I feel won’t necessarily allow me to know which way I am facing—leaving me filled with uncertainty about which way to turn (Ahmed, 2006; Heidegger, 1962). Even when I am uncertain about which way to go in an unfamiliar building or which way to turn if I am driving in my car, “getting lost” still takes me *somewhere*; and being lost “is a way of inhabiting space by registering what is not familiar” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 7). Being lost (for those of us who are lost often enough) actually can become a familiar feeling, because familiarity, according to Ahmed, is shaped by the “feel’ of space or by how spaces ‘impress’ upon bodies” (2006, p. 7). Familiarity, then, is not already “in” the world as something that is already given; it is an effect of inhabitation: “we are not simply in the familiar,

but rather the familiar is shaped by actions that reach out toward objects that are already within reach” (2006, pp. 7-8). Ahmed explains this notion of familiarity further:

Even when things are in reach, we still have to reach for those things for them to be reached. The work of inhabiting space involves a dynamic negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar, such that it is still possible for the world to create new impressions, depending on which way we turn, which affects what is within reach. (2006, pp. 7-8)

When thinking about how bodies in our culture are inhabiting certain spaces which are both familiar and unfamiliar, how those bodies are orientated toward some things more than others would, according to Ahmed (2006), depend on which way they turn, which would then affect what was within their reach. Orientations are about how we begin from one point: “here,” in order for any kind of other point: “there,” to appear. According to Merleau-Ponty, “spatial forms or distance are not so much relations between different points in objective space as they are relations between these points and a central perspective—our body” (as cited in Ahmed, 2006, p. 8). Merleau-Ponty argued that it is the body that provides us with a perspective in and of the world; so if the body provides the “here,” the point where I begin, leaving the world to more or less be “over there,” the “here” of the body, according to Ahmed, would then refer to “where” the body dwells. *Confused yet? Me too. Keep reading.*

In the “here” of bodily dwelling, the body is affected and shaped by its surroundings and becomes orientated in its responsiveness to the world around it, so bodies are “shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 9). And as bodies are *being* shaped by their dwellings and taking shape *by* dwelling, the spaces in which they are dwelling are also acquiring some kind of “direction” through how those bodies are inhabiting or dwelling in the

spaces. It is truly interesting to think about: how space itself is impressed upon by bodies, just as bodies are impressed upon by space. It is a matter, according to Ahmed (2006) and Lefebvre (1991) of how things make their impression of being on this side or that side of a line, as being left or right, near or far, which makes space *orientated*. Lefebvre (1991) actually suggests in *The Production of Space* that space is always orientated, so inhabiting spaces ‘decides’ what appears and what comes into view (Ahmed, 2006). The point of such decisions, according to Ahmed, “may be precisely that we have lost sight of them: that we take what is given as simply a matter of what happens to be ‘in front’ of us” (p. 14). We at *Rethinking Girls* see this as another one of those taken for granted moments that phenomenology allows us to open up: the idea that bodies take what is given as simply a matter of what happens to be in front of them—we take things as given because *that is just the way it is or has been*.

**Either Phenomenology OR Feminism, What’s It Gonna Be? Our Answer: How about
“Both/And” rather than “Either/Or”?**

Editor’s Note

When we sent out the call for this special issue on Phenomenology and the Body, we received manifold letters from feminist scholars wondering why this special issue was not on Feminism and the Body. We would like to reassure our readers that there will be a special issue on Feminism and the Body in the near future, and we want to thank you for all of your questions and concerns about phenomenology as it relates (or doesn’t) to feminism.

Thus, we decided that “Controversies in Research” would be the perfect venue in this special addition for an exploration of feminism and phenomenology, so we had our managing editor, Hilary Hughes-Decatur, interview feminist scholars, Linda Fisher and Linda Alcoff so they might elucidate their views about phenomenology and feminism, due to their recent chapters published in Fisher and Embree’s (2010) Feminist Phenomenology.

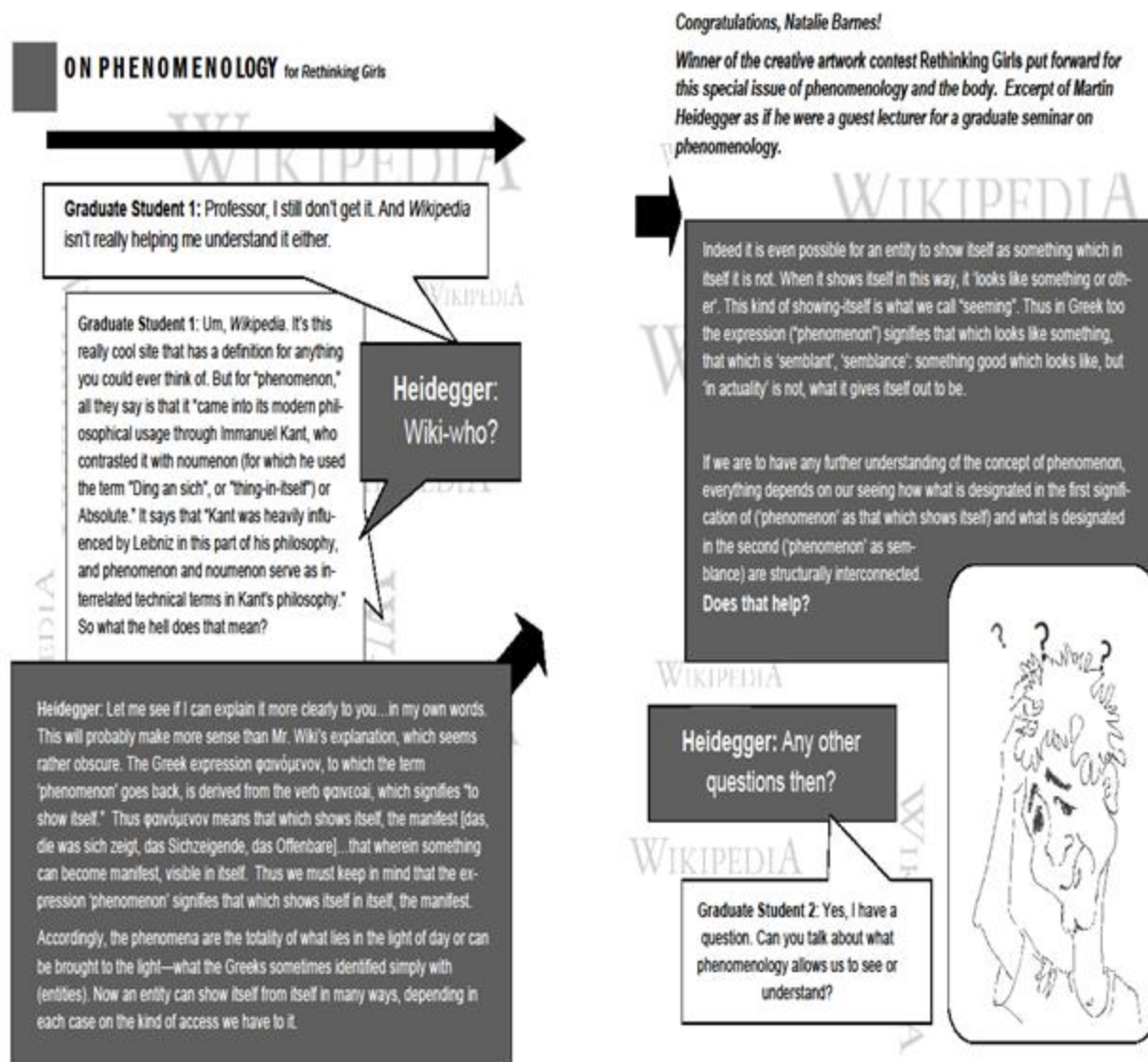


Figure 2. Phenomenology and the body.

Hilary: Let me begin by thanking both of you for taking the time to talk with me today. I have read your work and am a *huge* fan of you both. Linda Fisher—if it is all right, I'll refer to you by first *and* last name since both of your first names are Linda—

Linda Fisher: Sure.

Linda Martin Alcoff: Of course.

Hilary: So Linda Fisher, I'd like to begin with you and answer *your question* before we move to *my questions*. You asked about my interest in phenomenology and how I came to it, as well as how I see feminism and phenomenology coming together in my work. I have been reading some of the philosophers in phenomenology since I first worked on a research project with my major professor, Mark Vagle, in 2008 as a research assistant. I, like both of you Lindas, admire the work Husserl first did in phenomenology, and I also read and connect with Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty like both of you. I believe the ways in which Merleau-Ponty theorized the body—along with the work scholars like both of you and others are doing to bring his theories of the body in dialogue with feminist and queer theories—is something that we could *really* use in educational discourse to disrupt the mind/body dualism that is still *so* present. I have also learned from another mentor of mine, Stephanie Jones, that teacher education is in need of critical feminist pedagogies around the body—so talking with both of you about phenomenology and feminist theories will serve multiple purposes for me today. How I think about phenomenology and feminism coming together in my dissertation study, at least, is actually reminiscent of something you mentioned in your chapter, Linda Fisher, that it is rare—right now, at least—for feminist scholars to ‘claim’ phenomenology first. I think you said it was more about the scholar saying she was a feminist first, and then describing the phenomenological work she was doing.

I guess for me, I came to the philosophy of phenomenology before I read feminist theory. So I probably would refer to myself—if pressed—as a ‘phenomenologist’ first; but I would also add that I am (or hope to become) a phenomenologist who sometimes *embodies* a lot of feminist thought. I say “sometimes” here, because my reading and understanding of the history and current thought of feminist theory is extremely limited. So while I may *feel, see, and experience*

injustices that are going on around me, I may not be able to name those injustices as power relations or oppressive behaviors because, as we say in phenomenology, I am living too much in the ‘natural attitude’ in those moments. Or I might not be able to recognize them until I talk to someone who reads feminist theory as much as I read phenomenology. So in my work, specifically, how that interplay between phenomenology and feminism came into being in different instances was interesting. There were moments when one of the girls would be re-telling an experience from earlier that day or week, for example, and my ‘feminist-self’ would suddenly come into being, and I would rant and rave about the injustices of the world—sometimes even cutting the girl’s story short—or I’d rant about gender, or social class, or race/ethnicity, or sexuality, or how young adolescents are treated so unfairly in American culture; and reflecting back on *those* moments, I saw that my feminist thought seemed to help me (sometimes) have conversations with the girls about oppression without me saying, “You or we are oppressed.” And other times I might just rant about the injustice and tell them it was not OK that they or whomever had been treated that way and this is why we had to change the way things are done in this country...and then I would snap back into reality when I saw their large eyes or confused looks, and I would snap back into “listener-Hilary.” And still, in other moments, a similar situation might occur where one of the girls would tell us something that had happened, and my ‘phenomenological-self’ would come into being; so I might be *thinking* something radical that I wanted to spew to the girls, but instead I would “bridle” that thought and ask her to talk more about the experience, to explain why she thought it had happened, or how she had experienced whatever she was telling me.

So I think phenomenology allowed for this moving in and out of my critical-feminist-self and my phenomenological-self; whereas if I was doing a ‘feminist study’ or a ‘critical theory

study,' those theories might have prompted me to bring something different as a researcher into being, something phenomenology would not be interested in. Because ultimately, like I told you over the phone, I wasn't interested in looking for moments of oppression or power or how those things played out in the girls' lives; I was interested in trying to *understand* how the girls were *experiencing through their bodies*, different moments when a person or a societal message told them they were not enough *of something* in their bodies. And when one of those moments occurred, phenomenology allowed me to think: *OK, how is the experience of bodily-not-enoughness coming into being for this girl in this moment*; whereas another theory might have wanted me to think: *how is power playing out here or how is this girl being oppressed in certain ways*. Do you know what I mean? Yes? Awesome!

Then I'd like to start with you, Linda Fisher: I agree with you that phenomenology is sometimes over-simplified when some scholars write about it, leaving the reader with nothing more than a basic description of a lived experience; or even worse in my view, using no more than a terminological borrowing from phenomenology when writing up a study, like someone referencing it as her methodology but when I read the study I don't *see* how she might have employed the phenomenology, at least, with which I am familiar. So can you talk a little about how you see phenomenology being taken up in various discourses?

Linda Fisher: Yes, but first, thank you for having us here today, Hilary. I know I am excited about the possibilities of phenomenology and feminism forming a stronger partnership, so I appreciate you trying to think about this partnership in your own work. And yes, I agree that various fields have entire theoretical strains or approaches termed "phenomenological," like the considerable amount of work that is being done in some medical research, for instance, involving gendered or feminist analyses and some phenomenological approaches. Many of these studies

are significantly simplified, in my view, with the term “phenomenology” frequently meaning little more than a subjective, non-positivist approach; or sometimes, like you said, meaning no more than a description of something, leaving just the terminology of phenomenology.

Again, there may be *instances* of some kind of interaction between feminism and phenomenology in some fields, but the actual formulation of phenomenology is rather simplified and undeveloped, so I would not count these as full instances of a relation between feminism and phenomenology.

Hilary: Yes, a few of us in my academic world talk often about how phenomenology is either given the short-end-of-the-theoretical-stick in some empirical research, due to the lack of philosophy that is taken up in many studies, or how so many people haven’t read the philosophical underpinnings, so they have to rely on simplified notions of phenomenology that perhaps come from texts like qualitative handbooks or something similar. I actually haven’t read many studies where feminism and phenomenology are talking with one another, aside what I have been reading in the *killer* book you just edited with Lester Embree—great book, much-needed. I have really just read the feminist critiques people write about phenomenology, which are all good points, I do have to say: the lack of acknowledgement about anything other than the masculine I agree with, but the essentialist notion is a bit under-examined, I think. Which leads me to my next question for you, Linda Fisher: why do *you* think there is so much skepticism, coming from feminist scholars about phenomenology?

Linda Fisher: Well, I believe a central reason for much of the skepticism about phenomenology, as well as the possibility of a workable relationship between feminism and phenomenology, are connected, in part, to a number of perceptions and beliefs about the *nature* of phenomenology and what it represents. I know many feminist theorists who believe that feminism and

phenomenology are, at the very core, fundamentally different projects and represent radically different world views; and because they have such distinct and differentiated objectives, the two are seen by some as incompatible. Would you agree?

Hilary: I guess I would agree. I think a lot of people assume that because phenomenology has (the misperceived meaning of) “essentialism” tethered to its historical premise, it cannot be *thought* with other theories that critique essentialism. I mean, that’s what you’re saying about feminism, right? Isn’t essentialism one of the well-known targets of feminist critique?

Linda Fisher: Yes, and that perception of essentialism is a great example of one major deterrent to any interaction (beyond a critical one) that feminism might take with phenomenology. Additionally, phenomenology is seen by some feminists as having a general absence of analyses of gender or sexual difference, as well as a lack of acknowledgement of women’s experiences and the specificity of those experiences. And such omissions on the part of phenomenology are taken by some feminists as evidence of an apparent lack of openness to feminist or gender considerations, if not evidence of male bias and masculinism.

Hilary: Yes, I have read a multitude of critiques on the lack of acknowledgement of women’s experiences and the male bias that is perceived to be so present in the work of most—if not all—philosophers of phenomenology. I have noticed in my own work that Merleau-Ponty is extremely male-oriented in his descriptions of “human” experiences—always writing “he” or “men” when referring to all human experiences; and he wrote prolifically about the ‘anonymous’ body, not paying special attention to the ‘freedom’ some bodies *don’t have* when accessing the world in their bodies. So I connect with those critiques, but I guess I just wonder then, why we as the scholars doing the work can’t particularize and do the work of acknowledging the things that the philosophers seemed to ignore or did not value. I would think it might be more of a

contextual thing, too; meaning, all those dead white guys were writing during a time when women weren't valued, or thought of, or acknowledged, and the world was even *more* male-centered than it is now (if that's possible); so if we take the historical context into consideration, I think we should just be able to apply what we need and theorize around it—take what you like and leave the rest, you know? And we can critique those aspects that we do not agree with as we're writing about our phenomenological studies, like others have done. Right?

Linda Fisher: Well, yes, I see where you are coming from. And I guess I would agree that in Merleau-Ponty's work problems do arise, because despite certain promising aspects of his work with embodiment and sexuality, feminists critics charge that his analysis still falls short in addressing specificities of sex and gendered experience—indeed, in not even acknowledging that embodiment might be so differentiated. Elizabeth Grosz (1994) summed it up nicely in *Volatile Bodies*—you said you had read that, right, Hilary? Good. Yes, so she wrote that there are several feminists who have found great support for their various projects in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, but like you said, they also are critical about his phenomenology when using it in their projects. So yes, I think it *is* a good idea to ask what it is that philosophy can give us, as well as its limitations when we're thinking about different projects.

I mean, consider the ground-breaking work by those like Jeffner Allen and Iris Young. Those initiatives explored the potentials for feminism and phenomenology in wonderful ways!¹⁷ Though, I think looking at initiatives such as those point to the fact that more feminists end up critiquing phenomenology rather than trying to use it in a beneficial way, so we could say that feminist theory has tended to overlook phenomenology due to that degree of feminist skepticism.

Hilary: Yes, but couldn't you say that phenomenology is not quite off the hook for overlooking feminism either? From my readings, at least, there *is* a serious lack of acknowledgement within

¹⁷ See for example, Allen, J. (1990); Young, I.M. (1990)

the philosophy of phenomenology of feminist approaches or analyses, or of gender issues at all. Aside from what I've read in your new book and a few other articles, I'd say that it has been more customary for the scholar to first identify herself *as* a feminist *doing* phenomenology; so then I guess it wouldn't be phenomenology engaging feminism, as much as it was feminism engaging phenomenology. Would you agree?

Linda Fisher: Well, I think it may be important here to distinguish between phenomenology and phenomenologists, because when speaking of whether a school of thought has manifested an interest in a particular development, in this case an active openness to feminist approaches, it is perhaps more accurate to say that some *phenomenologists* have overlooked feminism. When seeking to bring phenomenology and feminism into a closer relationship with one another, there may be some resistance at a conceptual or ideological level which would make such a relationship difficult; but what might be more often the case is a more mundane and empirical resistance on the part of individuals who have evidenced little interest in accepting—or even listening to—a feminist perspective. The manifestation of such resistances has resulted then in a picture of phenomenology as closed and fixed, so it is also possible that such assessments are unfair to phenomenology, because to a certain extent, what phenomenology *is*, would be the product of how it has been formulated and what phenomenologists have or have not take up. I would argue, then, that the real issue *is* whether phenomenology is able to engage such issues, and whether and how it is compatible with a feminist approach.

Hilary: That is a great point, Linda Fisher. Linda Martin Alcoff, what are your thoughts on the compatibility of phenomenology and feminism?

Linda Martin Alcoff: Thanks, Hilary. And thanks for talking with Linda and me today. Let me say first that I think the work you are doing is extremely important, especially since I have

written prolifically about Latino bodies in America and the overwhelming and under-examined oppression Latinos experience, so I really do appreciate your work with young bodies of color. Now to your question: personally, I take it as a given that phenomenology needs feminism. Like Linda said earlier, there has already been some incredible work by feminist theorists showing that the body of phenomenological work in the canon has been indelibly imprinted with a masculine orientation when developing the different categories of experience. I think this work that has been done by feminist theorists shows us that if the phenomenological tradition is to continue in any *useful* way—rather than becoming a mere artifact in the museum of philosophical history—it needs to *acknowledge* and *explore* the ways in which it has been affected by *masculine* and, I would also argue, *racialized* and *Eurocentric* assumptions.

Hilary: Yes, I cited your work on the racialized phenomenological body extensively in my dissertation, so I understand your perspectives about phenomenology needing to acknowledge more than an “anonymous” body. But I have also relied on you so much in my dissertation work because you seem to argue against the critiques of phenomenology that many feminist theorists make, too. For example, I understand your take on the whole thing is that while, like you said just a minute ago, phenomenology needs feminism, you also think feminist theory could benefit from how phenomenology treats lived experiences. Could you talk a little about that?

Linda Martin Alcoff: Sure. I’ll start with my poststructuralist-feminist friends who largely critique and negate the *cognitive* importance of experience based on their beliefs that experience and subjectivity are produced through the interplay of discourses. I guess this is where I have taken a different stance in my own work, because I agree with arguments made by other scholars—good, sound arguments, mind you—that the pendulum has swung too far toward the

elimination of experience's formative role in knowledge. This is where *I think* a properly reconstructed phenomenology could provide a helpful corrective to that pendulum.

And as you know from your own reading and learning from your poststructural friends, Hilary, that the rising influence of poststructuralism has worked to discredit phenomenology on the grounds that it takes subjectivity and subjective experience as cause and foundation when in reality they are merely epiphenomenon and effect. It's so interesting, isn't it, that phenomenology is presented as developing metaphysical accounts of experience outside of culture and history, when you must know from reading Heidegger that this is simply not the case, right?

Hilary: Yes. I agree with you, there, Linda Martin Alcoff. It seems as if phenomenology and poststructuralism are set up as such binary oppositions that they cannot even be *thought* in the same sentence because, again, of that *essentialist balloon* that keeps phenomenology tethered to a history widely misunderstood; and the whole 'there is a body which lives and experiences the world' and 'there is no body, only meaning inscribed on the body' debate that seems to keep people going in different texts.

Linda Martin Alcoff: You are correct. And even though in reality phenomenology and poststructuralism are not wholly opposed, too often they operate as if they are mutually exclusive, and that has helped spawn a growing divide between feminist work in the social sciences influenced by phenomenology and feminist work in the humanities influenced by poststructuralism.

Hilary: I think that is so interesting, the split that has occurred and the posturing that often accompanies it. So what is your approach to this divide, then? How do you reconcile the body and bodily experiences in your own feminist thinking and work?

Linda Martin Alcoff: Well, I would agree with Merleau-Ponty: I do not, nor can I, experience myself as the mere meeting point of causal agencies, or as a mere construct of structures. My lived experience includes such things as choices, intentions, and a range of inarticulate affects that exceeds discourse. You said you had read my chapter in *Feminist Phenomenology*, yes? So you'll remember me using rape as an example of how we can draw on both discourse and the phenomenology of lived experience to theorize something as *lived* as rape.

Hilary: Yes, that was a powerful example.—one that I will use a lot in my argument for a “both/and,” way-of-being/thinking, rather than “either/or” that many are currently living. I really liked how you proposed that in order to theorize rape adequately, we have to have recourse to the description of embodied experience, rather than merely the various possible and actual discursive representations of that experience.

Linda Martin Alcoff: That's exactly right, Hilary. And by saying that, I am, *of course*, not implying that a rape experience is unsusceptible to discursive constructions. I can experience rape as deserved or undeserved, as shameful for myself or for the perpetrator, and an inevitable feature of woman's lot or as an eradicable evil. But when I *supplement* the analysis of the discourses of rape with the phenomenologies of rape experiences from the perspectives of survivors of rape, I will be much less likely to suppose that rape itself might be the product of an interpretation, either a misdiagnosis of an event or an experience whose traumatizing effect might be the product of a particular politics. Do you see what I mean?

Hilary: I *totally* get it—in a way that I used to not be able to explain, so I thank you!

Linda Martin Alcoff: Well, if you need a specific example to refer to in your own work, just use the Foucault example from the chapter. I've written about that example several times, because I think it does a wonderful job illustrating my argument that we need to supplement discursive

accounts of the construction of sexual experience with the phenomenological accounts of the embodied effects on subjectivity of certain kinds of practices. I think that such phenomenological descriptions should be a critical part of any attempt to explain experience, and not merely as endpoints or data that require theoretical illumination, but as capable of shedding light on theory itself. This will be vital—and I think Linda would agree with me here—if we want to reconfigure the role of bodily experience in the development of knowledge.

Linda Fisher: Oh, I absolutely agree. The whole reason we put this book together is because I believe the incorporation of feminist insights and gendered analyses into phenomenology, and phenomenological approaches and ways into feminist thought can constitute a pivotal next step for both; a next step, I would argue, both are ready to take at this stage of their respective theoretical evolutions. You agree with your own work, do you not, Hilary, that the idea of intertwining feminist and phenomenological thought has such rich possibilities for a wide variety of fields and discussions?

Hilary: I do, I do. I think these two theories or philosophies or whatever you would like to call them being brought together offers the potential of a productive and rather *radical* analysis for future inquiry. And like you have said before, Linda Fisher: I think feminism can look to phenomenology when seeking an articulated framework for experiential accounts, as well as a mode of expression for the issues of sexual difference and specificity that lie at the core of feminism. I know that feminist experiential accounts are often dismissed by critics of feminism as anecdotal, subjectivistic, and unscholarly, too, so maybe a phenomenological frame-work could provide a means for negotiating such criticisms. *So much possibility!*

Thank you both for taking the time to talk with me, and I look forward to reading more of your work in the future!

The Scoop: Introductions---by ‘Alice’

At first I wanted my name to be Killerbunny, because in one of the books I’m currently writing, *Vampire Wars*, all of the vampire hunters will have superpowers, and Killerbunny will wage war on all of the vampires. But then Miss Hilary said the names we chose for ourselves would be the ones she always used when she referred to us in her book, so I changed my name to Elpis. Elpis means *hope* in Greek. I looked it up. I’m the kind of girl who has a lot of hope, even with two older sisters who think they’re better than me, and a younger brother who is the laziest person I’ve ever met but gets everything he wants. It’s frustrating, really, that boys don’t have to do anything and get what they want, and we girls, we do everything we are asked to do by our parents and teachers and society, and we don’t usually get what we want. Anyway, I finally decided on Alice. For my name, I mean, because I saw the new *Alice in Wonderland* movie last summer and Alice was incredibly brave. I think I’m brave because I stand for what I believe in and I do what I want. So that’s me, Alice. (For the purposes of this story, anyway.) When I’m rich and famous one day, you might know me by another name, but either way you will know me. Because I will be a famous writer. Or artist. Or fashion designer. Or maybe an actor. Probably all of the above.

That’s maybe why Miss Hilary chose me to tell this part of the story, because I’m a storyteller. All of the Purple Flowers (that’s our writing group’s name) say that I tell stories no matter what is going on around me. I’m not sure why I tell so many stories; I guess that’s just how my mind works. Like we’d be in writing class—that’s what we called it sometimes instead of writing *group*, like Miss Hilary did; even though Miss Hilary kept telling us over and over it wasn’t a “class” because we weren’t in school; but you try living every day of your life in school with grown-ups telling you what to do and then try *not* to think that way when you’re with a

group of kids and an adult. So anyway, we'd be talking about some unfair teacher at school, or some girl who beat up some other girl, or our periods (which I didn't think we should talk about because that's not public conversation), or the different kinds of cookies Miss Hilary bought that we really didn't like, and a story just popped into my head. Sometimes it had to do with what we were talking about, but most times it didn't *directly* relate. Miss Hilary and the others finally started saying, "Alice, does this story relate to what we're talking about?" and if it didn't, they wouldn't usually let me finish. But sometimes they did. I guess it depended on what we were talking about. What we usually ended up talking about was that we were brilliant and amazing girls who would make a difference in the world. That's what Miss Hilary said, anyway. I pretty much agree.

So part of my job right now is to introduce you to us, the Purple Flowers. We are a complex group. And yes, I use the word *complex* here in the way you think it should be used, but may not be thinking I'm smart enough or old enough to know how to use it. (I'm in all advanced classes if that helps.) The way we came to be a writing group is complex, who we are as a writing group is complex, and anything else you can think of that has to do with complexity, well, that's us.

Miss Hilary started the writing class in the fall of 2009. She came to our middle school at the beginning of the year and asked to talk to all of the girls in 7th and 8th grade in the cafeteria so she could tell us about the writing group she was starting just for girls. She said we'd learn about different kinds of writing, we'd meet some authors who had published books, and we'd read a whole bunch of amazing writing by women. She also said we'd talk about being girls and our bodies or something like that, but I wasn't really listening to that part because it didn't interest me as much as the writing part. She seemed pretty nervous when she was telling us about all the

body stuff too—it might have been because some of the girls were laughing (so immature), or because there were like *seventy-five* of us in that room and we had never met her before; either way, it was pretty funny watching her act all nervous, pacing around the room, not looking at anyone and kind of looking out the window, taking drinks out of her HUGE water bottle right in the middle of her shaky-voiced sentences. Twenty-five girls originally signed up, but only six of us showed up the first day with the letters Miss Hilary sent home for our parents to sign saying it was OK for us to do whatever Miss Hilary wrote in the letter. (Mine was written in Spanish so my mom could read it, but I can only ‘kind of’ read Spanish so I don’t know what it said. My speaking is a LOT better than my writing and reading Spanish—it’s just easier to talk, you know? Miss Hilary used to really bug me about learning Spanish better since that’s what my parents speak, but, I mean, who has time when I’m brushing up on my French and teaching myself German?)

Anyway, back to the first day: personally, I’m glad more girls didn’t come. Some of them probably just signed up because their friends did and that annoys me. You know how girls can be sometimes: like lemmings. The original six of us got to know each other pretty well during writing class. It’s kind of weird, because at school—pre-writing class—none of us really hung out together. We were mostly in the same classes—almost all of us scored high enough on that stupid standardized test we have to take to be in mostly advanced classes, and a few others were in the regular classes. Most of us rode the bus to school together, even lived in the same neighborhoods—some of us on the *very same streets*—but we didn’t really talk to each other until writing group that fall in 2009. Actually, I’m pretty surprised we talked at all at the first few meetings because it was so early in the morning! AND, we had to meet on Saturdays if you can believe it! Don’t you adults know that we kids like to sleep in on the weekends? I’m pretty

sure there is some study that says we're supposed to anyways. We all made our own writing notebooks and decorated them however we wanted to. I drew characters from my novels all over mine. I can draw the girl characters in my novels pretty well; it's just the boys I have trouble with. It's their faces, I think. I don't know how to draw boys' boxy faces—have you ever noticed that boys have boxy faces? I draw girls better because I can draw all different kinds of hair—long, short, curly, wavy, bangs, layers—and all kinds of bodies—curvy, stick, tall, short, they're all easy for me. I draw heart-shaped faces for all of the girls because that's what my mom says I have—a heart-shaped face.

We had fun during those first few writing classes; I probably wrote like 50 poems and worked on one of my novels, creating all of the girl characters that would destroy the boy vampires, of course. Miss Hilary made this Blog just for our writing group on Blogger.com, and I put a lot of my poems on there. The others put some of their poems on there too, and we all still comment on each other's stuff—well, we did until we got too busy in school. We never really had “assignments” during writing class like in school—thank goodness! Miss Hilary would just teach us different kinds of ways to write, and we read *a lot* of poems and other bits out of novels, and then we could write like that author or poet if we wanted to, or we could use some of the writing prompts Miss Hilary would bring, or we could write whatever we wanted. We read *a lot* of poems by famous women: Maya Angelou—I wanted to read “Phenomenal Woman”^{xxx} out loud and it was hard the first time because I hadn't read it before, so Miss Hilary had me read it again and I thought, *hey, this lady really knows what she's talking about*. And we read Nikki Giovanni: Buttercup looooved Nikki Giovanni—she checked out some books of her poetry at school after we read her poems and wrote a lot of “mimic” poems based on the ones she liked—they were great! (In case you don't know what “mimic” poems are, they are when

you borrow someone else's poem and write a poem based on the one you borrowed, so you use the same form and maybe some of the same starter words but then just add your own words/lines too, and then you give the person credit—just one of the thousand things we learned in the Purple Flowers). And we read Alice Walker, and Sandra Cisneros, and Judith Ortiz Cofer, and a lot of poems written by teenagers who had their writing published in different books, which is what I'm going to do with my novel—get it published.

Authors came and worked with us each week, and we learned a lot from them (and they probably learned a lot from us). They had all written books and were famous and gave us good advice on writing; and all of them asked us to read some of our writing, which I LOVE to do, so I read as much as they would let me. I was inspired when they came, because they were women and smart and good writers, like me. The first week when we met at our school in the library, this lady from Miss Hilary's school came to write with us, JoBeth Allen (I wrote the names down in my writers notebook because there's no way I'd remember them. I'm smart, but that was like a generation ago). Miss JoBeth read us the funniest poem about Wonder Woman being a feminist or something like that,¹⁸ and then the saddest poem about war and a dad who was holding his baby who had died—it was probably too much for all the girls except me. And then she talked to us about fairness and injustices in our communities and had us write about injustices in our neighborhoods; we interviewed each other and wrote down what each other said about the injustices and then we told everyone what our partners said—it was interesting to hear different girls' thoughts because we didn't really know each other, so I guess that kind of helped me get to know them better. She also taught us how to talk about what we liked in each other's writing—and then we'd give “snaps” for each other's writing, because Miss Hilary said that's what they used to do back in the 60s, or some ancient-time-period-ago like that.

¹⁸ Robinson, L.S. (2007). *Wonder Woman: Feminism and Superheroes*. New York: Routledge.

There were a lot of people crying that first day when we shared our writing. *Of course* Miss Hilary cried because that's kind of her thing; I'm pretty sure everyone but me at least got teary because of what some people wrote, because, like, it was *deep*. But that kind of stuff makes me kind of uncomfortable—people being sad or crying—so if there was awkward silence after somebody finished reading what she wrote and people were crying or whatever, I'd just raise my hand and tell the person what I really liked about her writing or ask if I could read another one of my poems.

The next Saturday another lady from Miss Hilary's school came to our meeting at school and she brought her daughter. Her daughter was pretty young and still wrote what we were writing about—she will probably be like me when she grows up, very smart and talented and a good writer. Stephanie Jones was this lady, and she had us look through some newspaper ads and talk about what was being said but not being said, you know what I mean? I pretty much nailed those every time because I'm used to pointing out what's not right—there's just so much of that in our world. She read to us from her book—which I loved because of the book I'm writing, so we were totally alike. Then we wrote about *silence* and that was kind of hard for some of the other girls, but not me. We wrote about silence in positive ways, negative ways, how it was in our lives, and how it was in school, society, and in other's lives. I jumped right in and wrote about how we girls are always silenced in school by our teachers and how I am silenced at home all of the time, and it is all just really annoying!

Another lady-writer who also teaches at Miss Hilary's school came another week (hmm, writing this, I'm just now starting to see a pattern where Miss Hilary got all these famous lady-writers from), Judith Ortiz Cofer, and she met us at Borders. (We decided the week before that meeting at our school was lame so we asked Miss Hilary if we could go somewhere else,

somewhere writers go, and she told us to pick, so we picked Borders© for that week. Then we changed it every other week so we could check out other writer-ee places—Isn't that a great idea we had?) Miss Hilary bought all of us one of Mrs. Cofer's books, *Call Me Maria* (2006), and Mrs. Cofer signed copies for all of us—I had her write a special note in mine, it was awesome. Mrs. Cofer actually worked with us the whole time at Borders©—that may not seem like a long time to you, but all the other times the writer-ladies just came for an hour or so, and this lady was there for like 2 ½ hours and we weren't expecting her to stay the whole time, so it's like we got a whole writing seminar for free!

We asked her questions about being a writer and her books, and then she read to us from some of her books and poems; and then she had us read some of our writing, and she gave each one of us great suggestions to make our writing “show” and not just “tell.” (Like with one of my poems, for example: she told me that she could *totally see* the rich, chocolaty fudge topping I was describing dribbling down my chin.) Yes, we learned about the whole “showing and not telling” in school, but hearing it from a *real* writer who has *real* books published means more, so I listened to what she said. (BTW, I'm kind of just “telling” you right now instead of “showing,” so don't tell that lady.)

Oh, and speaking of “showing,” this one girl that Buttercup knew from church also joined us a few times and she read us a lot of her writing. She was a really good writer, so full of passion and rhythm and certainty—kind of like me. She told us that it's our job as writers to say what we think so we can change people's minds about stereotypes and other bad things, and that's what I'm basically doing, so I liked hearing that. She even wrote her own play that a whole bunch of people performed in at her high school. I'll probably do that one-day too. She wrote a lot about her body being beautiful no matter what size it was, and how smart she was and

how her intelligence would take her places, and how she didn't need a man in order to be happy because she had her intelligence. I actually feel the same way some days, because boys are kind of like cats—they just follow us around, always getting in our way, and they don't really *do* anything with purpose that helps us in any way. So we just hug them and pet them *like cats*.

Our writing group was supposed to be over in December 2009, but Miss Hilary asked us if we wanted to keep meeting after our winter break. All of us but one said yes, and to tell you the truth, we were all kind of glad that girl didn't come back because she was mean and most of us are scared of her. She fights everyone at school and yells at me in the halls all of the time, and I never even do *anything* to her. Miss Hilary said she's not really mean—that she had a “sensitive spirit” that we just didn't see at school—but none of us really believed that. We think that girl just put on some act when she was in writing class, because she *never* acted that nice to any of us at school. When Miss Hilary told us she wasn't coming back, Sunshine was like, “I don't need her bad vibes anyway.” Exactly my thoughts. I mean, I'm a nice person—everyone will tell you that—and some people are just mean. What did I ever do to her? Anyways, we asked Miss Hilary when she came to visit us at school after our winter break if three other girls could join, and she said it was up to us because we were already a “cohesive writing group,” whatever that meant. We interviewed the new girls and made sure they were serious about writing and felt comfortable talking about the body stuff Miss Hilary was into. It was pretty funny actually, because Buttercup was all up in their faces yelling, “Are you comfortable being a girl? Are you comfortable in your body? Are you serious about writing?” So we became eight. Actually, most of the time we were probably six, because two girls couldn't come a lot. So we say we were eight, but we were sometimes seven, and mostly six.

Let's see, I started with me, Killyerbunny/Elpis/**Alice**, the most brilliant and talented writer/artist/designer/actor ever born; so that leaves Buttercup, Sunshine, Paloma, Luna, Demi, Blossom, and Aqua. I know, I know: Miss Hilary tried to encourage everyone to choose names that might be more appealing to you, the reader, but like she said, it was ultimately *our* decision, not hers or yours. Anyway, the names we chose don't really represent who we are all of the time, because to tell you the truth it changes daily (and sometimes for Paloma, hourly, but don't tell her I said that). Take Paloma, for instance. She chose *Paloma* because it means *peace*. Well, actually, she said in Spanish it means dove and doves represent peace. And while she might try to live "peacefully," Paloma is a bit, um, opinionated. She will let you know, in a not-so-peaceful-manner I might add, if you have annoyed her, so maybe she chose Paloma so she could try to be peaceful one day. I mean, she's really nice.

As for Sunshine, she said that one of her favorite colors was yellow, and the sun and yellow remind her of happiness, so she chose Sunshine. She is, for the most part, a really happy person, so I think she chose wisely. She knows everything about any star or singer you can imagine, and I mean everything! (We think she is kind of obsessed because she reads about them on gossip web sites, but we like it because she keeps us up-to-date on all the gossip.) She did talk about feeling lonely and sad one time during writing class, and we were all like, shocked when she brought that up because we had *never* seen her sad at school; she must hide her sadness and loneliness really well when she wants to. I do that too--no sense in me parading my emotions all over the school, right? Well, unless someone REALLY upsets me like Blossom did at the end of the year last year. She wasn't being nice AT ALL and it really hurt my feelings. And *certain* people took *certain* sides, and I was the one who ended up apologizing when I didn't even do anything. But I guess that's over now, so whatever.

Luna chose her name, she said, because she loves the moon. There could have been more to it but we were all sitting around the table at this pizza place talking about what we wanted to be called, and when Miss Hilary asked Luna why she loved the moon, it must have been one of those days when we were tired of Miss Hilary asking us why we thought the things we thought because Luna said, “I don’t know, it’s like there but I don’t know yet. Just write down Luna.” If it had something to do with how the moon has so many phases, then the moon represents Luna well, because that girl can go through some phases, let me tell you. Some days she’d be all excited about school and soccer and music and boys or whatever, and then other days she was extra-annoyed with all the teachers, and her parents, and kids at school who tried to pretend they were Mexican when they’re Peruvian—and she’d be annoyed at all these people all in the same day.

Two of the other girls went for “Powerpuff Girl” names. You know the “Powerpuff Girls,” right? Miss Hilary didn’t, so we kept referencing different Powerpuff girls and she was all, “What are Powerpuff Girls?” and we were like, “Are you serious?” (BTW, it’s a cartoon with three kindergarten-aged girls who have superpowers—Blossom is the smart, self-proclaimed leader of the group, Bubbles is the cute and funny one, and Buttercup is the tough one who has a short temper). One of the girls chose Buttercup, because the character-Buttercup’s signature color is green, and that’s her favorite color too. The character-Buttercup on TV is the “tough” one with a short temper, and I’d say that our Buttercup is pretty tough and kind of has a short temper too—but she’s also really pretty, and smart, and funny, and popular, so she could have chosen any character she wanted.

It’s interesting, though, that Blossom—the one I mentioned earlier who wasn’t very nice to me—chose the name she did since the character on the show is the self-proclaimed leader of

the group. Our Blossom doesn't really seem like she wants to be the "leader" of the Purple Flowers, but like I said before, she did cause stuff between us sometimes—saying something about one of us, or the way that she would say something to one of us, or leaving someone out (like me). When she was mean to me and we got in that huge argument I was just telling you about (Blossom was making fun of my laugh during P.E.) and she wouldn't apologize, I was really upset and wrote about it on our Purple Flowers Blog. Everyone but Paloma and this other girl at school took Blossom's side because they said she was just kidding around or whatever and I shouldn't take everything so seriously, but I didn't think her mocking the way I laugh was very funny, so what's not to take seriously about that? Paloma and the other girl said I should have just told Blossom off, but I decided to be more civilized. So I wrote a lot of poems about ex-friendship and backstabbing on the Blog instead. I even posted this picture of a back with a knife in it and blood dripping down the back to illustrate my point, nice huh? Then Blossom started writing back on the Blog—poems about how "some friends were never even really friends" and other really mean stuff like that, and then Sunshine and Buttercup chimed in—kind of taking sides but also telling us to apologize and get over it, and it kind of became a huge *Blogument*. This didn't sit very well with Miss Hilary, because she said we were using a really cool space we created together to write hurtful things about each another, and we would probably feel bad about it later; and those words we wrote would remain there like a stamp of regret. (Or something very serious like that). Either way, we made up and I've moved on, like I told you before. You have to, right?

We have an interesting dynamic in our writing group, that's for sure. Most of us come from families with parents who work a lot; some of us have one parent at home raising us, others have two parents, and some of us are being raised by other family members. Some of us have

additional family members living with us—grandmothers, uncles, cousins—some of us live in houses, others in apartments; some of our parents have cars, some of them don't; some of us have siblings, and some of us have relatives or friends who are so close we call them siblings. Some of us are very faithful to our Christian and Muslim religions and a few of us aren't as religious. Some of us are African American, others Mexican American, Puerto Rican American, Peruvian American, and Lebanese American. We have long hair, short hair, curly hair, and straight hair. (I love my hair, personally—it's my best feature, anyone will tell you that.) We have light skin, dark skin, smooth skin, and pimply skin; grape-shaped toes, long, Cheeto-like toes, perfectly shaped eyebrows, and all different shades of brown in our eyes. And that's about all we decided you get for that well-painted picture.

Oh, and our name, how we became the Purple Flowers. It was my idea, of course. We were at Borders© one day for writing class and Paloma was talking about angry she was because one of our teachers said something horrible to her when she was speaking Spanish, because he was paranoid we were talking about him or something (As if he was important enough for us to *ever* say anything about him other than how boring he and his class were). Then we all started talking about how it's unfair that we can't speak our first language when we're trying to figure out homework or ask each other questions about school. Paloma, Luna, and I were saying how Spanish just comes out first when we think and talk most times, so it's really unfair for that teacher, or any other, to write us up when we don't even mean to do anything wrong in the first place. And then everyone started adding their little stories about times when they didn't feel like they were included in class because of how they talked, their skin color, how much money they had—or didn't—the kind of clothes they wore, all that stuff. We all had a good cry. (Well, *we* didn't cry but Miss Hilary got all *E-MO* and teary. Even if it's happy or sad, she just tears up

and says how wonderful we all are and how she can't wait for us to change the world—it's kind of uncomfortable.) Everyone was kind of sad but happy at the end of our talk and went off to write some more.

Miss Hilary and I were sitting there talking about what we should call our writing group after everyone went off to write and I said, "What about Purple Flowers, because purple stands for everything we are. We all have been metaphorically or physically bruised somehow during our lives and bruises have different shades of purple in them; but we all are growing and blossoming into something beautiful too, like flowers; and purple can also represent calmness and beauty." And there it was. Of course Miss Hilary got all *E-MO again*, and rushed off to get the others so we could ask them what they thought, and we've been the Purple Flowers ever since.

I hope you like the fact that we're kind of the 'editors-in-training' in this magazine, because we're excited to be in a magazine. We never really understood what Miss Hilary was doing all of this for—all she ever called it was a disser-something, and then when one of us asked what that was, she'd say, "Kind of like a book, but not the kind you're used to reading." She said it was for her "Ph.D.," but none of us knew what that was either and we didn't want to ask. Finally, just recently when we all got together to catch up, Miss Hilary said something about doing a lot of writing for her disser-whatever and how she hoped to have her "Ph.D." by the summer, and we all got quiet like we do when she brings that up because we have no clue what she is talking about, and Sunshine said, "I was talking to Blossom the other day and she didn't know what a Ph.D. was. So, what is it?" (Of course Blossom got all annoyed and started punching Sunshine telling her to shut-up.) And Miss Hilary explained it to us (a little too much like she does sometimes), so now we know this: she'll be a doctor but not the medical kind, and

she is going to try and do research to make our lives better in school. That's what she said, so we pretty much believe it. Anyway, I wrote a poem about us on the Blog and I was sure you'd want to read it, so I've added it here. Enjoy.

We are a bouquet of purple flowers
 each of us is a little different
 but we are connected--
 We are
 Purple Flowers
 full of grace
 Purple Flowers
 the color of a bruise
 Purple flowers that party all night
 Purple flowers with glossy green leaves
 Purple flowers with petals as smooth as silk
 Purple flowers close to the ground
 Purple flowers that were once blue and red
 We are purple flowers
 but together
 we are a bouquet.

The Purple Flowers Writing Group

Extra info...

Dissertation Study: One Year
 Fall 2009: pilot study-writing group
 Writing group—met 4 Saturdays for 3 hours
 Spring 2010: writing group
 Writing group—met once a week for 2 hours
 6 to 8 seventh grade girls (depending on who came each week)
 Purple Flower Members: Mexican-American, African-American, Peruvian-American, Puerto Rican-American, Lebanese-American
 Majority-minority middle school in a southern region of U.S.
 586 students
 87% eligible for free or reduced lunch
 90% African-American/Latino/Hispanic
 1 out of 4 middle schools in a county with 12,000 students

Figure 3. The purple flower writing group.

Out on the Street: What Do You Like about Your Body?

Editor's Note. *We sent one of our Rethinking Girls phenomenological interns out on the streets to gather a group of girls and talk to them about their bodies. Why? Because the silencing of bodytalk needs to change! Girls should spend more time talking about what they like about their bodies rather than what they want to fix!*

(Intern): Sometimes in our culture, women and girls don't feel comfortable complimenting ourselves/our bodies. What do you like about your body?

I compliment myself all the time.

Can it be kind of inappropriate?

Why can't we draw our body and then draw what we like about it on the body?

(What do you like about your body and why?)

My face: beautiful

My smile: it looks good

My eyes: I like the color

I love my smile; I meant to say my laugh: it brightens up a room—it's bubbly

I like my hands: they can reach out and grab things; I like how they look, they're beautiful

I like my fingers: they're long

My hair: it's curly and not a lot of people have curly hair

I wanna go! I like my hair: I like how thick it is and how glossy it is (except I ran out of conditioner, so, yeah, today, not so much)

I also like my eyes, I like the shape; I also like my hands because they're tiny; and I like my height because it seems normal—not too tall, not too small

(So that's your normal, right?)

My hair: I can wear it either way. I can have it curly or straight. It's long. I can do mostly anything with it. And I like my eyebrows because I don't have to take them out because they're just like, perfect. Not perfect, but just nice. My height: I know I'm short, but to me, I

am a fun size, like a little candy bar that comes in a fun size...and my weight, because I am not overweight and I am not under-weight. So this is my normal, my weight...the inappropriate would be my breasts. I am proud of them. If I could, I would stay like this forever. And I like my hand size—I think they're cute.

I'd say the breasts too because they're not like too big and they're not like too small. They're a good size.

I'm gonna add-on: I like my height. I like being tall. Most of the time I like it. I'm able to reach stuff my auntie can't reach and I can laugh at her and pick on her.

My smile and my skin color. My smile because I like to be happy and it's big. My skin because I like the color of it. I just love it. I also like my arms—they're long. I guess they're long, but I don't know if they're long or not.

I like my skin color too because it matches with like any color of clothes that I own.

I have another one: I like my face shape—it's heart-shaped and like everyone else in my family, they're either square shaped or rectangle or circular.

Oooh, I have one, I like the moles on my face. They make me look pretty. Very pretty.

I know what I like, I like my nose. It's a button-shaped nose. It's pretty.

Oh yeh, I like it too, wanna trade?

I like my hair: it's long

My freckles: they're pretty

I like my toes: I like how they're round. They look like mini-grapes.

I like my hips. My curves.

I like my curves too.

Yeh, I'm with you. I like my curves too.

Yeh, I like my curves.

I like my fat.

You're not fat.

I like my fat and my—everybody has fat on them—I didn't say I was fat.

People have baby fat too.

Wait, why don't you tell us about you? **(Yeh, sure, in a bit)**

I got one more, I got one more: I like my eye lashes

Well, I should like everything about me, because you should be happy with who you are. **(You should, but everybody isn't.)** Yeh.

What about curves?

They make you look more.....feminine

They make me look good.

What does more feminine look like?

Like a water bottle.

It makes the shape of a woman.

Because, like, this is what a woman should look like (does hourglass shape)

An hourglass shape

Exactly.

Or a Coke bottle

I don't think so. My stomach doesn't go in

(That's a curve)

Yeh, but y'all said hourglass; I ain't no hourglass.

Am I the only one that notices that boys are so square? Boys are so square.

How did it feel talking about your bodies?

I felt like we were under investigation

Yeh

I felt happy, funny, not embarrassed, excited. I kind of felt uncomfortable when I was questioned, 'why' because I think there shouldn't have to be a reason why I love my body and I should be able to just love my body for no apparent reason. Other than that I felt pretty comfortable about my body because I love my body and I don't mind talking about it.

Yeh because you're trying to make a list of stuff but you're not thinking about why, but there's so much to love about yourself.

I felt bubbly, glossy, happy, pretty, unique, special, different, proud, happy, jealous, jiggly, cool, OK.

I felt weird because this is an unusual chat between girls. Uncomfortable. Something I'm not used to talking about. Proud—to be happy with who I am. I should be happy with who I am first of all; and secondly, the only thing that really made me feel uncomfortable was talking about my breasts. But other than that, I am good.

OK, I'm taking over until you say everything you like about yourself.

Hmmmm, my teeth and my freckles. I think that's about it. My teeth and my freckles.

But you should be happy with your weight. You don't look fat or too skinny. And what about your hair?

Yeh, my hair is fine. OK, this was fun. I'm glad we did this.

Figure 4. Bodytalk.

CHAPTER 2

BODIES IN EDUCATION AND TEACHING

What do Bodies have to do with Education and Teaching?

“But what do *bodies* have to do with education and teaching?” he asks with curious uncertainty. I pause. *Good question.*

The curious uncertainty reverberates in my head as if the voice on the other end of the line decided a bullhorn would be most useful when asking a question that might spark an insightful conversation about the intersections of my research and my teaching. Countless years of reading and questioning and talking and theorizing bodies run through my own body like an electric current, and I want to open my mouth and listen to myself articulate the *worth* of doing work on/with/for bodies in education like it is a piece of beautiful (and reputable) literary prose.

I realize the irony of this moment as I can actually *feel* the answer: sitting in my office chair, forcing my body into its most upright position so the burning and throbbing in my neck and lower back might subside for just two minutes during this phone interview. My response is there, residing physically *on, in, and through* my body, a body wrecked with embodied mental, physical, and spiritual aches due to my own doctoral education the past five years. This body, my vehicle of being in the world¹⁹ that is actively and continually in touch with its surroundings, which as of this moment are the excruciating pains running through my neck, wrapping themselves around my right shoulder, and then sliding down into my lower back, creating a “certain living pulsation” that is not its own, but that it is living through and that is also living

¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002

through it—this pain which becomes my body’s being for the moment,²⁰ during this important phone conversation that could be my life’s future. But alas, this example of how my corporeal body has gradually come to *embody* the pressures and stresses I have endured the past five years in academia will not suffice as an answer to this question of what bodies have to do with education and teaching.

I could describe the girls’ forum I started when I was teaching middle school because I was concerned that too many (or any) of the 7th and 8th grade girls were experimenting with cutting, bulimic and anorectic practices, and uneducated sexual exploration, and the affects of those behaviors that were at first slowly, and then with lightning speed, dominating their emotional and intellectual spaces in my language arts classroom. Or I could reference the young woman I taught for two years from that same middle school who is currently taking a break from her college major—elementary education—to spend a second stint at an eating disorder clinic due to her excessive cutting, bulimic, and anorexic behaviors the past 7 years. No, probably won’t do, because those students and this girl were white and from upper-middle-class families—too passé.^{xxi}

What about the group of twenty-one undergraduate students in the *Teaching Young Adolescents* course I taught in the fall semester of 2010 who, when asked to write about their cultural locations in the world,^{xxii} chose as one of their topics—every single one of them, male and female—the body pressures and/or body dissatisfaction they have lived with since elementary or middle school and are still experiencing today? Or the two other groups of undergraduate students (around 30 per class) in the *Introduction to Early Childhood* course I was teaching in the fall of 2009 and spring of 2010 with a professor who was, like me, interested in the absence of bodytalk in teacher education, and when given the same cultural location writing

²⁰ Bigwood, 1991, p. 61

assignment, also wrote about (and discussed often during class) the body pressures society puts on women and men and their own body dissatisfaction that they could not seem to shake as juniors in college and future teachers of young children.

Or here's one for him: I could talk about the *countless* K-12 educators *and* teacher educators I have heard in casual conversation over the years (me included) interpret and make assumptions about the learning, living, or teaching ^{xxiii} potential tied to K-12 girls' bodies and female preservice teachers' bodies, often revealing the implicit and explicit raced/classed/sexed/queered/(dis)abled/xenophobic (mis)perceptions that we are not spending any/enough time discussing in our classrooms.^{xxiv} In relation to those (mis)perceptions, concerning my participants, specifically, what about the problematic and limited ways *some* bodies are written about as seemingly fixed categories in educational literature according to their race/ethnicity/social-class as probable liabilities—such as the “risk factors” African American and Latina youth possess that will ‘more than likely’ lead them to becoming teen mothers “before their time” (Lesko, 2001); or presenting themselves as “too” promiscuous or “too” sexual?^{xxv} That might be a good example.

Or hell, maybe I jump right in and explain my (white, middle-classed assumption-loaded) surprise at the *surplus* of negative bodytalk that the seventh grade girls who participated in my dissertation study engaged in every week. I could tell him about the pilot study-as-writing group I created first in order to get to know the girls—and them me—so I could understand better how they lived in their bodies. And the beginning impressions I had that these African American, Mexican American, Peruvian American, and Puerto Rican American eleven-and-twelve-year-old girls had no concerns whatsoever about societal pressures on their bodies because they never seemed to talk about their bodies, or *want* to talk about their bodies when I asked, leading me to

dolefully believe that all of the research I had read about white, middle-class girls being the leading contenders of body dissatisfaction was indeed warranted. But then I brought some random \$2 cookies one day and all of that changed.^{xxvi}

These are just a *few* of the scenarios that pop into my head which connect *directly* to education and teaching; I'm not even venturing into my mental files which store the countless conversations I've had around the body with men and women, African American, white, Hispanic/Latino American, Asian American, Lebanese American, gay, straight, bisexual, religious, atheist, agnostic, rich, poor, eighth graders, college professors, custodians, first graders, postal workers, engineers; and just last week a retired couple from England at a coffee shop who just happened to look over, see the books on my table, and after striking up a 30 minute conversation with me about bodies decided to go call their granddaughter to make sure she was "comfortable in her body" because she was an athlete and they had "just assumed" she *should have been* "enough" in her body because "she was an athlete her whole life."

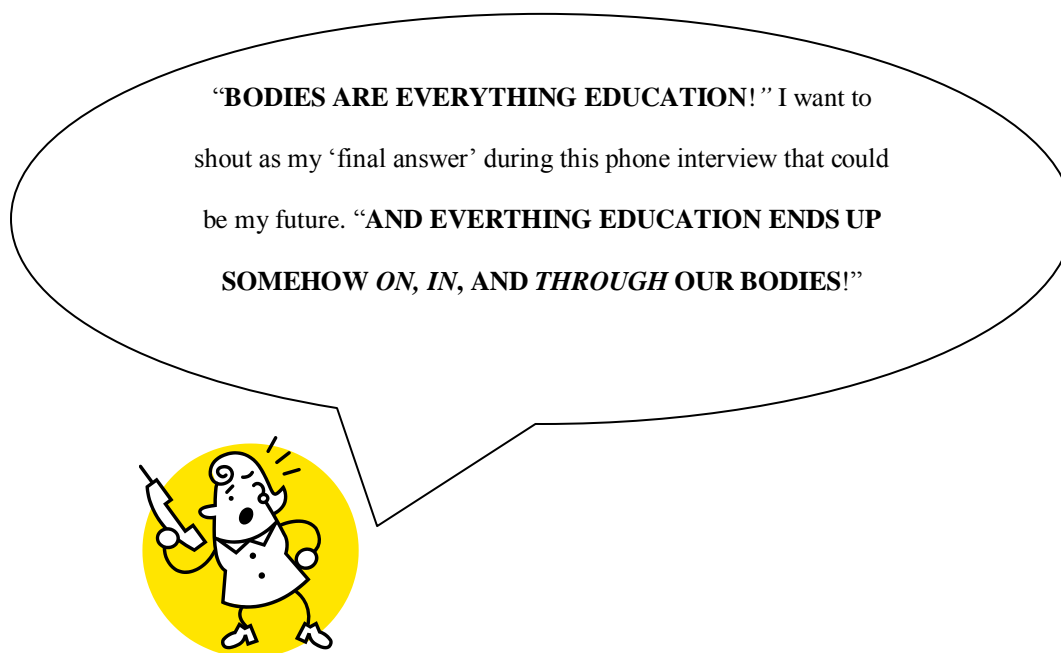


Figure 5. Bodies are everything education.

Of course, I understand that these two ambiguous statements presented this way without any contextualizing (and bellowed at the top of my lungs) would not speak to how my work and I intend on improving/changing/fixing the never-ending chasm of crises in our current education system—K-12 or teacher education, for that matter.

***Note to Self.** I sit erect in my computer chair and squeeze the yoga block that is situated between my knees to remind my body that this interview is not over—to propose to it that if I squeeze the yoga block a little harder and for just a little longer, its job is to then alleviate some of the current pain from the past five years of being a Ph.D. student, and I can continue selling myself to this professor-interviewer.*

Rather than passionately yelling what I *want* to say into the phone, I instead, hear my “professional-teacher-scholar” voice droning on vaguely about how bodywork aligns nicely with the rest of my equity-oriented commitments in teacher education; and from the silence and then (mis)understanding directed back toward me, I decide that I obviously need to craft an “elevator answer”²¹ that is both provocative and alluring to the importance of bodies in education and teaching. Something, perhaps, about how both bodies and education are always in need of fixing, that both *never seem to be enough*.

Interviewer: So it’s kind of like body image.

Me:

Interviewer: I mean I’m sure it’s about other things too, but the main gist is body image, right?

Me: . . . Sure.

²¹ How we are trained as doctoral students to talk about our research in “just a few sentences” or “under a minute” so we can “show what we know” and don’t drone on.

***Note to Self.** It's 2:46 a.m. and I am lying in bed, staring at the make-shift constellation of stars on my ceiling as my mind is still working on the answer for the interviewer's question four days prior: What do bodies have to do with education and teaching? I have come to the conclusion on this third night of lying awake at 2:46 a.m. that there simply is no elevator answer I can give to this question.*

Because, you see

BODIES

*are no
simple /subject
(nor is **education**)
both
under
construction,
in need of fixing
(for decades)*

*Neither **bodies***

*nor **education***

are ever

*good
"Enough!"
in America
they have been poked
and prodded,
ripped
apart
and put back together again*

We must

*catch up
work harder
move ahead
be **Better***

NO!

the Best

*If we are not **the Best***

*we will
never
be
enough*

So Here is My Not-So-Simple Answer

There is a relentless desire in our American culture to reshape the body (Orbach, 2009). And it is not just a desire to reshape the *physical* body; it is also a constant reshaping of any kind of *meaning* tied to the dominant culture's body: white, middle-class, heterosexual, English-speaking, Christian, and abled. We unconsciously and consciously learn *how* to reshape the physical and lived body through certain bodily practices; practices which discipline our bodies so that we can *be enough*. And in this disciplining of the body, we are taught that it is *our* responsibility to improve our own bodies, because the body is judged as our individual production (Bordo, 2003; Orbach, 2009). These bodily practices teach us daily that it is our job to display the evidence of the hard work we have done on our bodies, and if we do not, we are just proving that we have not "taken control" like the 2011 Nutrisystem© campaign is asking us to do, or that we have not "made the choice," like the rest of the **60 billion dollar** diet industry reminds us to do on a daily basis. As Bordo (2003) writes,

It's in our Sunday news, with our morning coffee. On the bus, in the airport, at the checkout line. . . It may be a 5 a.m. addiction to the glittering promises of the infomercial: the latest in fat-dissolving pills, miracle hair restoration, make-up secrets of the stars...A teen magazine: tips on how to dress, how to wear your hair, how to make him want you. The endless commercials and advertisements we believe we pay no attention to. Constant. Everywhere, no big deal. "Eye Candy"—a harmless indulgence. They go down so easily, in and out, digested and forgotten. Hardly able anymore to rouse our indignation. Just pictures. (p. xiii)

Pictures and videos and chatter and thought that have produced a new era of bodies, bodies which are unstable in the skin they reside in; bodies that, no matter what they do, are not enough.

Bodily practices teaching us how to talk, walk, sit, stand, gesture, eat, *not eat*, pray, love, dress, laugh, muscle up, slim down, whiten up: to be better, to be enough, so much so that our bodies have learned “what is ‘inner’ and what is ‘outer,’ which gestures are forbidden and which required, how violable or inviolable are the boundaries of our bodies, how much space around the body may be claimed...” (Bordo, 2003, p. 16). And most, if not all, of these cultural practices that chip away at our bodies, working on, in, and through them, and disciplining them accordingly, are transmitted through various popular culture mediums, teaching us all day, every day, that our bodies are broken and in need of repair in order to be more, in order to be happy. It is *our* responsibility, our *choice*, to fix the broken body.^{xxvii}

Fat bodies that need to be thinned; queer bodies that need to be straightened; dark bodies that need to be lightened and fair bodies that need to be darkened. Some bodies are not American-looking enough, and other bodies aren’t English-speaking enough. Some bodies need to be more feminine, and others more masculine. We have entered into what Orbach (2009) refers to as a new epoch of body destabilization: an era of smoothing, sucking, strengthening, and slimming our bodies; of tattooing sleeves and piercing noses; of straightening hair or altering its color. Some insert 24 karat gold teeth, while others insert \$2400 collagen. We have moved from long skirts, which reveal nothing more than the ankle, to mini-skirts, which almost reveal the soul. We have acquired the most indiscrete practices of painting our toenails so that they will look appealing in our new Monolo-Blancos, to the most outrageous practices of binding our feet so that they will fit into those Monolo-Blancos (Orbach, 2009). According to Bordo (2003) and Orbach (2009), these cultural bodily practices are often more powerful than the practices we learn consciously, “through explicit instruction concerning the appropriate behavior for our gender, race, and social class” (Bordo, 2003, p. 16). Simply put, those of us who engage in

subversive pedagogies and ways of being in the world, working doggedly on ourselves and with our Pre-K-University students to look, listen, learn, and think with a critical eye, are up against these discursive mechanisms that are policing and standardizing our bodies.

Let me say here that my goal in this bodily-exploration is not to criticize those who have injections and/or plastic surgery, spend hundreds to thousands of dollars on diets/diet pills that continue to fail them, or those who spend the same amount on beauty products, because I would have to implicate myself in either yearning to participate or participating in *all* of these practices; it is rather, to point to a *discourse* that has gradually changed our perceptions and experiences of our bodies; a discourse, according to Bordo (2003) that “encourages us to ‘imagine the possibilities’ and close our eyes to limits and consequences” (p. 39).^{xxviii} Like the multiple and beautiful languages we continue to eradicate in this country,^{xxix} we are also eliminating the variety of beautiful bodies. Orbach (2009) writes,

At a moral level, I am pained and disquieted by the homogeneous visual culture promoted by industries that depend on the breeding of body insecurity and which then create beauty terror in so many people. Millions, literally millions, struggle on a daily basis against troubled and shaming feelings about the way their bodies appear. It is not just a trivial problem just because it is a personal struggle which might be expressed as, and is sometimes mistaken for, an issue of vanity. It is far more serious than we first take it to be and it is only because it is now so ordinary to be distressed about our bodies or body parts that we dismiss the gravity of body problems, which constitute a hidden public health emergency—showing up only obliquely in the statistics on self-harm, obesity and anorexia—the most visible and obvious signs of a far wider-ranging body dis-ease.

(pp. 14-15)

Female Bodies and American Consumerism

More importantly, for the purposes of this work, what is considered an ideal body in popular culture for girls and women today cannot be narrowed to just one bodily ideal because of the multiple and somewhat contradictory ways in which female bodies are showcased as “normal” in varied contexts. For example, the underweight body or thin-body represented in fashion magazines, on television, and in Hollywood cinema, seems to be cloaked in this slenderness ideal—the idea that if one is to be enough in our society, then one’s body should be a certain clothes size—usually below zero. While some bodies in popular culture are depicted through a slenderness ideal, other bodies are being presented in more firm and contained ways. These bodies are teaching us to tone, shape, and firm-up our female “problem areas,” and they are reiterating the message that a *healthy* body equals a firmed, flabless body (Bordo, 2003). While a majority of these toned bodies represented in popular culture are mostly white, middle-class bodies—just like their skeletal counterparts—there are hints of slender and/or firm bodies of color sprinkled here and there to remind those who are not in the norm that they too are under constant surveillance.

American consumerism has historically taught women and girls (and now men and boys) how to live in what I refer to here as bodily-not-enoughness—the idea of not being enough *of something* in one’s body, as a way-of-being, due to the seemingly implicit and indeed explicit bodily practices we learn, those which teach us to keep our bodies under strict surveillance so we can locate areas of imperfection, both physically and lived, and improve them. All of these disciplining practices, also, of course, teaching women and girls, men and boys, how to see bodies (Bordo, 2003). In 1993, Bordo was writing about how America saw bodies a decade before the 90s, writing, “As slenderness has consistently been visually glamorized, and as the

ideal has grown thinner and thinner, bodies that a decade ago were considered slender have now come to seem fleshy” (Bordo, 2003, p. 57). In 2011, I would suggest this same thing is true for how we saw bodies in the 90s—those already-too-thinned bodies of the 90s are *now* the fleshy bodies that we are in need of ‘firming up’ in the 2000s. Janet Jackson. Jennifer Hudson. Jessica Simpson. Britney Spears. Kirstie Alley. Queen Latifa. Oprah. Popular culture press has at one time or another during the past decade hounded all of these women (and hundreds more) because their bodies shifted in size, as if it was some conscious choice these women made to alter their bodies so they could incite public outrage.

Jessica Simpson created her own documentary, “The Price of Beauty” in 2010, for example, after being hammered by the media for deciding that the work she had to do in order to live in a size zero body was not for her anymore. After she was photographed singing in what the media coined as her “mom jeans,” (which was offensive and problematic in its own right), Simpson used her documentary to essentially *talk-back* to American popular culture by visiting a variety of countries around the globe to learn about other ideas of beauty and body rituals. Even more recently during an interview with Barbara Walters (December 2010), Oprah Winfrey declared a truce with her own body, explaining to Walters that she was tired of the emotional eating battle she has had with her body her whole life: her new mission was no more dieting—just to *be enough* in the body she had while living a healthy life.²²

When thinking about all of these bodies and all of the criticism that is poured onto them if they grow ‘too much’—and subsequently shrink too much due to the harassment from growing too much—it is sometimes difficult to envision that these were the bodies that were considered ideal in the 1950s and earlier. Bodies which were *celebrated* because of their fleshiness before I was born in the 70s are today categorized as the “full figure” or “plus size” bodies; and

²² <http://theview.abc.go.com/forum/barbara-walters-special-oprah-interview>

consequently, it seems as we move forward, American popular culture becomes even *more* worshipful of both extreme slenderness and finely tuned flableness. Bordo (2003) writes,

. . . any softness or bulge comes to be seen as unsightly—as disgusting, disorderly “fat,” which must be “eliminated” or “busted,” as popular exercise-equipment ads put it. Of course, the only bodies that do not transgress in this way are those that are tightly muscled or virtually skeletal. Short of meeting these standards, the slimmer the body, the more obtrusive will any lumps and bulges seem. Given this analysis, the anorectic does not “misperceive” her body; rather, she has learned all too well the dominant cultural standards of how to perceive. (p. 57)

Bodied-Popular-Culture

Consumerism and its visual images began creeping up onto our bodies over 50 years ago, and those images have now exploded onto American culture, becoming one of the major mechanisms for standardizing our bodies (Orbach, 2009). If you have the (monetary) access, just check your email and two ads will *immediately* pop up offering you the top 3 anti-wrinkle creams of 2011; another will pop up as you navigate away from your Gmail, revealing a ‘before’ and ‘after’ picture of some woman’s body in a bikini so you will buy the *new and improved*, ephedrine-free Hydroxycut©; and on closer look, you might see that the ‘before’ body in the bikini doesn’t really look like it needed an ‘after.’ When you decide that you’ve surfed the web long enough, turn on the television and you might hear Queen Latifa telling you that for her, it’s not about losing weight—it’s about being healthy, so you should pay the \$50-\$100^{xxx} a week to Jenny Craig© and be more ‘healthy’ . . . so you can lose weight and be happier—I mean healthier—like Queen Latifa is in her continuously-shrinking body. Or you might see Valerie Bertinelli sporting her new bikini body and praising herself on how she “took control of her life

by joining Jenny Craig© and [she] lost 40 pounds,” so she can now wear sweaters, leggings, and boots (when she’s not wearing her bikini, of course) because they’re in style, as opposed to wearing sweaters to hide her girthy-feeling body like she used to.²³

If you want to read about someone else who felt girthy in her (anorectic/bulimic) body, you can buy Portia de rossi’s (2010) gripping memoir, *Unbearable Lightness: A Story of Loss and Gain*. According to one review, the actress writes “a candid account of the toll a tyrannical body image can exact” (Daunt, 2010, par 2).²⁴ Oprah Winfrey invited de rossi to talk about the book on the “Oprah Winfrey Show” in October 2010, and de rossi read excerpts from her book and talked with Oprah about “moments that seem crazy now but normal then.” For example, she described how she ate 5-calorie sticks of gum as a substitute for food, and how one day she was so hungry she unconsciously allowed herself to eat 60 calories of gum; but when the actress snapped out of her voracious appetite for the gum realizing the damage she had done eating those 60 calories, she got out of her car—wearing platform shoes—and sprinted back and forth across the parking lot to rid her body of those...60 calories. She also described moments where she did lunges across the room to the bathroom so she could purge whatever calories were in her body—the lunges benefiting her because they would burn calories on her way to purge. Another calorie-burner, de rossi discovered was when she was crying one day because she could not keep up with the body that people expected of her, but she felt better knowing she was crying because the act of crying burns around 10-15 calories.²⁵

²³ <http://www.jennycraig.com/successstories/blog/valerie>

²⁴ <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/02/entertainment/la-et-portia-de-rossi-20101102>

²⁵ <http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/Portia-de-Rossi-on-Her-Extreme-Exercise-Video>

Empowerment Rhetoric leaves No ‘Body’ Out

If you’re tired of watching all of the people Oprah invites on her show to talk about their bodies, you can peruse one of the dozens of reality TV shows that are teaching us we can *create* the bodies we want for a happier, healthier life, *if we choose to do so*. “The Biggest Loser,” “Dance Your Ass Off,” “Celebrity Fit Club,” and “DietTribe” (to name only a smattering), educate our bodies how to shed the unwanted pounds we have been lugging around most of our ill-fated lives, reminding us, of course, that it has to begin with *me*—I am my own master of my new fate, as Jillian Michaels—“TV’s toughest fitness guru,” best-selling author and radio personality will scream over and over: YOU HAVE A CHOICE. YOU CAN QUIT LIKE YOU HAVE DONE YOUR WHOLE LIFE OR YOU CAN KEEP GOING AND HAVE A NEW LIFE! ONE WHERE YOU WILL BE HAPPY! (And thin, and ripped, and accepted by society, like Jillian, who was 5’2 and 175 pounds at the age of twelve, and is now 5’2, *not 175 pounds*, and allegedly worth 2 million dollars because of her “life coaching.”) ²⁶ During an interview with *Women’s Health Magazine*, Michaels expressed, “I want to empower people to find happiness via a healthy lifestyle. And when I say healthy, I don’t just mean diet and exercise. Those are just tools.” Tools, the magazine reports, that are helping Michaels build quite the empire:

Along with “*The Biggest Loser*,” she’s executive producing and starring in a new NBC series, “*Losing It with Jillian*,” set to begin airing this summer. She has two new books—*The Master Your Metabolism Cookbook* and *The Master Your Metabolism Calorie Counter*. Then there’s her blockbuster workout DVDs, a line of diet

²⁶ <http://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/jillian-michaels-net-worth/>

supplements, and games for Nintendo Wii, as well as discussion of her own daytime talk show next year. (Lee, 2010, par 4)^{xxx}

No time for television? No problem. Magazines have historically been doing plenty to remind us that we are not enough in our bodies. *Cosmopolitan*, one of the top selling magazines in the nation for example, seems to live in paradox: on the one hand, it tells women that we are not sexy enough, thin enough, feminine enough, beautiful enough, heterosexual enough, and, most importantly, according to its founding editor, Helen Gurley Brown, not having sex enough (with men, that is), with its continuous 2-to-69 (pun intended) ways to do everything differently than we used to; while it simultaneously gives us the *choice* of agency we need in order to become enough. On the other paradoxical-hand is the fact that what made this magazine so desirable in the 1960s was that Helen Gurley Brown^{xxxii} rescued it from its lot in life as a ‘family magazine’ and transformed it into a slinky, sexy, “soft feminist” magazine for “single, working women”—and what makes it so irresistible still, according to Brown, herself, “is that it outlined an American dream for single, working women. It provided them with a vision and detailed advice on how to live a better life — on their *own* terms” (Benjamin, n.d., par 9).²⁷

If you’re standing in grocery store checkout line and happen upon a *Cosmo* or one of its competitors trying to ‘give us advice on how to live a better life,’ you can see those who *are* living better lives on the covers and throughout the magazine’s spread, as their invented happiness has been *airbrushed* onto their bodies, reminding me still, that even those who stretch, lift, suck, inject, shrink, and airbrush their bodies are not enough. Of course, as adults, we are supposed to be “sophisticated enough” to recognize that these images are not “real,” that virtually every celebrity or non-celebrity image we see in the magazines, videos, and sometimes even the movies, have been digitally modified. Almost *every, single* image. This of course goes

²⁷ http://www.cosmopolitan.com/about/about-us_how-cosmo-changed-the-world

for K-12 school photographs now as well—the companies will ask you if you’d like them to remove a ‘blemish’ from your little one’s face, so that your 2nd grader’s school picture can also be digitally modified. Let that thought sink in for a minute; don’t just skim over the text to the next paragraph, thinking, *yeah, yeah, I know that*: let your mind *actively receive* it, so you can confront its implications. As Bordo (2003) reminds us, this is not just a simple matter of deception; this is the work of “perceptual pedagogy: *How to Interpret the Body 101*” (p. xviii). “These images are teaching us how to see. Filtered, smoothed, polished, softened, sharpened, re-arranged. And passing. Digital creations, visual cyborgs, teaching us what to expect from flesh and blood. Training our perception in what’s a defect and what is normal” (p. xviii).

If we, as ‘adults’ can hardly shut out these bodily practices that are disciplining our bodies on a daily basis, what about our youth and the impact popular culture texts, like teen and Tween magazines, have on young adolescent girls and their bodies? Even more, how magazines as apparatuses of regulation (Walkerdine, 1997) construct girls’ bodies in such limited ways, depending on their audience (e.g., beginner-Tween mags: mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual, asexual and abled bodies; teen mags: mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual, sexualized/slenderized, and abled bodies), leaving girls with very few options of how they can *be enough* in their bodies if they do not embody these categories.^{xxxiii} And in those magazines, girls can read about what products they can purchase to alter their not-enough-bodies.

Due to the wide-ranging options we are presented to ‘fix’ the ‘broken body,’ cosmetic surgery—for those who can afford it—has become normalized for girls as much as it has for women. According to Orbach (2009), the discursive empowerment rhetoric that circulates modern American culture not only supports young girls’ desires to alter their bodies, it provokes them, suggesting that if they do *not* alter their bodies it would be a sign of self-neglect. This

empowerment rhetoric is everywhere, yet its ‘benefits’ might only be accessible to those who can come up with creative ways to pay for it; reminding us that at least the idea of ‘fixing’ the ‘broken body’ is no longer exclusive to a homogeneous group of bodies (white, upper-middle-class, females).^{xxxiv}

The Educated-Discipline of Bodies

As for K-12 bodies, disciplining is rather ubiquitous. The bodies of our youth are not only being told how to look and live by popular culture mediums, they are also learning how to live disciplined lives in our educational institutions. If you peer into the classrooms and hallways of most American schools today, you may be able to glimpse the contradictory ways in which all bodies are being disciplined:

You can't do *that* here---No *hugging!*---*Grow up!*---Ask to use the bathroom---You're acting *like a child*---No talking---*Walk the line* in the hall---No loud voices---Raise your hand---No *touching!*---Detention!---Follow directions---*Grow Up!*---Walk slowly---You can't say *that* here---You're *too young* to understand this concept---Don't run---Raise your hand---Be quiet--
-You can't think *that* here---*Act your Age!*---You're not *old enough* to talk/think like that---
Grow Up!

Figure 6. Rules.

And according to a multitude of scholars and theorists, some bodies are disciplined—and silenced—more than others in order to maintain the dominant discourse's way-of-being.^{xxxv}

Brown (2005), for example, argues that today's public schools for working-class youth resemble prisons or military camps rather than spaces of learning and critical thought. “In these schools, replete with metal detectors, armed guards, and periodic searches, poor youth, especially African American and other youth of color, are being subjected to increasing levels of physical and

psychological surveillance, confinement, and regimentation” (p. 271). These physical and psychological practices are also be supplemented with national policies and other practices in education: school uniforms, standardized rote and scripted curricula, and JROTC, all signifying the need for a disciplining obedience and conformity of working-class adolescent bodies of color (Brown, 2005). Additionally, Ferguson (2005) argues that these disciplined practices govern and regulate our youth’s bodily, linguistic, and emotional expression. “They are an essential element of the sorting and ranking technologies of an educational system that is organized around the search for and establishment of a ranked difference among children (p. 311). A system, Ferguson argues, designed to produce hierarchies.

Bourdieu (1977) wrote beautifully about how schools embody and reproduce the dominant culture’s ideology through certain practices, and his well-referenced notion of (white, middle-class) cultural capital as a superior ideology in education is particularly helpful when trying to understand these disciplining practices that are imposed on some adolescent bodies and not others. By embodying these white, middle-class standards, Bourdieu purports that schools reproduce the idea that the ruling class reigns superior with its ideas of behavior and lifestyle (Ferguson, 2005). “Politeness,” (i.e., manners, style, body language, and oral expressiveness) in Bourdieu’s point of view, for example, “contains a politics, a practical immediate recognition of social classifications and of hierarchies between the sexes, the generations, the classes, etc.” (Bourdieu, 1977 as cited in Ferguson, 2005, p. 312)—a politics, which according to Ferguson, “eventually comes to define and label African American students and condemn them to the bottom rung of the social order” (p. 312). Describing her work at an elementary school and how young bodies were regulated based on their gestures, for example, Ferguson (2005) observed that adults constantly monitored what the bodies of children were saying to them, “using the

grammar of demeanor, posture, proper gesture” (p. 315). The children had to embody a certain humility, submission and obeisance toward power for the adults at this school so they could avoid getting in trouble, or at least receive the *minimum penalty*. Ferguson continues,

Movements of eyes, head, placement of arms, hands, and feet can be the cause of the escalation of trouble. Face to face with adult power, children’s bodies should not jiggle, jounce, rock back and forth, twist, shout, slouch, shrug shoulders, or turn away. In interactions with school adults, children are expected to make eye contact. Looking away, down at the ground, or off in the distance is considered a sign of insubordination. Hands must be held at the side hanging down loosely, limply, not on hips (an expression of aggression) or in pockets (a sign of insolence or disrespect). (2005, p. 315)

In short, if these 6-to-10-year-old bodies disciplined and regulated themselves while they were in the presence of adult-bodies, they could (hopefully) remain in their classrooms to ‘learn,’ a notion similar to that of Foucault’s in *Discipline and Punish*. In his genealogy of the prison system, Foucault (1970/1995) wrote about the history of bodies-as-objects and targets of power beginning as early as ancient Greece; bodies that could be manipulated, shaped, and trained; bodies that obey and respond (p. 136). A ‘docile’ body for Foucault was one that may be “subjected, used, transformed and improved” (p. 136); and historically, what was formed were policies of coercions that acted upon the body—calculated manipulations of the body’s elements, how it gestured, how it behaved. Fast forward to 2011: bodies in some elementary and middle schools. Lines painted on the hallway floors that bodies must follow as they exit one classroom and enter the next—always, of course, turning right when leaving *any* classroom, even if one has to go left, and following those painted lines until the end of the hall; then the body makes a left turn and follows that painted line in order to eventually end up to its new destination. No breaks,

limited recess, no art, no physical education. Why? No time. Lunch? 15 minutes in some schools; 20 minutes in others. Bodies herded like cattle from one location to the next and during that process, they *must obey the rules*.

You can't do *that* here---No *hugging!*---*Grow up!*---Ask to use the bathroom---You're acting *like a child*---No talking---*Walk the line* in the hall---No loud voices---Raise your hand---No *touching!*---Detention!---Follow directions---*Grow Up!*---Walk slowly---You can't say *that* here---You're *too young* to understand this concept---Don't run---Raise your hand---Be quiet--
-You can't think *that* here---*Act your Age!*---You're not *old enough* to talk/think like that---
Grow Up!

Figure 7. Rules, again.

Never 'Mind' Those (Mis)perceived Bodies

Taking those bodies out of the classroom and into the literature, the subject of bodies seems to be either under-examined, or examined to the point of needing no further explanation. The literature around adolescent girls' bodies *seems* expansive as it focuses on body image (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007; Durkin, Paxton, & Sorbello, 2007), sexual practices (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, Gonzalez, & Bouris 2008; Houlihan et al, 2008) and dietary practices (Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004; Knauss, Paxton, & Alsaker, 2007; Rodgers, Paxton, Chabrol, 2009). The literature provides a plethora of *psychological* and *sociological* models and analyses of the ways in which *certain* adolescent girls perceive their bodies, and it speculates on the actions of their bodies; however, the literature is limited in the ways in which it constructs a totalizing view of girls' bodies according to the categories of race/ethnicity, social class, and gender. My thoughts are that the subject of bodies might be under-researched in *education, specifically*, because it has already been methodologically addressed in these large, generalized psychological

and sociological quantitative studies and seems like it needs no further exploration. It reminds me of what Heidegger (1962/2002) posited: sometimes a phenomenon gets buried-over; meaning, “it has at some time been discovered but has deteriorated to the point of getting covered-up again. This covering-up can become complete” (p. 285); or it may still be visible, but only as a *semblance*.

This kind of covering-up as a ‘disguising,’ wrote Heidegger (1962/2002), is “both the most frequent and the most dangerous, for here the possibilities of deceiving and misleading are especially stubborn” (p. 285). Or, sometimes, phenomena are bound up so constructively within different structures, they present themselves as something “clear”—requiring no further justification (p. 285). Maybe *this* is what has happened to bodies in educational research—they have been bound up so constructively within the sociological and the psychological literature *as* this way or that, the conclusions present themselves as clear and in need of no further investigation. Or perhaps the subject of bodies has been considered in such limited ways in education because as educators, we are supposed to be “brains on sticks, teaching brains on sticks;”²⁸ meaning we are still plagued with the mind/body dualism that continues to permeate educational discourse. Education and teaching have historically been perceived (dating all the way back to Descartes and the Enlightenment) in the general sense through a Cartesian mind/body duality. You know the mantra right? **THE JOB OF TEACHERS IS TO EDUCATE MINDS!** It is the teacher’s job to educate the student-*mind* so the body then becomes some detached biological object that can be moved around the classroom like furniture. Even in the talk about failing test scores, failing schools, and leaving no children behind, the

²⁸ Schmeichel, 2011, personal communication

actual *children-bodies* are never really present in the conversations: they are data, they are categories, and they are demographics.

As for the teacher-body in education? There is practically no *body* at all. The teacher-body is supposed to be some nondescript docile body: asexual and undesirable, another object to be moved around the classroom like furniture. This mind/body duality “dictates that instruction should take place solely between minds, which leaves no place for acknowledgement of the body’s role in teaching and learning” (Johnson, 2005a, p. 15). These mind/body dualist practices also work on teacher and student bodies as disciplining codes, if you will, so that there is no room beyond reading the body as an object. Grosz (1995) writes that bodies can speak without having to actually talk, because “they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes. They become intextuated, narrativized; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms, and ideals become incarnated” (p. 35). All bodies in education have been historically narrativized as a “problem” or a “sin” rather than a “treasure” (Estoal & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003, Johnson, 2005a, 2005b), so any kind of embodied learning or living cannot be *thought* in educational discourse, leaving little room for anyone to acknowledge she/he even has a body in the classroom, much less talk about anything related to bodies.

All of this thinking about bodies just keeps reminding me over and over that it is *the body* that gives us a world in the first place; it is through the body and bodily experiences that the surrounding world becomes meaningful for us (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002). So contrary to the popular and educational Cartesian ways-of-being, we are *all bodies* living in the world: teaching, learning, living, and interacting with other bodies living in the world. The question I am left with then, is how we uncover this phenomenon of bodies in education that has been buried over for so long? How do we begin having conversations in classrooms around the body, so when I

say *I'm interested in bodywork*, people will not ask me *what bodies have to do with teaching and education*. I wonder if I can call that professor-interviewer back and give him this answer instead. . .

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL MOMENTS OF DISORIENTATION IN

PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY: ‘THE SECRET’ FOR THE PERPLEXED

Dear Elena

Thank you for your questions about the philosophy of phenomenology and the methodological processes of doing a hermeneutical phenomenological study for your dissertation, as that is the camp with which I feel most comfortable after just completing a phenomenological study that I would say lingers more on the ‘radical’ hermeneutic (Caputo, 2000) side of phenomenology. Based on what you wrote in your letter, Elena, I think we might agree that hermeneutic phenomenology is a “philosophy of the personal, the individual, which we pursue against the background of an understanding of the evasive character of the logos of other, the whole, the communal, or the social” (van Manen, 1990, p.7). Or, applying Gadamer’s (1960/1998) hermeneutics, we could say hermeneutic phenomenology is a way of putting my horizon “into play” so that it is then put “at risk,” and taking that risk, according to Gadamer, is the only way I can make what you say my own, which is what he refers to as the “fusion of horizons” (Caputo, 2000).

You wrote in your letter that you have been reading van Manen (1990), and you connect with his descriptions of hermeneutic phenomenology; like you, I agree with him that we “gather other people’s experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves” (p. 62). He also reminds us that phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of some theory we could then use to explain the happenings of the world, or to control the world; rather,

phenomenology offers you and me the possibility of some kind of insight we did not have before we began, insight that might bring us in more direct contact with the world (van Manen, 1990). I am excited about your up-and-coming phenomenological journey that will hopefully bring you in more direct contact with the world! I want to jump right in and remind you that van Manen says trying to ‘do’ phenomenology is to “attempt to accomplish the impossible” (p. 18). I would absolutely agree. If you think about it, the idea of trying to construct *any* kind of interpretive description about some aspect of the lifeworld is truly a daunting task, because the lives of human beings are always more complex, plural, and open-ended than any explanation or description could ever reveal. Any kind of “final” interpretive description, then, would be unattainable (van Manen, 1990). But instead of allowing that finality to become a deterrent and giving up on studying people’s lived experiences altogether, van Manen suggests we pursue the project with “extra vigor.”

In relation to pursuing your project with ‘extra vigor’ Elena, I applaud the sincerity of your question, “*Am I doing this right?*” because it is one that I have been asking a long time. The simple answer to your complex question is, *there is no answer*. Well, that is not exactly true: there are plenty of answers, within the realm of various qualitative paradigms,^{xxxvi} from scholars dedicated to those paradigms who write about how certain methodologies should be approached in order to ‘do’ a qualitative study ‘right.’ Many scholars over the years have written about and deconstructed ‘doing qualitative inquiry right,’ referring to terms such as ‘trustworthiness,’ ‘credibility,’ ‘authenticity,’ ‘credibility,’ ‘transferability,’ ‘reliability,’ and ‘significance.’^{xxxvii} Or, as you said in your letter, what we must do to ‘prove our project’s *validity*.’^{xxxviii} Like Koro-Ljungberg (2004), I think theories, philosophy, and the validity of qualitative work do matter;

and I think how we choose to use our theories and reproduce them matters; but I also think validity in qualitative inquiry is about more than member-checking and audit trails.

For me, Elena, what van Manen (1990) means when he suggests for us to pursue our projects with ‘extra vigor,’ is for us to *always remain responsible* to our participants, our philosophy, our project, our communities, and ourselves. According to Koro-Ljungberg (2010), responsible researchers “could possibly be seen as methodologically uncertain and responsive by revising and reconceptualizing the research purpose, processes, techniques, and approaches, as well as interactions with participants and data based on changing social circumstances and rapid shifts in power” (p. 605). I know this idea of living uncertainty might be more difficult to digest than following prescribed steps in order to ‘do it right,’ but I found in my own study that being responsible by maintaining a certain balance of uncertainty and responsiveness when thinking about my participants and the larger community helped me approach the phenomenon of bodily-not-enoughness in ways I would not have been able to if I was stuck in trying to ‘do it right,’ to live in certainty. This process has taught me that being a responsible scholar means I have to be extremely diligent at being committed to change, at (de)centering the margins, and facing the unknown (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010). I did not begin this way, mind you; I was where you are, Elena: living the “Am I doing this right” mantra, and I still visit that place often, I assure you. But for any kind of validity to take place in qualitative inquiry, we have to free ourselves from the calculative techniques and processes of validation that we have read in the ‘how-to’ qualitative texts, so we can face the ultimate responsibility of the unknown (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010).

You wrote that your phenomenon of interest would probably be related to some lived experience of young adolescents of color, so responsibility will be very important for you to

consider as it relates to the ethics of your study—as it was very important for the ethics of my study, as well. I found that because I was working with a group of girls who were already struggling to resist oppression, I constantly (re)adjusted, modified, and reconceptualized my ‘researcher skills’ so I could be mindful about not exploiting the girls in any way that might add to their marginalization or oppression; I did this by constantly interrogating my motives, practices, thoughts, and questions. One of the ways I tried to remain responsible to the girls in my study, for example, was the problem I had referring to the Spanish-speakers as a collective category. When I was writing about “Latinos” in American culture, I had to remember that Latinos are multiracial, so would that mean that the category of “Latino” would not be considered a *racial* category? Latinos are extremely diverse in *all* respects: class, culture, national origin, religion, and language, so maybe I should write the category of Latino as multiethnic and multiracial (Alcoff, 2005).

Alcoff (2005) posits that we cannot maintain a clear separation between race and ethnicity when trying to understand Latino identity; therefore we should acknowledge the *racialized nature of Latino ethnicity*. She elaborates on this,

If we are aiming at metaphysical accuracy, then the best descriptive account would be the one that understands that Latino identity has some elements of ethnicity and also some elements of racialization. Most butnot all Latinos have been racialized in the United States and experience a very specific form of racism that focuses not just on skin color but also on accent, bodily morphology, hair, and other physical features. (p. 543)

Furthermore, many Latinos in the United States do not self-identify as Latinos, at least in non-white dominated contexts; they self-identify as Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, etc. (Alcoff, 2005). This was also true in the Purple Flowers much of the time: there were several

instances when one of the Spanish-speakers made especially sure we all understood she was not “Hispanic” when another girl might have identified her that way; and much of the time if someone referred to the “Latinos” at school, one of the girls would say, “He’s Mexican.” Luna reiterated that she was indeed *not* Mexican American—she was Peruvian American—so we should refer to her accordingly; Paloma would remind us that she was Puerto Rican American, or sometimes just Puerto Rican, and it was also important to her during those reminders that we try her mother’s Puerto Rican food and listened to stories about her family in Puerto Rico so we could learn about her ethnicity. There were other moments, still, when Alice said, “You know, being Mexican American, I think. . .” Or she might also say something like, “Well, you know us Mexicans. . . we love. . .” The Spanish-speakers rarely—if ever—referred to themselves as “Latina” or “Hispanic,” so how could I write using any kind of ‘descriptive adequacy’ in regard to terms that were not being used in self-description (Alcoff, 2005)? It was this reasoning and the girls’ constant reminders that reassured me in my quest to remain responsible to them, that I should refer to them just like they referred to themselves.

In my additional quests to remain responsible to the girls, I also wanted to acknowledge that bodies experience racism differently because of the multiple forms of racism in our country and the complicated history of ethical and political accounts as to why and how these bodies ended up *in* the United States. Therefore I realized I needed to be extremely thoughtful when particularizing the varied, racialized experiences of these bodies that were not ‘the same,’ simply because the marginalized lines they walked shared similarities. For example, Buttercup’s experiences of racialized-not-enoughness that I write about in “Unexpected manifestations of (dis)orientation: Learning from 12-year-old girls how to talk-back in order to *be enough*” are tied to a history of enslavement and the Jim Crow South; whereas Paloma’s experience of racialized-

not-enoughness I describe in “Racialized Bodies” is tied to a history of colonial invasion and colonization.^{xxxix} Yet, both of these bodies have in common the chance that, once caught in the hostile white gaze (Fanon, 1986), they could find themselves no longer in the present moment of possible transformation, because when they experienced those racialized moments they were *both* thrown back into a past that was never their own (Weate, 2001). So as you can see, Elena, remaining responsible to our participants is a huge ethical matter. We must constantly interrogate our motives, practices, thoughts, and questions.

And while I am on that subject—constantly interrogating my motives, practices, thoughts, and questions—I want to explore something else you brought up in relation to member checking in your letter. You wrote about the concept of member checking not making sense to you because you would be working with young adolescents, writing that if you took them your descriptions for ‘verification,’ they might not agree with them simply because “that is how young adolescents can be sometimes.” Giorgi (2008) suggests, however, that strategies such as member checking are motivated by empirical considerations, not phenomenological ones.

According to Giorgi (2008), there are two theoretical reasons for not using member checking in a phenomenological study; and his first reason—when people describe their lived experiences they are in the natural attitude—makes the most sense to me, because I cannot remember a time someone replayed something I said or sent me transcripts (I have been a participant in other’s studies) where I was like, “Oh yeah, I totally meant that.” It was more like, “WTF? Who was talking there? Was I even in the room? Did she/he send the wrong transcripts?” To elaborate on a more academic level, when people describe their lived experiences, they are coming from the perspective of what Husserl referred to as the “natural attitude.” You actually asked about the natural attitude in your letter, so I will go ahead and

expand upon that here before I move to the second reason we do not use member checking from Giorgi.

Husserl (1970/2002) posited that how we first and mostly live-in-the-world is in the natural attitude (*die natürliche Einstellung*); and this is one of the reasons I believe Husserl was so radical in his thinking. Did you know, Elena, he was the first philosopher to outline a lifeworld philosophy, the first to theorize the lifeworld as an “epistemological idea” (Dahlberg et al., 2008). I do not want to go off on any tangents—I will save those for later—but the natural attitude, how I have come to understand it at least, is extremely important to phenomenology because it was the natural attitude that Husserl wanted to try and understand more: he wanted to try and understand our taken for granted lived experiences through our *intentional consciousness*. Husserl (1970/2002) would probably tell you, Elena, that the natural attitude is how you live in the world every day, taking for granted that the world is how you perceive it, as well as your taken for granted attitude that others experience the world as you do (I imagine he was kind of frank like that).

In the natural attitude we do not give pause to consider all of the possibilities to the multitude of scenarios we find ourselves in each day, because we are caught up in what is happening in that moment; we do not stop to critically reflect on how we perceive the world at large or on our immediate actions and responses to other people or situations—because we are living in *that* moment; we just keep doing what we are doing, we just *are* (Dahlberg et al., 2008). But we can ‘convert’ that attitude, according to Husserl (1970/2002, 1981/2002), into a more “phenomenological” attitude. This is where Husserl proposed ‘bracketing’ and the ‘phenomenological reduction, processes which were meant to be radical disruptions or suspensions of the natural attitude. I write about different moments of disorientation later in this

text where I realized I was living more in the natural attitude during my time with the girls in my study, rather than a phenomenological one, because when one takes on the phenomenological attitude, I like to think of it as more of a philosopher's attitude and I was far from living a philosopher's attitude during some moments. I like to picture Buddhist monks dressed in their brilliant orange Buddhist robes, sitting atop their mountains in Nepal or Bhutan contemplating life, if that helps give you a visual of the phenomenological attitude. I will get back to Giorgi (2008) and his theoretical reasoning for why we get to ditch member checking, though, because I write more about the phenomenological attitude later.

As I mentioned earlier, Giorgi argues that participants describe their experiences when in the natural attitude. However, our analysis as researchers is performed from a phenomenological perspective as well as from a disciplinary perspective, adding a second theoretical reason Giorgi believes we should not use member checking. The phenomenological attitude 'properly employed,' according to Giorgi, "results in eidetic findings that can only be checked by phenomenological procedures" (p. 5). I mentioned in "I'm not Giorgi, but. . ." that Giorgi is rather absolute in his thinking about how phenomenological methods should and should not be properly employed, but I agree with him here that any kind of verification by participants in a phenomenological study would be considered dubious because of the role of the participant versus our role as researchers. We are coming from specific disciplines (education, nursing, psychology, etc.), and Giorgi (2008) argues that our results should be "loaded with the discipline's orientation" (p. 5), which would mean that some proficiency in that discipline would be required in order to understand the results. Again, while I disagree with much of Giorgi's dogged Husserlian phenomenology, I do agree that member checking is dubious in phenomenology, at least, because how *I* perceive your lived experience will not necessarily be

how *you* perceive your lived experience, because we are both coming to that experience with our own locatedness and historicity—and your perception of that *same experience* would probably even change weeks or months later because your locatedness-in-the-world will have changed, you know? When delving into a qualitative study from the *philosophical perspectives of phenomenology*, I agree with Nietzsche: “You have it your way. I have it my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.”

‘The Secret’

When you find yourself *stuck* somehow during your research processes, and you are questioning whether or not you are ‘doing it right,’ remember this, Elena, and it might keep you going: the answer is, *there is no answer*; and the secret is, *there is no secret*. I whole-heartedly agree with Caputo (2000), that we have not been, nor will we ever be, given privileged access to *The Secret*; “to some big capitalized know-it-all Secret, not as far as we know. . . . The secret is, there is no Secret, no such access to The Secret” (p. 1). According to Caputo (2000), and Derrida (1989) before him, ‘the Secret,’ fortunately for us, “keeps things safely secreted away, not passingly but in principle, due neither to mischievousness on its part nor to a failure on our part to try hard enough to crack it” (p. 1).^{x1} The secret of whether we are ‘doing phenomenology right,’ for me then, falls right in line with the secret of ‘discovering the essence of perception’ or the ‘essence of consciousness,’ Elena: those are just things *we are not going to get to know* (Caputo, 2000).

What I have learned in my own phenomenological journey is there is no road to glory or ‘truth’ that some philosopher’s or theorist’s method is going to open up to us if we follow and obey its methodological structures—nor will it if we fast, or pray *harder*, or sleep less, or learn how to operate *Windows 7* or an *iPad 2*. Any of us who are interested in “attempting the

impossible” by studying the lifeworld, as van Manen (1990) suggested, are like anyone else: human beings living-in-the-world, doing the best we can with what we have. And all of us, in some way or another, are searching for some kind of meaning—it can be the meaning compiled by computers in quantitative studies, the meaning built from theories about how meanings are produced, the meaning derived from people’s lived experiences, or yes, even the new-meaning-that-is-not-supposed-to-count-as-meaning constructed when some deconstruct the meaning you and I are currently constructing. I believe this is what Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002) meant when he put forward that because we are in the world we are condemned to meaning (p. xxii).

Thus, the secret still remains “that we all pull on our pants one leg at a time, doing the best we can to make it through the day” (Caputo, 2000, p. 2), without any metaphysical hooks to hoist us out the abyss of uncertainty. We simply must have the good sense, perhaps accompanied by a few extra dashes of humility, to know our own limits as human beings, to know our philosophy’s and methodology’s limits—because they were constructed by human beings, not to overstate our conclusions, and “not to put too high a polish on our principles” (p. 2). It is this secret, this unconditional secret that no one really knows, nor will it ever be a matter of knowing, that impassions my own ‘radical’ hermeneutic phenomenology and drives me on (Caputo, 2000). It is my continued awareness of being condemned to meaning that Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002) suggested, paired with my passion of non-knowing that Caputo (2000) suggests, that drives me forward so I can continue at least playing with multiple interpretations of meaning. Caputo writes,

Our readings and interpretations, our rereadings and conflicting interpretations, are like so many fingers clinging tenaciously to the edge of the cliff. Instead of arresting the play of meaning, a more radical or more originary experience of hermeneutics faces up to the

inescapable play of interpretation, which is all we have to hang on to as our feet dangle dangerously over the rushing rapids below. (p. 3)

To answer your question, there are a plethora of contemporary scholars and theorists across a wide range of fields who also dangle their feet dangerously over the rushing rapids below, working within the inescapable play of interpretation as they take up the *philosophy* of phenomenology in multiple ways (e.g., Ahmed, 2004, 2006; Alcoff, 1999, 2010; Dahlberg et al., 2008; Fisher, 2010; Vagle, 2010; Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009; van Manen, 1990, 2000). I think these scholars would agree with Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and others that there is no ‘one way’ to ‘study’ the lifeworld; and I think they too might agree that we will never be able to access ‘the secret’ about people’s lived experiences. That does not mean we should give up the passion of non-knowing and the drive to pursue our projects with extra vigor! Of course there are also, as you mentioned, phenomenological theorists and scholars who suggest there are ‘proper understandings of how to employ the phenomenological method’ (Crotty, 1996; Giorgi, 1997, 2002, 2008, Moustakas, 1994). I am glad you mentioned Giorgi’s (2008) discontent, for example, that there are several procedures being recommended in the social sciences for how to employ the phenomenological method that are not acceptable to him, “either according to the criteria of phenomenological philosophy or in terms of sound phenomenological research strategies” (p. 1).

I wrote briefly about my own concerns with how phenomenology is taken up (or not) in the social sciences,^{xli} so I will not explore those concerns here; but I do want to consider your question about Giorgi’s (2008) proposal that phenomenological method needs to be employed properly, as a starting point for my own lived (and messy) methodological moments of disorientation. I will do my best to point to different moments of methodological disorientation

as I describe my processes of my phenomenological journey, but keep in mind that I am pointing to those moments of disorientation I feel will benefit you most, as to not turn this into a dissertation. . . *oh, wait*. . . For me, the messiness began when I was first considering the phenomenon I wanted to explore. van Manen (1990) suggests to ‘do’ phenomenological research is basically to question something phenomenologically—that phrase, on paper, sounds pretty uncomplicated; he also suggests it is to be addressed by the question of what something is “really” like, so we then are supposed to ask “what is the *nature* of this lived experience?” (p. 42). There are those who pursue phenomenology like me, however, who love to live in contradiction by questioning ‘essences’ and ‘natures,’ and simultaneously hanging onto the glimmer of hope that I have some particular trait that belongs just to ‘Hilary.’ So contradictory people like me who live in the ‘both/and’ rather than the ‘either/or’ still pursue phenomenology, Elena, because of that glimmer of hope we have that we are human beings living-in-the-world who have something we can each call our own, as well as our belief that we are always, already in intentional relations with the world. We just see the ‘nature’ and ‘essences’ of the wakeful cogito differently than Husserl did: perhaps as a bit more fragmented and forever changing.

Knowing I was not alone in my thinking, I turned to Vagle (2010) and his post-intentional phenomenology when I was conceptualizing my study. You may not be familiar with Vagle’s post-intentional work yet, Elena, as you are just beginning your journey, so I will touch on his work here. Vagle’s ‘post-intentional’ was not meant to be ‘after’ intentionality; rather, he brought particular aspects of St. Pierre’s (1997) poststructural work to bear on phenomenology. There are those of us who believe the researcher is “always, already in an intentional relationship with the phenomenon under investigation” (Vagle, 2009, p. 586), knowing we can never *decide* “to invoke intentionality nor escape it; the researcher can only try to make some fleeting sense of

it as [she] reflects on it” (p. 586). Vagle helps people who live comfortably in contradiction like me feel more justified when taking up the philosophy of phenomenology, mostly because I believe philosophers like Heidegger (1962/200)—who wrote *copiously* about the violence we can do to phenomena if we do not take things like historicity and our locatedness-in-the-world into consideration when we are investigating phenomena—might share similar beliefs about the partiality of lived-experiences. Vagle (2010) writes,

Typically, phenomenological descriptions/interpretations are not discussed as tentative, presumptuous and potentially violent. However, such notions can be phenomenologically powerful if a person’s primary aim is to gain meaningful glimpses of phenomena – glimpses that acknowledge the inherent complexities and conflicts in trying to capture a tentative sense of others’ intentional relations. In this way, the intentional ‘findings’ of phenomenological research can be de-centered as ‘multiple, partial and endlessly deferred’. A post-intentional phenomenological research approach resists a stable intentionality, yet still embraces intentionality as ways of being that run through human relations with the world and one another. (p. 400)

Vagle (2010) drew on the work of Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom (2001); Dahlberg et al., (2008); and van Manen (1997); as well as some poststructural aspects from St. Pierre (1997) and proposed five components for us to think about when pursuing a phenomenological study:

Component 1: Identify a phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts;

Component 2: Devise a process for collecting data appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation;

Component 3: Make a bridling plan;

Component 4: Read and write your way through your data in a systematic manner;

Component 5: Craft a text that captures tentative glimpses of the phenomenon

As I contemplated my own phenomenological question, I considered Vagle's post-intentional suggestions, as well as Dahlberg et al. (2008), Gadamer (1960/1989) and van Manen's (1990) thoughts on *openness*; and it was this idea of *openness* in phenomenology that became one of my endless methodological experiences of disorientation. Gadamer held that the crux of the question we ask is more about the opening up, and keeping open, of possibilities; but we can only do this, van Manen adds, "if we can keep ourselves open in such a way that in this abiding concern of our questioning we find ourselves deeply interested in that which makes the question possible in the first place" (van Manen, 1990, p. 43)

A question in which we are *deeply interested*, yet, one that reminds us to remain open to the possibilities of the phenomenon. Challenging, you ask? More like, attempting to accomplish the impossible. When I first envisioned my dissertation project, I wanted to explore some concept having to do with middle school girls and their bodies, but I was not sure what the specific phenomenon was that I wanted to explore. I asked myself over and over how I could come up with research questions for a study when I did not even know what I wanted to know (insert: "Am I doing this right?"). van Manen (1990) also reminded me during this (perplexing) part of conceptualizing my study that sometimes researchers *know too much* about a phenomenon; or more accurately, "the problem is that our 'common sense' pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions, and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge, predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question" (p. 46). I wondered, then, if by choosing middle school girls and their bodies, if I was 'too close' to whatever phenomenological question would come from

this notion of girls' bodies—if my pre-understandings and lived experiences might keep me from 'remaining open' to my future participants' lived experiences.

The processes I went through to 'name' my phenomenon however were only the beginning of my unremitting intellectual experiences of disorientation (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002). Trying to be thoughtful about bodily phenomena in ways other than the physicality of bodies was difficult for me because I had not read what I have now (isn't that always the case); and if there was one word I knew that most aptly characterized phenomenology, it was *thoughtfulness* (van Manen, 1990). "In the works of the great phenomenologists, thoughtfulness is described as a minding, a heeding, a caring attunement (Heidegger, 1962/2002)—a heedful, mindful, wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life" (van Manen, 1990, p. 12). I include some of those beginning thought-filled processes below via a series of emails I sent to my advisor during my 'narrowing down of the phenomenon' in the summer of 2009. This way, you can at least glimpse what was going on in my reading/thinking/re-reading/disorientating processes as I was trying to take van Manen's (1990) advice of choosing a question that deeply interested me, and one that I could try to remain open to throughout the journey.

June 1, 2009

As I am gearing up to figure out what in the hell I'm going to research, I was going to see if you could forward me your articles you wanted me to read on phenomenology. . . . I'm going to start my reading with the *Phenomenology Reader* and the new Dahlberg. . . your articles. . . some van Manen, some Moustakus, and see what happens from there. I've been dabbling with Caputo and he's so freaking awesome! I figure as I read/re-read phenomenology stuff, it might help me really narrow down my phen. of interest. Hopefully, because I feel a bit overwhelmed with a topic [girls' bodies] that is very complex and large and so I am going to try and narrow it by necessity, interest, and do-ability. I guess.

June 23, 2009

Hey there,

So I've had some fun ideas pop into my head as I continue talking to girls and reading Michelle Fine. First, I was thinking. I want my participants to like writing. . . and at first I was thinking I would try to get some girls from different areas. BUT, what if. . . I wrote some kind of grant. . .

for a writing workshop for the fall. I would locate it in one school and ask 6th, 7th, and 8th grade girls who were interested to participate. It would be after school, and my funding would allow for them not to have to pay for the workshop days/materials/snacks, etc. I did a writing workshop patterned after National Writing Project twice in CO and the kids LOVED it.

So THEN, I could either get IRB for the fall and tell the girls I was doing some pilot stuff. OR I could use it as an experience for a group to become familiar and comfortable with each other and me, and then ask any from the workshop if they would participate in my study in the spring (or I could begin earlier or whatever). So THEN we could really do some writing/open dialogue because we would have already spent time together just in writing workshop.

That's my exciting idea number uno.

#2:

I had one of those exercise moments when I FINALLY went back to the gym today and was reading Michelle Fine again. I've been troubled with my original "what does it mean to be bodied" because of several reasons----situating it in education, how to open up what I mean by 'bodied' things like that. SO, I came BACK to silence today in my reading.

What if. . . I explored the experiences of being silenced as a 10 to 15 year old girl? And THEN I could make it about the intersections of race/class/gender/sexuality/religion/disability, etc. in relation to the body. That way, I use Michelle Fine, Susan Bordo, Nancy Lesko, and maybe a lil' bell hooks to enter into the body in education AND I use my feminist and queer theorists to intermingle with phenomenology.

It' just makes so much sense to me this way, so easy to situate it in education, because the focus has been primarily in (middle school) ed to talk about sex education or body image. . . but it's like an "either/or" thing or a "neither/nor" thing. So how are girls experiencing those moments of being silenced in relation to all of those things listed above by their teachers, their parents, each other, pop culture, etc. I'm thinking of so many moments when something is said or done and everyone is so uncomfortable they look around and then move on. Or whatever. What happens in those moments? For the girls?

So I found this book today: *Bodily Knowledge: Learning about equity and justice with adolescent girls*. Out in 2000. Someone's research with 4 middle school girls and their bodies. Prrrrretty close to what I'm talking about, but STILL only focusing on body image and sexuality. The authors do talk about silencing and resistance, and draw on Fine too, so that could be helpful for my study AND for my situating it in the either/or, neither/nor stuff that's going on in ed. What do you think? What do you think? heheheheh Jumping up and down! Woohooooo

June 29, 2009

Shitfuck.

So it's not about "being bodied." Because that doesn't make sense in relation to "what is it like to . . ." or "what is the experience of. . ." Because this book I read (the *Bodily Knowledge* one) she is interested in these 4 girls and how they are "making meaning" according to their bodies, but I'm not interested in "making meaning," nor the 4 girls. I'm interested in the phenomenon of something. . . not the people. . . (so-to-speak). . .

so then I re-read fucking Dahlberg and van Manen over and over to try and see if they could help me articulate this thing and they can't. Cuz, well, they don't know what I want to know. But they ask me to ask myself that: what is it that I want to know? Gooooood question.

So when I ask myself that, it's not about bodies, body image, fat/skinny, over-sexed or not. People have been there dun that! This is what I came to today. . . so how in the freakinfuckinshitmotherfucker do I articulate it?

I am interested in what it's like to experience moments when girls don't feel like they are ENOUGH. That's my word that I keep coming back to. In relation to time/space/physical, and in relation to religion, class, race, gender, sexuality, all that shit.

BECAUSE, when I keep thinking about certain experiences or when I keep asking others to describe moments when they felt "bodied" is how I've been saying it, it keeps being about not being "enough." Not skinny enough; not pretty enough; not smart enough; not feminine enough; not straight enough; not Christian enough; not tan enough (just got that one today); not motherly enough; but it's still all in relation to the body--just different kinds of the body---like embodiment and subjective body and physical body.

Some of my girls talked about "not being old enough to wear something" so I was writing about that as the physical body not being "mature and aged enough" to wear something that was "too old." It's everywhere. THAT is what I'm looking for. But howwww oh mentor of mine, do I say that so it doesn't sound stupid?

As you can see, I knew I wanted to explore research that could possibly give middle school educators some kind of understanding of how girls were experiencing our culture's plague of unattainable body ideals, or some glimpse of how girls might be experiencing those moments when they felt like they needed to be more of something in order to be enough; after deciding the phenomenon was not about 'being bodied,' I came to the phenomenon *bodily-not-enoughness*. Thus, the over-arching research question became: What is it like for 10-to-14-year-old-girls to experience bodily-not-enoughness? However, I was supposed to constantly remain open to the question and the phenomenon, remember? So when I conducted my pilot study—writing workshop—in the fall of 2009 and only had 7th grade girls participate,²⁹ the finality of the overarching research question (or so I thought then) became: What is it like for these 7th grade

²⁹ For more on the pilot study, the participants, and the 'research site(s)', see "Introductions, by Alice"

girls to experience bodily-not-enoughness? I write “or so I thought then,” because as the study began and progressed, Elena, I *questioned my question*. It had been brought up by my committee members at my prospectus defense that I might not want to become the ‘symbol’ for negative meaning attached to bodies by my participants, as in, “Oh, here comes that lady who wants us to talk about not liking ours bodies;” so, I wavered back and forth about bodily-enoughness and bodily-not-enoughness and came to understand that ideas on paper are much different than trying to discuss them with human beings who have volunteered to join your journey. It feels a bit sadistic, actually, even as I type it here: I mean, who would want to sit down with a group of young adolescent girls who are already trying to navigate all of the absurdities in their world and ask them to conjure up a memory of pain or shame or vulnerability so they could then explicate the *essence(s)* of not-being-enough in their bodies—all the while making sure they used “thick, rich” descriptions (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 2006; van Manen, 1990)? Which leads me to another moment of methodological disorientation: *IRB* (Internal Review Board).

IRB and Other Unthought-of Realities

IRB is not something many may explore in their dissertations in depth, but like Johnson (2005) brought to fruition in her dissertation, IRB can be an excruciating process for some researchers, depending on their phenomenon of interest.^{xlii} Because I had chosen the topic of young adolescent girls’ bodies, my topic was red-flagged by IRB as ‘sensitive,’ and while it did not receive the ‘full’ consideration like other studies that have ‘vulnerable participants or vulnerable topics,’ it did receive serious scrutiny—their main concern being my “qualifications” to talk about this ‘sensitive topic’ of bodies with young adolescent girls. *Great point!* I thought when they sent my application back and asked me to make considerable revisions in the “what

are you going to do if . . .” area. Was I qualified to talk about sensitive topics like bodies with young adolescent girls, and even more, girls whom I had never met? My conclusion: *Sure, why not!*

In my revisions for IRB, I described the girls’ forum I created for 8th grade girls the last three years I taught middle school, and explained that we had drawn on videos, novels, poetry, essays, conversation, and journal writing in order to talk about our bodies; and in those three years of bodytalk, covering topics like cutting, anorexia, bulimia, alcohol and drug abuse, and sex, to topics such as being ostracized by peers if one “liked school” and enjoyed learning, I—nor the girls’ caregivers—ever felt the need to call in a therapist for any of the girls (or me). I assured IRB for this study, however, if there was ever an incident that I felt warranted a therapist, or the need for me to talk to the principal of the school or one of the girls’ caregivers, I absolutely would.

The other difficulty I did not anticipate was writing all of my documents (information letters, consent letters, etc.) in both English and Spanish for IRB, a process that is thankfully mandatory for the school district in which I was situating my study. Because I am not a fluent Spanish speaker or writer, I first turned to the Internet for help translating my documents, and I can assure you, Elena, this is not the best idea I ever had; nor is it something you should do if you cannot read the writing you are having translated into another language by a computer program. Unfortunately for the families who received my first information letter, the IRB members did not read the Spanish translated letters, nor did the person in charge of research for the school district; so I sent the first information letter home with about 80 seventh and eighth grade girls in English and Spanish, and I can safely say the Spanish readers did not receive anything comprehensible. Following my instincts for the next round of information letters (I had

several rounds of information letters as the numbers narrowed for who ‘really’ wanted to participate in the pilot study/fall writing workshop, and who was showing up to my cafeteria meetings so she could get out of class), I asked my long-time friend and fluent Spanish-speaker/writer/reader, Alicia to ‘cleanup’ (rewrite) my documents.^{xliii} I point to this experience of disorientation, because my inability to speak/write/read Spanish was a theme of disorientation throughout my study. I had three participants who were Spanish-speakers, all three who had caregivers at home who did not speak English, so I had to rely on the participants to communicate anything I wanted their caregivers to know each week as plans changed, and it reminded me each week how lame I felt as a monolingual speaker.

If you read “Introductions” by ‘Alice,’ then you will remember that I asked any 7th or 8th grade girl who came to my initial meeting in the school cafeteria to participate in the pilot study, and this openness to the participants is what created such a wonderful variety within our writing group of Spanish and English speakers. Well, let me say that I was not interested in *any* girl; I was interested in any girl who was 1) interested in writing, 2) in 7th or 8th grade, and 3) comfortable enough talking about bodies. Other than those considerations, it did not occur to me when I was designing my study that I would have to think about the truckloads of complexity that came with the following details:

- ***No Access as a ‘teacher’ to find [recruit] participants:*** not being a teacher at the school, I did not have a starting point for participants. I resist using ‘recruit,’ because I feel like I was looking for people to enlist in the army. Because I was not a teacher in a school, I had to rely on whichever professor knew whichever principal who would agree to let me do a study with students from her/his school;

- ***No Family Connections***: not knowing the girls' families like I did when I was a teacher was really difficult for me; if I already knew the caregivers, I could just call to give them information, rather than relying on the girls to follow through with whatever consent or information letters I needed and wanted their caregivers to have;
- ***No School Access***: the principal explained to me that I was welcome to meet with the girls at the school during the weekdays after school was over, but she did not feel comfortable with me observing in classrooms because 'learning' was too important for students to be disturbed by my presence; I'll leave all of the unexplained meaning in this one alone and let your mind wonder...
- ***Transportation***: finding transportation for the girls when we met on Saturdays was difficult; or getting them home after we met during the week when school was over. I could fit four girls in my car, but most of their caregivers either worked or did not have transportation, so I had to enlist my partner to be my additional taxi service; this included picking girls up at their homes, driving them to whatever bookstore, coffee shop, or pizza place the girls decided on, and then driving them back home.
- ***Money, money, money***: I wanted to write a few mini-community grants to try and receive some funding for writing materials for the workshop, to pay the guest authors I had come in the fall, and to buy snacks for each weeks' meeting—all of this, never expecting to pay myself, which I had done in the past with other writing workshops. Results: I missed all of the deadlines for community grants, because I thought of this writing group idea too late in the game for grant money (as you can see from the email dates, it wasn't until then end of June 2009). Therefore, I wrote letters and went around to community businesses and talked with their managers, and I did receive a small gift

card from Wal-Mart, Office Max donated some writing journals and pencils; and one of my preservice education students happened to work at a university bookstore, so she had her manager donate a whole bag full of key chains and stickers with our university's logos. The only other 'grant provider' in my life was my incredible and selfless mother, who provided us with snack money each week, as well as gift-bags for each of the girls that she put together from The Dollar Store, filled with pencils, pens, note cards, composition notebooks, mini-boxes of raisins, rulers, and a few fun erasers.

These are just a few of the incredibly minute details I never imagined I would have to think about (continuously); they are details that both hindered and burgeoned the data I collected; and they are details that always reminded me just how open I had to be during this process. Before I move into those intellectual and emotional experiences of methodological disorientation I had while collecting and analyzing my data, let me first revisit the idea of what it means to 'really' (try to) remain open during your phenomenological journey, because I had to revisit it often during my own journey.

Openness and Bridling as Intellectual and Emotional Experiences of Disorientation

Realizing that we will never have access to 'the secret,' for me, does not mean as researchers we can simply live un-thoughtfully in the natural attitude and not constantly interrogate the ways in which we engage the world, the phenomenon, and our participants. I briefly touched on Gadamer's (1960/1989) ideas about remaining open in the article "Why *Can't* People Be More Like Walnuts," but I want to explore my experiences of openness in more depth here, as this way-of-being was one of my principle intellectual and emotional experiences of methodological disorientation. I believe it is one thing to claim the *reflection* you might practice up front as a method of responsibility when doing qualitative research and then look back on the

study and question your processes after it is over; or to write a *subjectivity statement*^{xliv} and then metaphorically wipe your hands of any more responsibility to your participants and the phenomenon after you have put your assumptions, limitations, and pre-understandings on paper. The difference between practicing reflexivity and reflectivity is reflectivity does not demand that I acknowledge there is an ‘other’ to whom I am responsible—only myself; while being reflexive demands “both an other and some self-conscious awareness of the process of self-scrutiny” (Pillow, 2003, p. 177). It is a totally different experience to find yourself relentlessly questioning and critiquing the decisions you are making, the conversations you are having with participants and peer-critiquers, the writing you are doing (or are not doing), and the ways you are (re)constructing the human beings who have willingly consented to join this journey, not quite understanding the implications of their presence in your “research study.” This was my lived experience of bridling.

Bridling and My Limits of Being Human

In order to situate the phenomenon in multiple and varied contexts, Vagle (2010), following St. Pierre (1997), suggests the researcher persistently critique her own knowing, “as any understandings of the phenomenon are sets of performances within the researcher’s relationship with the phenomenon” (p. 401).^{xlv} Bridling’s purpose for me was to kick off my relationship with the trials of practicing openness as a way-of-being, so that I could, from the beginning, not approach my study in any kind of dogmatic way and practice remaining open to the phenomenon while studying it (Dahlberg, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2008; Vagle, 2009, 2010; van Manen, 1990). Dahlberg (2006) proposed the metaphor of ‘bridling’ in place of Husserl’s ‘bracketing,’ because bridling is a more fluid concept that allows researchers to be more open by scrutinizing their involvement with the phenomenon, as they continually reflect on how meaning

is “coming to be” (Vagle, 2009). Bridling, according to Dahlberg et al. (2008) is more forward-looking than Husserl’s bracketing, which is ‘directed backwards,’ putting all of our energy into keeping our preunderstandings in check “back there,” as opposed to not allowing it to affect what is happening in the “here and now” (Vagle, 2009). Vagle (2010) adds that bridling “requires the researcher to stretch his or her idea of openness and humility” (p. 403), which I also agree is a necessary part of the research approach.

In addition to Dahlberg’s concept of bridling, Vagle’s (2010) post-intentional approach “acknowledges and welcomes the fact that as researchers all of our work is in part autobiographical” (p. 403). Vagle suggests the researcher create a bridling journal as “a space to wonder, question, think, contradict oneself, agree with oneself, vent, scream, laugh and celebrate” (p. 403). After beginning with a ‘bridling statement,’ where the researcher writes as much as possible about her/his pre-understandings of the phenomenon, Vagle posits that our assumptions “should be interrogated throughout the entire research process as the phenomenon and the contexts in which it manifests itself will move and shift, as will the researcher’s assumptions and understandings” (p. 403). Thus, I wrote about and listed every possible way I could remember in which bodily-not-enoughness had been a part of my life via vignettes, poems, and traditional prose; and I wrote about the multiple contexts in which I thought bodily-not-enoughness might reside for the participants in my study, always wondering in the back of my mind if I would be able to practice the kind of openness Gadamer (1960/1998) asked of us, or if I was too close to the phenomenon to see anything ‘new’ or ‘different.’ (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Giorgi, 2008; van Manen, 1990).

According to Dahlberg et al. (2008), openness is “the mark of a true willingness to listen, see, and understand. It involves respect, and certain humility toward the phenomenon, as well as

sensitivity and flexibility” (p. 98). To be open, then, I needed to conduct my research on behalf of the phenomenon (Dahlberg et al., 2008). I reiterate here again, Elena, that on paper this concept seems much more do-able than actually living it. Try to recall some topic or idea about which you are extremely passionate—those moments when you are so moved by something you can feel the passion running through your entire body. In those moments of passion, you are then asked to momentarily turn that passion on itself, in order to try and see someone else’s passion for that same topic differently. This is why phenomenology is so radical to me, and why I am so connected to the philosophy: over ninety years ago, its philosophers began asking human beings to disrupt their everyday, natural way-of-being in order to turn how they lived-in-the-world on itself, in order to see how we live-in-the-world in a new or different way. And still today, it is such a radical idea for me to think that as researchers, we have to deliberately acknowledge our fore-meanings and assumptions so we can then keep this knowledge always just within reach, as to not ‘forget’ it because that is impossible; so we keep this knowledge at the tips of our fingers, on the tips of our tongues; yet, we are asked to continually turn this knowledge on itself, so we can both expose its ‘shallow or concealing character’ (van Manen, 1990) and try to understand how others are experiencing the phenomenon.

How often do you really give pause to a moment in order to try and understand where someone else is coming from without consciously/unconsciously (however you want to think about it) putting your own theory on that instance? How often do you literally stop yourself mid-thought during a friendly or collegially conversation when someone has just described how she/he experienced this or that and you *instantly* think (to yourself or out loud) *Oh, that’s just because of the hegemony/patriarchy/bigotry/classism/power relationships that blah blah. . .* or, *Oh, that’s just because* [insert whatever theory or life experiences you might draw on]? I am not

even talking about when doing research; I just mean everyday life. It almost seems impossible. Almost. The principle of openness is central to phenomenology, as well as to the tradition of hermeneutics, so we have to persistently try and approach phenomena as they present themselves—if even in fragmented, fleeting, multiply interpreted ways—rather than imposing our pre-conceived ideas on them and closing ourselves off to being surprised and learning something different.

As I wrote earlier, and Dahlberg et al. (2008) agrees: it is one thing to “uphold openness as an ideal or a guiding principle that can be clarified conceptually and epistemologically, and quite another to practice openness as a researcher” (p. 99). So basically, Elena, I had to remember Caputo’s (2000) advice in relation to ‘the secret’ of practicing openness just like I did with every other facet related to methodology: I had to be mindful of my limits as a human being and not allow the fact that I know attaining ‘pure’ openness was impossible keep me from pursuing it with dogged passion!

My Resistance to Openness while Experiencing Madness in the Methods

Deciding my methods of data collection was another intellectual experience of disorientation, Elena, because of the incredible complexity involved with trying to “study” the lifeworld. I devoured phenomenology texts to learn how others had conducted their studies so I would make sure I was “doing it right,” always questioning what “doing it right” should look like in qualitative research. van Manen (1990) holds that we should search everywhere in the lifeworld for lived-experience material that upon reflection, might reveal something of its ‘aboutness,’ and Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002) considered everywhere in the lifeworld our field of perception, giving me a bit too much to think about when considering how best to study this phenomenon of bodily-not-enoughness. van Manen also reminded me that the notion of “data”

was ambiguous and too overshadowed by the quantitative overtones associated with behavioral and more positivistic social science approaches; so within the human science perspective at least, lifeworld research was more about someone relating valuable experiences to me so I could indeed gain more understanding about life. But those “things,” Elena, are not quantifiable entities. *So then what*, I thought, as questions flooded my mind like:

1. How could I decide the ‘best’ approaches to ‘gather’ multiple lived experiences from human beings living-in-the-world in order to understand how they experienced the phenomenon of bodily-not-enoughness? Who was *I* to know this, and how could I be open to something I had never done before?
2. Bodies are complex and messy and trying to understand how people live-in-the world in/with/through their bodies is extremely complex and messy, so what methods would most appropriately help me gain access to the phenomenon of bodily-not-enoughness as it was (partially and plural-ly) lived by whatever girls decided to join my study?
3. Working with young adolescents is complex and messy, and scholars in phenomenology suggest one ‘goes to those who have experienced the phenomenon’ (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Vagle, 2010; van Manen, 1990), so how did I know who would have experienced this phenomenon when I did not know which girls would sign up to participate in my pilot study? And even more, what ‘methods’ would work ‘best’ for whichever girls decided to join the writing group when I did not know them, making the complexity even more contextualized and contingent?

According to some scholars in phenomenology, there are no ‘set’ methods or techniques for gathering data, because collecting one’s data should not be carried out like one might collect or pick flowers (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Vagle, 2010; van Manen, 1990). There are, however,

three factors that Dahlberg et al. (2008) propose govern data gathering in reflective lifeworld research: “the nature of the phenomenon; the research question in its context; and the aim to go to the ‘things themselves, i.e., to practice a ‘bridled attitude’ to the phenomenon of study and the research process” (p. 176). Vagle (2010) adds that a post-intentional approach “resists traditional boundaries for what data might be appropriate—researchers should feel free to use data sources that might appear to ‘belong’ to other research approaches” (p. 402). The world was my apple, Elena; it was kind of like someone who was not from America visiting a Kroger or King Super grocery store and having all of those choices before her—where to begin?

You asked in your letter what methods scholars recommend, and while I would say the scholars I draw on, at least, suggest we remain open to the phenomenon, they still make suggestions based on their own work or other phenomenological studies to give us helpful starting points. Some approaches Dahlberg et al. (2008); Vagle (2010); and van Manen (1990) suggest, for example are: open-ended/conversational interviews, ‘close’ observations, written descriptions, drawings, paintings, fictional representations, acting, novels, journal entries, anecdotes, novels, photos, and poetry—just think, no limits in the lifeworld, Elena, no limits. The ways in which various approaches were described by Dahlberg et al. (2008) and van Manen (1990) were helpful too, when I was trying to at least make a beginning ‘plan’ of how to approach the phenomenon. van Manen, for example, writes about the hermeneutic phenomenological interview serving very specific purposes: (1) “it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” and (2) it “may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience” (p. 66). He also suggests literature, poetry, or other story forms as approaches

that can help increase practical insights. Poetry, for example, allows the expression of “most intense feelings in the most intense form. . . . A poet can sometimes give linguistic expression to some aspect of human experience that cannot be paraphrased without losing a sense of the vivid truthfulness that the lines of the poem are somehow able to communicate” (van Manen, 1990, pp. 70-71).

Vagle (2010) also reminds us, along with Dahlberg et al. (2008) and van Manen (1990), that researchers should remain open to changes and adjustments along the way; in this way, the researcher can adjust the methods according to the needs of the phenomenon and what it calls for. Dahlberg et al. (2008) adds that more complex and ambiguous phenomena might require more sensitive choices of methods, and if your phenomenon calls for it, you can use a combination of methods or begin with just one approach and see what happens as you come to understand its characteristics better. Dahlberg et al. (2008) writes,

Every researcher must be prepared to have a phenomenon tell her/him how it is best studied, instead of applying oneself, one’s pre-understandings and expectations on the phenomenon. It is about an active waiting approach. . . the ‘dwelling’ with the phenomenon, which allows it to slowly show itself in a new way. (p. 177)

This was where I experienced more intellectual moments of methodological disorientation, Elena, where I was reminded of my limits of humanness to remain open to the methods, as well as the limits of my methodology. I needed to remain open to the phenomenon, but I still had to make a plan, so in that plan I listed a few methods I thought might be a good starting point; I jokingly refer to these now as my *anticipated methods* versus my *actual methods*.^{xlvii} I had methods in mind like, van Manen’s (1990) protocol for a lived-experience description^{xlviii}; photo elicitation (Collier, 1967, 1987); ‘close’ observation (van Manen, 1990);

field notes (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Vagle, 2010; van Manen, 1990); journals the girls might keep (Dahlberg et al., 2008; van Manen, 1990); and the most important method, I thought: **the phenomenological interview**. I obsessed over the interview; perhaps it was the one thing I thought would be my golden ticket, my path down that road Caputo (2000) reminded me I would never be able to travel to get to ‘the secret.’ But the traditions of PhDness worked on me, whispering in my ear, “shoulding” me about how important interviews ‘probably’ would be to this study, because that was what so many people did in phenomenology, did they not?

The phenomenological interview: I knew it well; I had read about ‘hermeneutic interviewing’ from van Manen (1990) and ‘interviews as open dialogue’ from Dahlberg, et al. (2008); and more importantly, I had practiced phenomenological interviewing in my qualitative classes and finally conducted several phenomenological interviews in another study,³⁰ practicing my openness and bridling and phenomenological questioning—all of which I knew had prepared me for this study. If interviews were not a possibility, PhDness reminded me I ‘should’ probably have some kind of focus group, or some kind of structured format, at least! This ‘should-ing’ was not coming from my advisor, mind you; nor was it coming from anyone else on my committee or any doctoral student to whom I went for advice and support; I can only tell you that the pressure to conduct some kind of ‘structured conversations’ with the girls was there, *residing in my body*, and for me, at the time, it was real. But you know what else was real, Elena? My participants’ deliberate resistance to my repeated attempts to any kind of ‘structured talk.’

I did everything I could possibly think of to try and coerce them into some kind of structured talk: I changed the language from “interview” to “conversation,” so “interview” might not feel as intimidating: no go. I told them we could have our “conversations” in “pairs,” to see

³⁰ See Vagle, M.D., Hughes, H.E., Durbin, D.J. (2009). Remaining skeptical: Bridling for and with one another. *Field Methods*, 21(4), 347-367.

if that might feel less intimidating: no go. I added food as a teaser, explaining that I could pick them up from school and take them to Chick-fil-A so we could have “individual conversations” or “paired conversations:” no go. To all of these attempts, each and every one of them said, *Yes-sure-of course-whenever-sounds-great!* But when it actually came down to planning a specific day and time that I would pick them up for our “individual or paired conversations,” each of them—every single one—replied with something like, “Oh, I think I’m busy that day. Why don’t we just all talk when we meet next week?” It was brilliant, really, their refusal to succumb to my closed-minded-researcher-ways to avoid being manipulated into some unauthentic conversation. I just did not pick up on that brilliance until much later when I was bridling my way through my natural attitude and all that I was taking for granted during my time with the girls.³¹

When I finally came to this moment of intellectual disorientation—that moment when I thought, *Hmmm, why am I not listening?*—I was able to give myself a break and (re)orient by assuring myself I would really try to practice openness with those damned methods of collecting data, rather than imposing my pre-understandings and expectations on them (Dahlberg et al., 2008). And I did. I simply kept Lather’s (1991) advice in mind that “group interviews provide tremendous potential for deeper probing and reciprocally educative encounters” (p. 77), and ‘told myself’ that I could treat these weekly meetings as loosely put-together group interviews and for some reason that made me feel. . . well, like I was enough. I went to each week’s writing group meeting with my recorder, writing prompts, poetry to read, mini-lessons about different genres of writing, writing exercises and magazines—lots of magazines. I asked them each week what they wanted to do during that writing group, explained what I brought, and the girls decided how

³¹ For more on this, see “Why can’t people be more like walnuts?”

those next few hours would unfold. Sometimes we followed their plan; other times, we ended up doing something totally different than they or I had planned. As each week passed us by, I learned how to shut my mouth more, and I learned how to not just listen, but also *listen differently*.

Lesson Learned

I understand that it is important to practice openness so as the researcher I can ‘learn from the phenomenon how it should best be studied’; AND, I think it is important to understand that, when working with young adolescents, at least in my case, we can also be open to learning from our participants how the phenomenon could be studied. Sometimes the participants determine which way the study will go because they are a part of the phenomenon—they are always, already intentional with the phenomenon—and even though I learned this a bit late in the game, I did learn what it meant to be more open to the methods (and to the girls in my study). Thus, I was just beginning to learn “to live in the middle of things, in the tension of conflict and confusion and possibility; and [I became] adept at making do with the messiness of that condition and at finding agency within rather than assuming it in advance. . .” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 176). So my actual methods ended up ‘taking the side of messy’ that Lather (2006) writes about, “via exploration of the ambiguity, fragmentation, undecidabilities, fluidities, hyperrealities and incoherencies of a world in process” (p. 789).

My Cacophony of ‘Transgressive Data’ and ‘The Secret’ to Analysis^{xlvi}

In qualitative research, Elena, people will want to know about the data you ended up with, just like they want to know how you collected it. This was another methodological moment of intellectual disorientation for me, because I had conventional data (St. Pierre, in press)—weekly transcripts from our 10 recorded meetings that lasted 1 ½- 2 hours, my bridling journal notes

from each week, my field notes from each week, the shoeboxes the girls decorated with pictures for the ‘shoebox poems’ we never wrote, and the writings I collected from the girls’ writers’ notebooks and our Blog. But I also had more elusive data that was just as important to the phenomenon—*transgressive data* (St. Pierre, 1997), which seemed to both enrich and complicate the more conventional data. I agree with Johnson (2005a) that data analysis “happens in the sense that *events happen* (Caputo); flashes of insight *fall on you* (Derrida) sometimes in unexpected ways throughout the research process” (p. 60). Flashes of insight fell on me at 3a.m. when I was lying in bed trying to not think about my data or the girls in my study; during my walks; trips to the bathroom during my Monday night ‘data dinners’ with my friend Sarah; in the middle of “House,” or “Glee,” or “The Daily Show”; (unfortunately for my partner) in the middle of breakfast, or lunch, or dinner when my partner and I would be talking about *nothing* related to bodies or my study; and of course, all throughout my planned writing days. All of this became my data.

I had repeated moments of laughter and tears with the girls that soon became emotional data (St. Pierre, 1997) for me when I wrote about those moments; and all of those moments I described earlier where the girls were subverting my attempts to interview them eventually became response data (St. Pierre, 1997). St. Pierre (1997) refers to these transgressive data as data that are not visible, yet they still disrupt linearity and consciousness; they are the data that are identified during analysis and not before. “Until one begins to think one cannot know what one with think with. In that sense, data are collected during thinking and, for me, especially during writing (St. Pierre, in press, p. 36).

The Physicality of Data-Theorizing

Throughout my research processes, I walked, and I eventually came to know walking as a physical process that influenced my analysis and created more data. I walked to think, exercise, escape, interpret, and create. I walked to begin my day, to reduce stress at the end of my day, to attend to my physical body-needs and body-pains, to tame the body-disciplining giant that lives in my head, and to open up space in my head if I had a ‘block’ during writing. I had my selected music and some article, book, or set of transcripts I thought might help me get somewhere I had not yet been in my thinking, and I walked. Perhaps it was the physicality of movement that contributed to my creative analytic processes (Richardson, 1997) during this part of my data creation—Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002) would probably agree—because when I walked I *felt* the always, already-ness of being-in-the-world: my lungs breathed in the phenomenon of bodily-not-enoughness as my ears reverberated the lyrics from Sting or Paul Simon or Tom Petty or Beyoncé. I would look around on every walk to see the world already there, always taking place whether I chose to participate in it or not, and in some random moment when I was taking note of the bluest sky or of birds simply making their way, a thought would be there. I would stop, grab my pen and scribble down whatever epiphany had just popped up on whatever I brought with me, making sure to be as descriptive as I could in that moment because I knew when I got home it might be gone forever.

The early Greeks believed walking cleared the mind so they could better engage problems of philosophy (Ferguson, 2003), and I would agree. Hell, that was the whole premise of Aristotle’s ‘peripatetic’ concept—simultaneous walking and thinking—because he believed walking improved thinking, and he would walk and lecture (Ferguson, 2003). Other walking experiences that contributed to the physicality of data and the physicality of theorizing data were

on my long walks with my friend Sarah. We would walk and talk about our data, asking each other questions, always reminding each other the purpose of our studies, making each other talk about the research questions and how they were changing or not, and where we were coming from philosophically. I would interrogate my assumptions and talk with Sarah about the processes of phenomenology—always, of course, asking if I was ‘doing it right.’ All of this thinking and talking—on my own and with others on walks—*became data* as it also helped shape and reshape my conventional data. This transgressive data is just as important to the phenomenon as the transcripts or the poetry or the field notes, Elena; and as St. Pierre (in press) reminds us, “audit trails can’t capture that work, it can’t be triangulated, and it is never saturated” (p. 36).

Writing as the Method (of Madness)

You wrote in your letter that writing is sometimes difficult for you, because you see it as more of a burden than a benefit. This might be a methodological moment of disorientation for you, Elena, because writing is considered by many in phenomenology to be *the* method of inquiry (see Dahlberg et al., 2008; Vagle, 2010; van Manen, 1990, 2000). For me, writing has always been a way to make some kind of meaning out of this messy world in which we live; even if it is contingent and fleeting, I still need to write my way through thoughts, emotions, events, conversations, theories, philosophies, and dreams, because like Richardson (1997), I want to find something out, to learn something I did not know before I wrote it. In my writing the cognitive and the emotional seem inseparable; yet, *because* writing was my central method of inquiry, my relationship with it changed—it became an intellectual and emotional experience of disorientation for me. According to van Manen (1990) to ask what method is in human science is to ask for the nature of writing. He elaborates:

Certainly writing is a producing activity. The writer produces text, and he or she produces more than text. The writer produces himself or herself. As Sartre might say: the writer is the product of his own product. Writing is a kind of self-making or forming. To write is to measure the depth of things, as well as to come to a sense of one's own depth. (pp. 126-127)

I wrote my way through this research process believing as Richardson & St. Pierre (2005) do, that “writing *is* thinking, writing *is* analysis, writing *is* indeed a seductive and entangled *method* of discovery (p. 967); and in doing that, I believe I was coming to a sense of my own depth, as well as measuring the depths of the phenomenon of bodily-not-enoughness. In addition to making copious notes on the marginalia of my bridling journal notes, my field notes, and the transcripts, I also created new documents so I could write my way through those copious marginalia. I relied on the computer and I relied on the pen, giving both of those processes equal amounts of time, yet never seeming to bring them together in the end. I wrote on sticky notes and the backsides of articles in the middle of the night, on my ‘data walks,’ during dinner conversations, or just before bed. And just as those flashes of insight became my data, all of the sticky notes, article notes, bedtime notes too became data. This was a good reminder for me that we cannot separate data collection and data analysis, because one is always part of the other (St. Pierre, in press).

van Manen (1990) posits that writing separates us from what we know and unites us more closely with what we know; it distances us from the lifeworld, yet draws us in more closely to it; it decontextualizes thought from practice yet returns thought to praxis; it abstracts our experience of the world, yet concretizes our understanding of it; it objectifies thought into print, yet subjectifies our understanding of something that engages us (pp. 127-129). All of these things

happened *to* me and *for* me as I wrote my way through the phenomenon, Elena; and it was a bitter-sweet experience, because of those moments when I felt like writing not only separated me from what I thought I knew, it led me to doubt everything I thought I knew about bodies, or young adolescents, or myself as a scholar and a writer. And then I would take a break: go for a walk, or go to the bathroom, or call my friend Mardi to explain the void I had just written myself into, eventually coming back to my writing, and it would take me places I never thought I could leave—places of possibility and hope. And uncertainty. This was the dialectical going back and forth, the rigorous interrogation of the phenomenon by questioning and re-questioning that the methodology of phenomenology requires. This was the complex process of rewriting (re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing) that van Manen (1990) suggests can help us do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld (p. 130).

Always trying to remember that there was no such thing as getting it right, just getting it “differently contoured and nuanced” (Richardson, 1997), I used whatever genres felt appropriate for whatever I was writing my way through, calling upon poetry, vignettes, and traditional prose writing to “create a condition of possibility for ‘producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently’” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 969). Some days, Elena, I wrote with more clarity than I knew existed; but more often, I wrote my way into confusion or disorganization. Perhaps similar to Wolcott’s (2001) ‘bleeder,’ I refer to myself as a “throw up and clean up writer.” Meaning, I write with little organization and scarce end-points in mind, so writing sometimes took me to places so off-course I had to start over by opening a new document, and other times it took me right where I needed to be: reaching my own impossibility, where anything could happen and did (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). St. Pierre (in press) posits “when writing the next word and the next sentence and then the next is more than one can

manage; when one must bring to bear on writing, in writing, what one has read and lived, that is thinking that cannot be taught. *That is analysis.*” (pp. 33-34).

Writing Myself Out of Vulnerableness to Resistance

An example of me reaching my own impossibility is when I first began writing about the phenomenon of bodily-not-enoughness as it pertained to the transcripts and the girls’ poetry. I relied on my bridling journal as a conceptual space to brainstorm *what if*. . . possibilities of interpretation; and when I wrote I could try to figure out what I thought about what I wrote by seeing what I had written. It was the act of writing that brought the ideas and interpretations for me during this process; and so what I saw in that writing was me trying to put some kind of vulnerableness on the girls’ experiences of not-enoughness, because that is what I thought should be there. I refer to this in “Unexpected Manifestations of (Dis)orientation,” my realization through bridling that I was looking for vulnerableness in the girls’ lived experiences of not-enoughness, because I was putting it there; but when I would read my writing about the transcripts or their poems looking for that vulnerableness, I kept running into some kind of resistance. The entry from my bridling journal below from July 3, 2010, for example, illustrates the conversation I often had with myself where I wanted to put vulnerableness on the girls but I kept writing about their *resistance to vulnerableness*.

It’s as if they are constantly moving in and out of vulnerability and resistance. In a vulnerable moment of not-enoughness, then one of them or many of them will say “NO! This is not going to bring me down!” Or, more like, “You are NOT the boss of me!” They write that way, they talk that way, but in all of that absoluteness, there is still [sic] seems to be so much *embodied vulnerability*. This is what I need to think about—how can I describe *embodied vulnerability*? It’s like a contradiction of what someone is saying versus what she wants from us---

Buttercup talks constantly about people calling her “fat” or “big,” and she is also constantly saying that no one can make her change; no one can make her diet; people should love her body because she loves her body. Several times she mentioned that there was nothing she wanted to change about her body; yet, in the very same conversation,

just minutes later, she'd make some comment about how either we in the group or people at school "made her feel" a certain way: "greedy" if she ate or talked about food; and then she'd refer to the kids at school calling her big, and make some comment about needing to work out, then say no one was going to tell her she needed to change her body again. So what's all of that about?

This is just one example of the cacophony of ideas swirling as I wrote and rewrote my way through the phenomenon with all I could muster—with all of those words and thoughts from the philosophers, my participants, my friends and mentors in PhDness, all of the specters from my past that sometimes haunted me in the night and other times showed me which way to go, all of the characters in the television shows and movies I had watched and novels I had read, all of the conversations I had with my husband, and "all the other bodies and the earth and all the things and objects in [my life]—the entire assemblage that is *a life* thinking *and, and, and. . .*" (St. Pierre, in press, p. 37). All of those things becoming a part of the phenomenon, as well as my multiple and fragmented perceptions of this incredibly complex phenomenon.

Trying not to pledge allegiance to what seemed familiar, and instead make that familiar strange (Ahmed, 2006, Dahlberg et al., 2008), I returned to philosophers such as Heidegger (1962/2002), who reminded me that depending on the access we have to any entity (intentional object), it is indeed possible for it to show itself as something which in itself it is *not*. "When it shows itself in this way, it 'looks like something or other.' This kind of showing-itself is what we call 'seeming' [*Scheinen*]" (p. 279). This is what people talk about, Heidegger writes, when they speak of the 'symptoms of a disease.' "Here one has in mind certain occurrences in the body which show themselves and which, in showing themselves as thus showing themselves, 'indicate' something which does not show itself" (p. 279). Thus, how I grappled with the idea that some kind of vulnerableness should be coming into being during my initial analyses, relates to this notion of 'semblance' as an appearance 'of something.' The vulnerableness that I

anticipated coming into being in those moments, and the fragments of vulnerableness I sometimes glimpsed during my initial analyses, I now understand as a *semblance* of the complexities within this thing I named some kind of resistance. Meaning, the ‘aboutness’ of all of these moments of bodily-not-enoughness could have been moments of resistance-IN-vulnerableness, moments of resistance-TO-vulnerableness, and other moments of vulnerableness—they were always partial and forever changing. But I had to write and re-write my way through all of that complexity to come to realize this, Elena; I had to constantly check myself before I wrecked myself.

I think it is important to note here that I might have been trying to put vulnerableness on those moments because any kind of resistance was very unexpected (and most times disorienting) for me. As an adult and a woman, I have worked much of my life to simply be content in the skin and body I reside in, and although I was bridling my perceptions/assumptions of bodily-not-enoughness before and during my weekly meetings with the girls, and still even now as I write about the phenomenon, there were repeated instances I saw in my writing where I was not distancing myself enough from the ‘familiarity of the world’ (in relation to my perceptions/assumptions of bodily-not-enoughness), so I was not able to “transform the world from the realm of the actual to the realm of the phenomenal” (Alcoff, 2010, p. 49). But as I continued bridling (writing, re-writing, talking, questioning, listening, thinking, walking, reading, re-reading), I eventually found myself in more of a phenomenological attitude and hesitated as I attempted to put that vulnerableness on different moments, because there was so much of this thing I kept naming resistance coming into being rather than the vulnerableness I thought should be there.

I want to remind you, Elena, that I also wrote about moments where not-enoughness came into being for some of the girls as something I never had access to, because bodies are complicated and messy. Trying to understand how people live in their bodies is complex and messy. And doing phenomenology is complex and messy. The attempt to even describe the intricacies of how this phenomenon came into being for different girls in various moments was so complicated for me that sometimes I could not even find the words—and pictures seemed like they would not do those moments justice either. The words I chose to describe those moments of *resistance-in/to-vulnerableness*, or those moments when I had no idea what was going on, even though they were limiting, were purposeful.

Reading as a Method of Inquiry

I want to note here that reading was also a method of inquiry for me during this process. What was interesting, though, was that I did not have moments of disorientation when I turned to reading; I had moments of clarity, relief, and reassurance. As I wrote my way through the research, I also continued reading scholarly texts from philosophers in phenomenology and scholars in feminist theory who wrote about bodies. I relied upon both ‘high level’ theory and ‘mid-level’ theory to take me places I had not yet been, and sometimes those texts led me to others—as they often do—so my analytical reading became intertwined with my analytic writing and thinking, and it moved across genres and theories. I reread Maya Angelou’s and Nikki Giovanni’s poetry to calm my spirit when I was frustrated; I reread Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird* to remind me why I loved writing when I loathed it; and I reread Bordo (2003) and Orbach (2009) when I thought I thought something or other about bodies but wanted to also remind myself what they had thought about bodies. I claim that I “reread” Ahmed, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger, but every time I read those texts it still feels like I am reading them for the first time,

because they have so much to teach me. When I was reading Ahmed (2006) one day, for instance, I noticed that I had marked up the text so many times using different pens and highlighters that I did not really have any room to add new color, but I could not for the life of me remember reading those powerful lines she put on those pages that were speaking so loudly to me about my study—it was like I was seeing how Ahmed wrote about bodies for the first time, but I had read those pages at least a dozen other times. I also spotted philosophers and theorists to whom Ahmed referred that I had never before noticed, so I read those philosophers and came to new understandings about bodily-not-enoughness and the phenomenology of racialized bodies (e.g., Alcoff, 1999; Fanon, 1986; Weate, 2001).

People in PhDness might tell you, Elena, that when you are ‘writing the dissertation,’ that is what you should do: “just write.” But again, like Nietzsche wrote: “You have it your way. I have it my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.” You have to do what works for you when attempting the impossible, and for me, it was to write and write and write (all-the-while, reading whatever I felt called me)—and when I could not write anymore, I read more and then wrote about that reading. Of course, the more you read, the more you will have to ‘bridle,’ but hell, like I wrote in “I’m Not Giorgi, but...” if we are *not* reading ‘hard theory and philosophy,’ it is not going make the process of analysis any easier—probably just more shallow. Like St. Pierre (in press) suggests, if the texts are too hard, just keep reading them; let them ‘wash over you until they become familiar’ (p. 11). Reading and writing, Elena, that ends up being the simple answer when there is no answer: read and write--just like we learned in elementary school, but harder. The most important things to remember when attempting the impossible, Elena? What I hope to continue reminding myself:

1. The secret is, there is no secret
2. You have it your way. I have it my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.
3. When attempting the impossible (researching the lifeworld), we can pursue our projects with ‘extra vigor’ in order to remain *responsible to our participants*—how we write/read/think about them; responsible to our theories, to our projects, to our communities, and to ourselves.
4. Practicing methodological openness will not assure an answer to ‘the secret,’ it will probably do the opposite and leave you more times than not in *uncertainty*—but as long as you understand the secret is, there is no secret, there is no other way to live-in-the-world, right?

I invite you to take what you like from this phenomenological/methodological advice, Elena, and leave the rest—that is why we gather other people’s lived experiences anyway, right? Because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves.

Good Year/Bad Year for Bodies in the Media	
Good year for:	
<i>The King’s Speech</i>	
Isn’t it interesting how experiences from childhood manifest on/in/through our bodies, like stuttering? <i>The King’s Speech</i> is a wonderful example of how we <i>are to the world as body</i> ; “it is through the body and bodily experiences that the surrounding world becomes meaningful for us” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).	
Bad year for:	
Natalie Portman’s character in <i>Black Swan</i>	
Her psyche actually split in two so she could “be enough” and it still didn’t get her anywhere; and did you notice how the whole movie is about bodily-not-enoughness but they never once mention it “out loud”—we just infer from her self-mutilation and anorexia/bulimia?	

Figure 8. Good year/bad year for bodies in the media.

Bodies in the Media

See what Mr. Shcu and the gang of Gleeksters are up to on the hit television show, “Glee” this week: here you can purr with satisfaction at the work they are doing on “Glee” to illustrate that *all bodies* should be accepted: all body shapes, all sexual orientations, all ethnicities, and all social classes—all, of course, while one of the lead female characters, Lea Michele who plays “Rachel Berry,” withers away as each season ends and her fast-paced stardom begins. Reportedly losing over 15 pounds since the show first aired, Michele recently reported in an interview for her 2010 cover of *Women’s Health Magazine*³² that she now goes back and forth between a vegan and a macrobiotic diet, because she loves *being healthy*. “I think taking care of yourself and being healthy not only makes your body look good, but it makes your spirit and your energy good, so I just like to be good to myself; because like I said, it helps me keep up my energy for everything, especially for what I have to do everyday for my job.” Maybe Michele should talk to Portia de Rossi about what it’s like to keep up your energy *and* the expectations put your body for the celebrity-lifestyle-job.³³

Next turn the channel to ABC Family and see how the kids on “Huge” are doing at fat camp with their *bodily-not-enoughness*—not being enough in society or even within the camp itself because of their weight, sexual orientation, social class, and/or gender. Entering the life of “Huge,” you could be overcome with delight at how some depictions of the modern body have swung to the other side of the thinness pendulum, declaring that the slenderness ideal is unrealistic and destructive, and instead present us with the “plus size” body *as enough*. Except for the fact that the “plus size” bodies being portrayed in shows like “Huge” and “Glee” (maybe

³² “Behind the Cover Story” <http://www.womenshealthmag.com/life/glee-lea-michele>

³³ See, “Why are bodies important in teaching and education” for more on Queen Latifa and Portia de Rossi

a size 12 or 14) are actually the size of most women in the United States, making the “plus size” the norm, rather than the exception.

Tired of Fiction? Plenty of Reality!

Reality television shows are limitless and dogged at reminding us that we are not enough in our bodies if we are not meeting/acquiring certain standards of the body; standards which are historically entrenched in a white, middle-upper-class discourse, but are now much more recognizable within *any* race/ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality, religion, or age category (Bordo, 2003; Orbach, 2009). With shows like “Dr. 90210,” “Extreme Makeover,” “The Swan,” and “The Drs” reassuring us that cosmetic surgeries, needles, potions, (and most importantly, money) will indeed alter how we live in the world as *more* confident, *more* beautiful bodies; or “Survivor,” “The Amazing Race,” “America’s Next Top Model,” and “The Weakest Link” constantly *eliminating* those bodies that are not enough, the message is clear: the joke’s on us. No matter how much weight we lose; how straight we can get our hair; how much skin we have pulled, stretched, and stapled behind our ears, or how much skin we can have bleached; how much fat we have sucked out from one area and inserted into another; how many miles we can run across a foreign desert or on a treadmill; how much Botox we have injected into our foreheads, around our ‘crows’ feet,’ or yes, even in our armpits, we will not be *enough*. Just look at Natalie Portman’s character in the 2010 psycho-thriller *Black Swan*: her psyche actually split into multiple selves/swans to be enough, and where did that get *her*? Wandering the Elysian Fields? Crossing the River Styx? Pushing up daisies?

The Scoop: Bodytalk Session at the Pizza Place

Blossom

When Miss Hilary started one of those sessions—that’s what I called it when she would act all serious and try to get us to talk about body-stuff—it was hard for me to figure out what she wanted us to say. Like, this one time she took us to this pizza place and she brought all these teen magazines for us to look at while we ate dinner so we could talk about the body-stuff. She must have had like 12 magazines and me and Sunshine went *crazy* because the magazines had so many posters in them (we hang posters in our rooms and inside our lockers). Miss Hilary asked us not to take anything out of the magazines until after we talked about them, but I had already ripped out like 3 different posters of Zac Efron because, well, have you *seen Zac Efron*? I asked Buttercup if she wanted the ones of Justin Bieber and she was all, “I hate Just Bieber!” and I was like, “I am so with you!” And then Alice said Justin Bieber looked good but she thought he had a squeaky voice and sang like a girl; then Alice started saying something about the first time she heard a Justin Bieber song and Miss Hilary said she was telling a side story, so Alice threw her hand over her mouth and was like, “Oh right! You’ll have to tape my mouth shut. Sorry.” She’s so. . . chatty. She really does have a story for *everything*!

Anyway, we were supposed to have some kind of session about the magazines but then we kind of got sidetracked on the clothes the stars were wearing, and Buttercup’s family reunions in South Carolina, and Paloma wanting to go buy running shoes at Rack Room because she wanted to start running the next day because she was eating too much. That conversation was actually pretty funny too: Paloma kept talking about wanting to buy running shoes so she could start running, but when Miss Hilary asked her why she ‘had’ to go running the next day—because we never heard Paloma even *talk* about running—she told us she’s never run before—

she actually “hates running”—but she felt like she needed to start the next day because she was eating too much lately and getting fat.

Paloma’s fat-talk must have hit a nerve with Buttercup, because then Buttercup said *she* was eating too much and getting too flabby and told us we had to make her stop eating. And *right* when I saw Miss Hilary shift in her seat like she was all annoyed and was probably about to yell at Buttercup and Paloma for saying they were fat, this little kid whacked Miss Hilary right in the head with a booster seat. *WHACK!* It was awesome! Well, Miss Hilary wasn’t laughing, but we were. I mean, *C’mon!* This kid was like 8 and getting this booster seat for his baby brother, and he tried to like scoot behind Miss Hilary with the booster seat, but he wasn’t paying attention and the leg of the booster seat clocked her right across the head. Paloma was laughing so hard pizza almost came out of her nose.

We did have kind of a session about the magazines that night like Miss Hilary wanted us to, but probably not as good as she wanted because she had to ask us all night to not tell side stories. Like when we were talking about how the girls in the magazines don’t look real because they don’t look like us—*normal*—and I started telling everyone about this time I was watching that TV show, “A Thousand Ways to Die,” and this man got squished to death by a really obese woman who he was, you know, they were, um, she was lying on top of him to do “the deed” and, basically killed him because she was so...obese. Miss Hilary seemed kind of irritated because she couldn’t really understand what I was saying: I was laughing so hard when I was telling the story that my words were coming out like this: “be—cau—I—mean—she---squashed—can—you—be---lieve...” (You’ve had that happen, right? It’s so funny and then you can’t stop laughing and then it’s even *funnier?*)

So anyway, Miss Hilary asked us if looking at the magazines ever made us think about how we think about our *own* bodies and I was like, “Yes, yes!” and the other girls were like, “*Of Course!*” Then I was like, “Yeah, they make me feel horrible. Like, I mean, really, seeing those skinny bodies everywhere.” I mean, isn’t that kind of a stupid question? I don’t mean *she* is stupid, of course, but *of course* we think about how we don’t look like those anorexic models; but who wants to sit around and get all E-MO about that all day? I’ve got better things to do with my time, personally. Miss Hilary said that the models in the magazines were too skinny and airbrushed (which we knew, of course), and she said in America we have a really messed up idea of what a “normal body” is supposed to look like.

She said that all of us at the table would probably be considered “too thin” by some people in other countries, like in Europe or something. So I was like, um, “I’m not too thin. I’m not even *skinny*.” I don’t know why she would even say that when I am *not* skinny. And then she asked how we thought we could change how people think about bodies in America, like in magazines or whatever. I didn’t answer because I have *no idea*. All I know is, it’s annoying, and it will never change. I’ll let Alice tell you the rest, because she, *of course*, did have an idea.

Alice

So *my* idea was that the people in charge of magazines should do what Jennifer Garner did in that movie *13 Going on 30*. She did this high school reunion spread for the fashion magazine she worked for, and instead of using models she got a whole bunch of people she actually graduated high school with to be in the photo-shoot. Then there could be *normal, real people* in the pictures instead of all those really skinny people who eat broccoli. Don’t you like my idea? I’m sure Blossom has told you enough, so I’ll continue.

We talked about a lot more stuff that night too, and we ate a LOT of food. The pizza guy just kept on coming over to our table and giving us these new kinds of pizza he was making, and these really garlicky bread sticks that made me thirsty, so I drank way too much Sprite and got all hyper; and he brought these buttery cinnamon sticks with all this gooey icing drizzled all over them. They were delicious! But like Blossom told you earlier, it made everybody complain about eating too much and that made Miss Hilary annoyed, so she told us to stop worrying about how much we were eating because we were at an “all you can eat” pizza place, and it wasn’t like we ate like that all the time, and we had to get our money’s worth. I agreed. I even asked if I could take a few pieces home to my family, but the pizza guy said no. I probably would have eaten any kind of food that pizza guy brought over because that’s one of my 100 things to do before I die: I’m going to try every single food in the world. Or at least America. Except for dog. I will never eat dog.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Note from the Author. The following multi-voiced, found-poem, “Ubiquitous Bodytalk” is taken directly from transcripts where the girls in my dissertation study and I met at an “all you can eat” pizza place on March 9, 2010. I brought about 5 different ‘teen’ magazines for the girls to peruse so we could have a “structured conversation” about bodies. What follows is a visual representation of how I saw myself ‘in’ this study ‘with’ the girls, as well as the ubiquitous bodytalk that I finally began ‘hearing,’ when I learned to listen *differently*. For a lengthier discussion, see, “Why *Can’t* People Be More Like Walnuts?”

Layout of “Ubiquitous Bodytalk”

I strategically spaced the girls’ lines apart from one another so you can glimpse a visual representation of moments when multiple girls talked simultaneously and how many girls participated in the conversation at any given moment. (For example, Paloma’s lines are always set on the *far left* margin of the right side of the page; Alice’s lines are 5 spaces after Paloma’s; Buttercup’s 10 spaces after Paloma’s, and so on.)

In a “multi-voiced” or “double-voiced” poem, the speakers’ lines are set horizontally parallel on the right and left sides of the page if they are thinking/saying something at the same time; if there is a vertical space in between the lines on the right and left side of the page, then one speaker is saying/thinking something and ‘right after’ the other is saying/thinking something. (For example, in the first lines, I am on the left side telling the girls I brought the pictures I took of them, and then Paloma said, “Oh, I hate that picture; I look so fat.” Right after I said, “Look, pictures of you!”

Ubiquitous Bodytalk

Look, pictures of you!	Oh, I hate that picture I look so fat
You’re joking, right?	No I look so ugly I look I look I look pale
Who ARE You?	I like the second one I look like I’m only half of me

<p>To the magazines then</p> <p>But not right now— I'm just sayin' we're not doing that right now ...but... go ahead—</p> <p>Wait, what now?</p> <p>I agree.</p> <p>What wall?</p>	<p><i>J-14?</i> But first I have to say something—</p> <p>(blank stares)</p> <p>They just need me all through this magazine I like that shirt: “mind, body, spirit”— we're going to be talking about our mind and our bodies</p> <p>Girls, I notice, are comfortable talking about their bodies around girls their age or like, someone they trust, they know well</p> <p>Girls, <i>most girls</i>, are comfortable talking about their bodies around girls their age or people they trust or are close to but no one else like, seriously. Or, older people who they trust.</p> <p>Are we a sorority? Are we the Purple Flowers sorority?</p> <p>But we're really close so we're OK with it-- But bring in somebody else somebody who's not close-- it's like the conversation stops and we're like, <i>Nice weather we're having</i></p> <p>We should go sign that wall as a sorority</p>
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<p>I'm going for seconds</p> <p>And you have to go <i>run</i>?</p> <p>Then <i>why do you have to run tomorrow</i>?</p> <p>Why do you want to go for a run if you hate sports?</p> <p>This is buttery deliciousness</p> <p>That's what it's for it's an all you can eat buffet you gotta get your money's worth</p> <p>Mmmm, new kind of pizza to try: veggie</p>	<p>There, where other famous people have signed it</p> <p>Wait, are we famous now? I feel famous sometimes; I should be famous I will be famous one day We know We know We know</p> <p>I wish I could just get a plate and stop eating I need to go running tomorrow What are you talkin' about? I don't even have running shoes I'm not a runner</p> <p>I'm not a sports person I don't like sweating</p> <p>I want to go for a run I gotta go to Rack Room and buy me some shoes</p> <p>I know, I hate sports too I just like to feel my heart</p> <p>This is so buttery Really good This <i>food</i> is deliciousness because I like to eat This is the most pizza</p> <p>I'm not a vegetable person-- only carrots and ranch One of my 100 things to do before I die: try every single food in the world or at least America Except for dog. I will never eat dog.</p>
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<p>This little thing is probably my favorite</p> <p>Soaked in butter Cinnamon heart attacks</p> <p>Just don't eat a whole pan of them you'll have a heart attack-- if you eat four you'll be just fine</p> <p>I was making that number up I've had like 20 so you're fine and you're resilient your hearts are just <i>pumpin'</i> that blood</p> <p>Our <i>session</i>?</p> <p>Actually, can I? Since I never really get to say anything? Can I have a turn?</p> <p>These magazines-- they're to start some kind of conversation</p> <p>Huh?</p> <p>Yeh, but not right this second-- for now--what I'd like to do— --maybe you could close those for a second? I thought we could talk about body stuff-- we can look through the magazines and just have a conversation about— like— what kinds of bodies are represented- what kind of images-</p>	<p>What? The butter?</p> <p>Now y'all got me scared to eat 'em</p> <p>Man, she ate more than four that girl, she ate like 13 of 'em I'm good. I'm done.</p> <p>OK, let's begin our session now</p> <p>But let me say something—</p> <p>(girls making cat sounds) (girls making cat sounds)</p> <p>Can we have the posters?</p> <p>Can we have the posters? I was going to ask you that question.</p>
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what type of bodies-
Know what I mean?

No, no, hold on-
So what I want y'all to do is just look
through them
See what you notice
--Listen, listen--
Who's in there?
Who's not?
How does it all affect you?
Does it?
Like do you ever look at some of those
pictures
and think
Oh, I wish I looked like that

And we'll have a serious conversation,
so if one person is talking
just allow her to talk,
don't interject--
--A protocol,
we can try a protocol
just letting one person talk--
no side stories

You're in a side story right now

No, you can talk, as long as it's about
what's--
Did y'all watch the Oscars the other night?

Well, it was about bodies

[A for instance in a magazine]
"Kim Kardashian's personal story about
her struggle to be proud of her booty"

You know what I've noticed?

Do you see what she's wearing
in here?

Oh, I wish I was her, *sure*
Yes, yes, *of course*
Or, I hope I *don't*
look like that

I wouldn't want that dress
Do you see her hair?

Horrible

I hate Justin Bieber
I am so with you—he's
so—

Yeh, Justin Bieber looks good
but he has a squeaky voice--
He sings like a girl—Oh my gosh,
the first time I ever heard Justin
Bieber...

Oh right, you'll have to tape my mouth
shut, sorry.

That's a side story

Oh, right.

Oh, I love Kim Kardashian

<p>She has issues with her butt?</p> <p>She had surgery to get her butt smaller?</p> <p>So, what could be wrong with that?</p> <p>But why? What's wrong with that?</p> <p>But that's like the model pose</p> <p>You wish you were her?</p> <p>So what, she gains weight and then loses it</p>	<p>I know, I love her</p> <p>Yeh, she got it smaller she used to have like— a big butt</p> <p>Yeh, she just had, like a butt, you know, a butt Y'all know Nicki Minaj gets shots, like steroids injected into her butt, makes it bigger</p> <p>She used to have, she had, she still, that's why J-Lo has a bigger one than her She used to have, Like, you don't wanna see that thing</p> <p>I don't know Who, Nicki? getn' steroids injected into her butt to make it bigger Oooo, I heard Nicki got um— AIDS Yeh</p> <p>Every time they take pictures of girls they're always posing it's fake they're never just hanging out in a little kid photo no, they're posing, like---- and they have impossible clothes Would you wear that?</p> <p>They pose in every magazine Well it's not natural I wish I were her</p> <p>Yeh, because every time she gains weight she goes on a diet she loses it</p>
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<p>quickly?</p> <p>Well then how do you know she gains weight?</p> <p>So this is pretty cool: it doesn't seem like magazines do much for y'all, like with not enoughness</p> <p>Or they ask celebrities about their favorite foods</p> <p>When you're looking at all of this, do you ever look through and go, ewwww...</p> <p>But what about positive?</p> <p>You go through those pages and do what?</p> <p>Do you?</p>	<p>Yeh, you don't even see it</p> <p>Because of the pictures</p> <p>And they rarely show people eating you rarely see pictures like this unless they're advertising some food then they're eating stuff</p> <p><i>Of course,</i> but then what?</p> <p>Yes, but I keep my opinions to myself I think a lot about the subject I do, when I'm in a bad— when I'm goin' through somethin' when I'm upset</p> <p>Oh, especially when it comes to hair I'll be like, my hair is so much better than hers- everybody compliments my hair- that's why I always do the hair pose</p> <p>I only go through these pages</p> <p>Look at, compare the outfits think about how they would look on me</p> <p>Yeh Yeh Yeh Yeh, I would do that and second of all, I would be like</p>
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<p>Do you really? Are you just saying that?</p> <p>I mean, I do that too</p> <p>Their legs?</p> <p>They're not real. Y'all know about airbrushing? Everyone in here is probably not the original- If they took a picture of me and I had a zit they could just airbrush it out- they can change your whole body shape</p> <p>Really?</p>	<p>that <i>does not</i> go with her body those shoes <i>do not</i> go with her skin Then I'll say, I'll never be caught dead in that dress- that dress wouldn't complement my skin</p> <p>--my body Yeh, my body it wouldn't complement the shape of my body</p> <p>I'm not just saying that I'm for real</p> <p>Whenever they show legs and stuff they're so skinny they make mines feel fat</p> <p>Yeh, the legs some people have scars and stuff-- me and my little sister other people have perfectly smooth-- like they've never got a cut or never got bit by mosquitoes it's just not real</p> <p>Yeh.</p> <p>Last year when we took our pictures if we wanted to buy them, they could take out your pimples, your zits, <i>Everything</i></p> <p>Yeh, they take out your pimples and zits but if you have a cut across your face</p>
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<p>I've never heard of that for school pictures</p> <p>What <i>is</i> normal for a body? What is that? What would that be? Earlier you asked how come they always talk about people gaining weight and not losing---but my question is, How come they talk about people's weight <i>at all</i>? Why do we have to have conversations about people gaining or losing weight? Like Jessica Simpson</p> <p>Sure. But in general, as a society, what do y'all consider a normal body? But what does that mean?</p>	<p>they won't take it out what's the difference?</p> <p>And not only that they can take away a tiny little hair sticking out Yeh, take away all the hairs sticking out- It's called <i>re-touching</i> They let you look at them first then you can go back and tell them what to fix I'm like, what's the point? To make me look normal?</p> <p>I don't think there is a normal</p> <p>People sometimes be proud of their weight-- if somebody a little out of their weight they proud of it so they wanna go and tell everybody</p> <p>Like not too fat, not too skinny</p> <p>I think my body is normal Like perfect, you know, on the scale from the doctor But if you're perfect, you're not normal, you're unique I wouldn't reflect it on weight I know</p>
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<p>Like their sense of being in the world?</p> <p>Beautiful.</p> <p>But that's how you <i>want</i> bodies to be— where we live our culture and its obsession with bodies as you can see everywhere you go in every commercial</p> <p>If you watch TV for 30 minutes diet commercials beauty product commercials How come there aren't ever people who aren't considered-- who aren't this thin?</p>	<p>Yeh Someone's own, like personality</p> <p>How you choose to be How they show people who they are</p> <p>Yeh, how they show people how they are</p> <p>If they carry, like if they're depressed they carry themselves like— I think normal is basically, something, a normal body— they eat more, I guess, or sometimes less</p> <p>A normal body something that has unique stuff it has flaws it has everything flaws and the good stuff it's like positive and negative stuff if it has a mix of both, that's normal yeh because there is no such thing</p> <p>That's why I'm going to Siberia</p> <p>In every magazine, mmm-hmmm</p> <p>Except for Precious, people</p>
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<p>I saw her on the cover of a magazine today</p> <p>What do people say about Precious then?</p> <p>I wonder if that will get to her soon</p> <p>Which is really normal</p> <p>...beautiful, curvy women</p> <p>In our country, the plus size is considered overweight in other countries that's normal a normal body go to Europe Mexico talk to people they say Americans are too thin we're obsessed with thin bodies</p> <p>Our plus sizes are other country's normal</p>	<p>big as Precious</p> <p>They're either going to have people that big that small they don't have nobody normal except for Lane Bryant commercials</p> <p>She's big</p> <p>She don't understand they either like skinny people or big people they don't have normal people Yes They don't like that kind of size</p> <p>Yeh, curvy women They just leave stuff out they leave stuff out, man Or what about JC Pennys the women's section women's plus sizes that's the only time they'll show bodies like that I know, the plus size clothes, they make it ugly but they're making people who are overweight feel bad</p> <p>It's true Yeh, it is</p>
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<p>bodies</p> <p>But how do we do that? when there's <i>this</i> everywhere- when people are obsessed and there are these magazines and people keep buying them over and over they keep seeing these types of bodies only these bodies represented they'll continue to think that's normal, some of them</p> <p>--too skinny, really? Because all of you sitting at this table would be considered too thin</p> <p>You? Yes, you are skinny.</p> <p>So, do y'all ever hear your teachers talking about this stuff we're talking about in any way?</p>	<p>Plus size isn't really people who are fat</p> <p>I was thinking people are like walnuts people should think about other people like walnuts we should not only care about the shell we should think about what's on the inside</p> <p>Not me man it makes me feel horrible I mean, really seeing skinny bodies everywhere</p> <p>Me?</p> <p>I'm not too thin. I'm not even skinny.</p> <p>What if we did what she did in <i>13 going on 30</i>? You know, how she decides to change the image of her magazine-- She uses the people she graduated high school with they are the models for her magazine real people with real bodies</p>
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<p>Not P.E. Well, in any class— Do you read novels or talk about bodies in any way?</p> <p>What?</p> <p>Remember me telling y'all about the 8th grade girls I was hanging out with from your school who were cutting?</p>	<p>In P.E.?</p> <p>Not really I mean, the students do- like they'll judge people if they're fat or skinny-- like if they were fat they'd be like, I'm not gonna be your friend</p> <p><i>Exactly.</i> There are some people that are <i>obsessed</i> with perfection</p> <p>Well, that's just going to make it worse I have had way too much sugar today I've had way too much food I've had too much Sprite— I'm <i>way</i> hyper! I don't feel too good...</p>
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Figure 9. Ubiquitous bodytalk.

Why *Can't* People Be More Like Walnuts?

So there I was, sitting in this all-you-can-eat-pizza joint with six middle school girls at 6:00p.m. on a Tuesday night: a table full of teen magazines, caffeinated and sugar-filled beverages, and all the pizza and dessert one could ever want. Sounds like a dream date, doesn't it? It was for me. *This* would be the night, I thought, where I would finally bring the

participants in my study together and use my finely tuned positive manipulation³⁴ skill to create a “structured conversation,” a focus group, if you will, about bodily-not-enoughness like *I wanted*—even though I wasn’t really sure why I wanted that kind of structure or what might come from it. I just knew they ‘needed’ to have some kind of structured conversation, maybe with a protocol, so I could have some useful data for my dissertation study. I had been meeting with these six girls, plus two more who came intermittently—for three months, once a week, for 1 ½ - 2 hours each week, and the girls had pretty much blown off every attempt I made at formally interviewing them, either individually or in pairs. I have written elsewhere about these multiple, failed attempts of trying to manipulate the girls into some kind of structured talk, because I felt like certain methods and not others might lead me down the golden road, to ‘the secret,’ if you will.³⁵

I will say here, that when I ultimately learned to first *shut my mouth*, and second, listen *differently* through my processes of bridling, I could then truly ‘see’ and appreciate the cornucopia of ‘*useful data*’ that I had been gathering during my time with the girls in my dissertation study. ‘Data,’ let me remind you, that I gathered from a group of twelve-year-old girls, who ended up teaching me a thing or twelve: like, for instance, how to talk-back-TO the cultural practices that discipline our bodies so I could (re)orient my body on those bodylines that are both created by being followed and followed by being created (Ahmed, 2006). And even more, the hard work I have to do as an adult, a researcher, and a teacher educator to be more open to a contingent and recursive relational vision about young adolescents, rather than the developmentally responsive traditions to which I clung. Below, I refer to the multi-voiced,

³⁴ “Positive manipulation” is something that Sarah Bridges-Rhoads and I refer to when we do or say something that is manipulative, but for positive intended outcomes for the person or people, rather than to benefit ourselves in some self-serving way.

³⁵ See “Methodological Moments of Disorientation in Phenomenological Inquiry: ‘The Secret’ for the Perplexed.”

‘found’ poem, “Ubiquitous Bodytalk” in order to explore those processes of becoming more open to a contingent and recursive relational vision about the young adolescent girls in my study. I begin by briefly describing openness as it is referred to by Gadamer (1960/1998) and Hanh (1987) and then highlight different aspects of the poem to point to moments where I was learning about openness and others when I . . . was not.

Bridling³⁶ my way out of Tradition: Gadamer’s Prejudice and My –isms of Development

Gadamer (1960) theorized beautifully about remaining open so we can learn something new, so we can learn the ‘otherness’ of something. He wrote,

We cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meaning about the thing if we want to understand the meaning of another. Of course this does not mean that when we listen to someone or read a book we must forget all our fore-meanings concerning the content and all our own ideas. All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text. But this openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it. (p. 268)

To practice openness is not an effortless act, mind you; it is actually a rather excruciating attempt to accomplish the impossible (perhaps similar to ‘doing’ phenomenology); and the consequences of practicing Gadamer’s approach to openness are quite radical for those of us in the lifeworld—even if it does not seem radical on first thought—because we are “less emancipated from values and other pre-suppositions in our society than we would like to admit” (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 76). According to philosophers in phenomenology, human beings are always already in-the-world-together; we come to understand ourselves through familial traditions, societal traditions, and the states in which we live long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-

³⁶ For more on bridling, again see “Methodological Moments of Disorientation in Phenomenological Inquiry: ‘The Secret’ for the Perplexed.”

examination, ever-reminding us that *we belong to history*, rather than history belonging to us (Gadamer, 1960/1998).

Thinking about how bodies belong to history, and the hold certain traditions can have on bodies sometimes surfacing as impressions on the skin (Ahmed, 2006), makes it possible to think about how we might get *stuck* in a certain traditions, certain ‘truths’ which we might not even be conscious of until we begin practicing the kind of openness Gadamer referred to. This openness to *check ourselves before we wreck ourselves* always reminds me of Thich Naht Hanh’s (1987) notions of releasing the knowledge of what we think we know in order to understand. Hanh suggests that sometime, somewhere we take something to be the truth; and if we “cling to it so much, when the truth comes in person and knocks at your door, you will not open it” (p. 49). Similar to Gadamer’s (1960/1998) notion that we cannot stick blindly to our fore-meanings if we want to come to know ‘otherness,’ Hanh (1987) posits that guarding our knowledge is not a good way to understand; in order to understand we have to “release” or “throw away” our knowledge, because it is solid and blocks the way of understanding.

This act of releasing knowledge, like Hanh suggests, or trying to remain open in order to understand the ‘otherness’ of something or someone, according to Gadamer, involves the acknowledgement of my own fore-meanings and prejudices^{xlix}, because “it is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition” (Gadamer, 1960/1998, p. 270). Gadamer (1960/1998) wrote that the “prejudices and fore-meanings that occupy the interpreter’s consciousness are not at [her] free disposal. [She] cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings” (p. 295). In the same way until I did some serious self-interrogation (bridling), I was not aware of the traditions that were taking up residency in my consciousness—

traditions of developmentalism within the discourses of *PhDness*¹ and *Adolescence*—so I could not separate the productive from the unproductive and was temporarily stuck in misunderstanding.

It did not occur to me, for example, to check myself before I wrecked myself about putting any kind of developmentalism on the girls related to their adolescence, due to the years I spent as a 7th and 8th grade language arts teacher; the literature I had read that debunked the litany of supposed developmental characteristics attached to young adolescents—meaning, the traditional literature that pays little attention to the possibility that identity is a least as much a sociohistorical and cultural construction as it is physiological and psychological development (Beane, 2005); and because of my own published work where I tried to at least interrupt some of grand narrative attached to young adolescent girls’ bodies.³⁷ Gadamer (1960/1998) reminded me however, that foregrounding a prejudice requires suspending its validity for me; but as long as my mind was influenced by this prejudice, I could not consider it a judgment, so how could I foreground it if it was still influencing my consciousness? “It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked. . . . Understanding begins when something addresses us” (p. 299). *Enter the phenomenological processes of bridling*. Writing, re-writing, talking, and questioning my way through all of my frustrations with not being able to “make” the girls participate in some kind of “structured” research process, or not being able to “make” them talk about bodies how I thought they should talk about bodies, I eventually came to understand that traditions of developmentalism were working on me: the historical meaning too often stuck to the term

³⁷ See Hughes, H.E. (2010). Fourteen is the new thirty: Adolescent girls, their bodies, and sexuality. In K. Lee & M.D. Vagle (Eds.) *Developmentalism in early childhood and middle grades education: Critical conversations on readiness and responsiveness*. (149-156).

“adolescence,” a tradition of developmentalism which ostensibly crammed itself onto the bottom of our American education and popular culture shoes that we cannot (or will not) remove.

The Stickiness of Adolescence

To be brief, in the early 20th century G. Stanley Hall (1904) published two volumes, each containing over 1300 pages, which proposed a working (and apparently sticking) definition of “adolescence,” informed by “selective evolutionary and psychoanalytic ideas of Darwin and Freud” (Saltman, 2005, p. 16). Hall posited that adolescence was a crucial period of individual development “in which the individual’s development replayed the development of the human species from primitive savage early humans to civilized White Europeans” (Saltman, 2005, p. 16). If you have ever heard or used the phrase “storm and stress” when referring to young adolescents, this concept came from Hall’s argument that “all young people go through some degree of emotional and behavioral upheaval before establishing a more stable equilibrium in adulthood” (Arnett, 2006, p. 186). This is just one of G. Stanley’s brilliant ideas that I spend much of my time trying to disrupt when working with preservice middle grades education students, because the notion that human beings only experience some degree of emotional and behavioral upheaval during the time period of adolescence has become such a ‘truth’ in education and popular culture discourse, that many seem to think once they graduate from adolescence, they have no need to acknowledge their own continued “stormed and stressed” lives.^{li}

The topping to this American-filled apple pie? Within Hall’s (1904) view, only white middle-class boys “were capable of fully reaching individual development necessary to bear on the burden of carrying civilization forward. Girls and non-Whites could never hope to reach the developmental level of White boys” (Saltman, 2005, p. 16). The point here being, Hall’s original

notions of how youth moved through certain developmental stages (of course, with his added belief that some [white boys] would move up the ‘chain of being’ faster than others [white girls], while others [children of color] could *never* reach ‘true’ civility) were taken up by psychologists, sociologists, and education theorists over the past 100 years, leaving little room for many to think about *adolescence* as a social, historical, and cultural construction. According to Ahmed (2006), an arrival of something, such as the litany of developmental characteristics attached to the term *adolescence* (“storm and stress,” hormonal, explosive, concrete, immature, and self-absorbed, to name a few), takes time; and the time that it takes shapes “what” it is that arrives. *What* arrives, posits Ahmed, is also shaped by the “conditions of its arrival, by how it came to get here. Think of a sticky object; what it picks up on its surface “shows” where it has traveled and what it has come into contact with” (p. 40).

This is how I envision adolescence as it is taken up in popular culture and a majority of educational discourse: time has shaped adolescence in a certain way, and adolescence has brought all of its encounters with it as it has continuously been shaped by those encounters over time. But we are not privy to all of the encounters adolescence has had with various theorists in multiple fields over time, so we may not know all of the historicity stuck to its surface, leaving little room for adolescence to have new encounters, to be considered in ways differently than it has been considered in years past. Numerous scholars^{lii} have written about our American youth in ways that are not complicit in reinforcing the existing bodies of knowledge that keep adolescents and even more, adolescents of color, boxed up in those confining and restrictive ways most familiar to G. Stanley and his motley crew of chauvinists. Lesko (1996), for example, has done fabulous work trying to re-envision how we construct youth by suggesting that adolescents are kept “socially young” because of the chronological ages we assign them. By

encapsulating adolescents in this age-structuring system, Lesko argues we keep them timeless or “always becoming” during their adolescent years, so that they are “both imprisoned in their time (age) and out of time (abstracted), and thereby denied power over decisions or resources” (p. 456). In later work, Lesko (2001) elaborated further on this idea:

Youth are invariably talked about as our future. Adolescence is an emblem of modernity, and time is its defining mode. . . . In my view, adolescence enacts modernity in its central characterization as developing or becoming—youth cannot live in the present; they live in the future, that is, they exist only in the discourse of “growing up.” Adolescence reenacts the evolutionary supremacy of the West over primitive others in its psychologized (internalized) progress from (primitive) concrete operational stages to (advanced) abstract ones. (p. 137)

Lesko (2001) has suggested a reoriented discourse around *adolescence*, “one that strives to capture what she describes as the contingent and recursive nature of growth and change” (Vagle, under review, p. 7). Vagle (under review) explains that Lesko’s perspective,

challenges educators of young adolescents to consider the simultaneity of what may appear to be contradictory identities such as adolescents being mature and immature and learning and learned at the same moments in time, as opposed to being immature and learning at one point in time and necessarily moving toward a state of maturity and learnedness in adulthood. Lesko also stresses the need to think about the blizzard of social factors that influence the lives of adolescents, rather than a straight line which one factor occurs after another. (p. 7)

Taking up Lesko’s call for this reoriented discourse around adolescence, Vagle (under review) suggests further that the young adolescent often gets obscured by the developmental

stages of young adolescence, and therefore makes three pleas to educators of young adolescents: (1) to move from a developmentally responsive vision to a contingent and recursively relational vision; (2) to move from characterizing young adolescen(CE) to particularizing young adolescen(TS); and (3) to move from a ‘sameness’ curriculum to a ‘difference’ curriculum. While all three of these pleas are important to the future well being of young adolescents, I currently identify with Vagle’s first plea: *to move from a developmentally responsive vision to a contingent and recursively relational vision*; because I most often found myself *stuck to the developmentally responsive role* as an adult and a researcher during my dissertation study.

My purpose in writing “Ubiquitous Bodytalk” the way I did, for example, was to illustrate how that mode of developmentalism—the one of me feeling the need to constantly be developmentally responsive to the girls in my study and structure their bodytalk—was stuck to the bottom of my researcher/teacher/adult shoes, and I had a really difficult time pulling it off. Lesko (2001) and Vagle’s (under review) argument that youth cannot live in the present because we position them as ‘always becoming,’ only allowing them to reside in the discourse of ‘growing up’ helped me think about how, as teachers, parents, and researchers, adults are positioned as more knowledgeable than young adolescents; and because of that positioning, some of us often marginalize young adolescents in many ways—‘you aren’t old enough *yet* to understand this’; ‘you haven’t learned enough *yet* to learn this next concept’; ‘you don’t have enough (life) experience to do/say/know/understand that *yet*’—when really, we are on the margins of their lives, so trivial to their ways-of-being-in-the-world.

In the poem, I wanted to visually represent how, as an adult and a researcher *I* was many times on the margins of my own dissertation study when I met with the girls in the Purple Flowers; I strategically placed my speaker-voice on the left side of the page, split off from and

just outside the crux of the girls' conversations. As I continued writing the poem, referring back to the transcripts, the tape of the meeting, and the notes from my bridling journal, I also noticed that the words and phrases I was choosing for the poem highlighted adequately just how inconsequential I was as both researcher and adult to the girls' agenda for our meetings; the words and phrases also pointed to the incredible bodytalk that was always, already taking place when we met each week, needing no help from me. In the first few lines of the poem, for instance, I had the expectation to 'tell' the girls about the magazines I brought and how *I* wanted them to talk about the magazines; but even before I tried to 'make' them stop talking (which I actually never did), they were already looking and talking about the magazines, about the bodies in the magazines, and about their own bodies—all, of course, at the same time. Buttercup acknowledged that "they needed her all through that magazine," while flipping through and observing the different teen models they had chosen for the magazine; Paloma spotted a shirt in another magazine that connected her to bodies and our bodytalk ("I like that shirt: mind, body, spirit: we're going to be talking about our mind and our bodies"); and Alice promptly began thinking out loud about how she could be comfortable enough talking about bodies, only because she was in the safe-space the girls and I created together—that 'supplementary space' we called our writing group.³⁸ I want to point out, however, that Alice had to repeat what she said about how girls are comfortable talking about their bodies around other girls, because I was too busy trying to 'make' the girls do what I thought they 'should be' doing and did not hear her beautiful comment the first time: "Girls, *most girls*, are comfortable talking about their bodies around girls their age, or people they trust, or are close to, but no one else; like, seriously. Or, older people who they trust."

³⁸ For more on the writing group space as a 'supplementary space', see

A similar scenario took place later in the conversation when I attempted to re-direct the food-consumption-surveillance a few of us had just participated in about some cinnamon sticks to some kind of ‘structured’ magazine conversation, and Blossom—to get the attention off of how many cinnamon sticks Sunshine had just told everyone she ate—said she was ready to begin our “session.” This was the first time, by the way, I heard the girls refer to my attempts at structured conversations around bodies as a “session,” and I think the word, itself, illustrates fabulously how *unauthentic* those structured conversations could have felt for the girls—if they would have ever allowed them to take place. The fact that Blossom (and later others) referred to any of my attempts at structuring our bodytalk as “sessions” helped me (finally) see that she (and the others) might feel as if she was in some kind of adult/child, therapist/patient, teacher/student power relation—a power relation I thought I had worked so hard against when I met with the girls.

While I was busy ‘telling’ the girls when to talk and not talk about bodies, they were having a wonderful discussion among themselves, reminding me later when I was typing the transcripts, that if I would have just stopped talking and listened *differently*, I could have heard so much more than I ever might have during some question/answer “session.” From Kim Kardashian’s ‘booty reduction,’ to Nicki Minaj’s ‘booty enlargement,’ there was not much in between that the girls did *not* cover: all the while, with me on the margins trying to either participate awkwardly in the conversation or manipulate it—and finding neither technique very effective.

Writing about this experience as a multi-voiced, found poem really allowed me to see (metaphorically and literally) that I sometimes slipped into the developmentally responsive mode of adulthood by putting the tradition of adolescence on the girls, like below when I was trying to

‘tell’ them how to have a ‘serious conversation,’ rather than valuing (and learning from) the incredible conversation in which they had already been engaged:

No, no, hold on-
 So what I want y’all to do is just look through them
 See what you notice
 --Listen, listen--
 Who’s in there?
 Who’s not?
 How does it all affect you?
 Does it?
 Like do you ever look at some of those pictures
 and think
 Oh, I wish I looked like that

And we’ll have a serious conversation,
 so if one person is talking
 just allow her to talk,
 don’t interject--
 --A protocol,
 we can try a protocol
 just letting one person talk--
 no side stories

By continuously trying to ‘make’ the girls act in a way that I thought they ‘should’ act (not interrupting each other; taking turns and listening to one another talk), or structure their talk how I thought it should be structured, I was assuming I knew the “developmental readiness, needs, and interests of young adolescents,” a concept supposed to be at the heart of middle level education (*This We Believe*, 2010, p. 5). I was not ‘seeing’ the *adolescence* Lesko (2001) argued for when I was with them that night: taking up the contradictions of adolescence as being “simultaneously mature and immature, old and young, traditional and innovative” (p. 196), because developmentalism worked on me; so I perceived their contradictory ways-of-being as “just adolescence.” However, I worked really hard to practice Gadamer’s openness later on while writing and re-writing my way through the analysis of that developmentalism so I could

reach a new understanding. In this way, the format of the poem allowed me to reflect on Vagle's (2011) view about Lesko's (2001) conceptions of remaking adolescence. He writes,

when Lesko (2001) used the word *simultaneously* to describe some of the contradictions young adolescents face, she was not trying to describe adolescence as a tumultuous time in life. Instead, she was trying to dislodge a time-bound, unidirectional conception of growth and change and forward a contingent (i.e., profoundly contextual and dependent) and recursive (i.e., occurring over and over in and over time) conception. (p. 362)


Re-making adolescence in this way, I was able to 'see' how the girls were *theorizing bodies*, negotiating what 'normal' bodies were to them, and how they understood so deeply the skewed the perception of bodies is in American culture. So many thoughtful moments, so many thoughtful ideas about what society does to bodies, and whenever I tried to 'teach' them something about how bodies were disciplined or perceived, they in turn, *taught me more*, so that we were—in the poem—finding ourselves in relation to one another as we all struggled to continually learn and grow with and from each other (Vagle, under review).

The poem that follows this article, "Body of Knowledge" is another visual representation I created from this same bodytalk conversation trying to represent the amazing 'body of knowledge' the girls had when theorizing "normal" bodies. What I realized from my own contingent and recursive journey with the girls is that as adults, we too often create a temporal and spatial gulf between ourselves and our youth; a gulf that presents itself as natural and inevitable (Lesko, 1996), when it is really just a developmental framework that we can re-frame. By doing the work on ourselves and truly practicing Gadamer's openness by interrogating our fore-meanings and prejudices so that we can better understand the 'otherness' of something, rather than assuming we 'know,' so that we can 'be responsive *to young*

adolescents,’ we might at least rattle—if not bust up—that developmental framework that insures adolescent bodies as ‘always becoming’ rather than just ‘being’ (Lesko, 1996).

Body of Knowledge

I don't think there is a normal



Like not too fat, not too skinny	Plus size isn't really people
I think my body is normal	who are fat
Like perfect, you know,	I was thinking
on the scale from the doctor	people are like walnuts
But if you're perfect,	people should think
you're not normal,	about other people
you're unique	like walnuts
I wouldn't reflect it	we should
on weight	not only care
Someone's own,	about the shell
like personality	we should think
How you choose to be	about what's
How they show people	on the inside
who they are	it makes me
how they show people	feel horrible
how they are	I mean, really
If they carry, if they're depressed	seeing skinny bodies
They carry themselves like—	everywhere
I think normal is basically,	I'm not too thin
A normal body—	I'm not even skinny
they eat more, I guess,	What if we did
or sometimes less	what she did
a normal body	in <i>13 going on 30</i> ?
something that has	Real people
unique stuff	with real bodies
it has flaws	they either like skinny people
it has everything	or big people
Flaws and the good stuff	they don't have normal people

Figure 10. Body of knowledge.

CHAPTER 5

TALKING BACK

On Talking Back, by Buttercup

My mom jokes that I need to see a psychologist because I gotta a problem. What's my problem? Bein' crazy. But I'm not crazy. Well, at least *I don't think I am* until one of you adults tells me I am. When I told Hilary that one day during writing group she asked me what bein' crazy meant and I was like, "You know, I'm crazy! Do I need to get a dictionary out for you, Hilary?" and she was all, "No, I know what crazy means to me. I'm just wondering how *you're* defining it."

So Here's How I'm Defining It for Her and for You

Maybe middle school kids aren't crazy; we're just tired of all of you grown-ups contradicting yourselves all the time and that makes us *be crazy*! Like one minute y'all are tellin' us we're "too young" to understand something that's goin' on, and then the very next minute, y'all are sayin' things like, "You need to act more mature about this or that." So which one is it? Are we *too young* or do we need to be *more grown-up*? I mean, I get it, sometimes you don't think we should be hearing things because it might make us E-MO or whatever, but do you think we walk around with earplugs or somethin'? I mean, parents, do you think we can't hear you talkin' in the living room or talkin' on the phone when we're in our bedrooms? Or when we're at school, do you teachers think we don't hear *everything* you're "whispering" about us or our friends *before, during, and after* class; or like, when you think you bein' all discrete, coverin' you mouth with a stack of papers to talk about one of us with another teacher in the hall? (Oh,

and don't even get me started on the "You need to be responsible and get your work in on time" speech we always get when y'all take like *a semester* to get our work back to us.)

And another thing: y'all always telling us to *be* a certain way--be respectful, be polite, don't curse, don't talk about other people like that; and then you turn right around and disrespect each other (or us), use curse words, or rant and rave about your boss or some Wendy's© worker in the drive-thru like they the devil. I call Hilary out on that contradiction stuff because she does it *all the time*! Like, one time she was telling us a story about these redne—ooo, wait, I'm not supposed to use that word; so she was telling us this story about these *really, really country-ignorant-actin'* men who were rude to her and then in the middle of the story she was like, "If they think I'm comin' back to that place, they gotta another thing comin', cuz I ain't goin' back!" Then Alice was tellin' a story (go figure) like 10 minutes later, and she said something like, "She ain't going to make me do that," and Hilary says, "Don't use 'ain't' around me, please." and I was like, "WHAT? You JUST said 'ain't' like *5 minutes ago*!" She said somethin' 'bout using it as a joke because she was making fun of something and she knew the rule of "ain't" so she could break it. So I said, "*Well so does Alice, so what's the difference?*" See what I mean? Walkin' contradictions, you adults.

Y'all think y'all know how to joke around or use irony and we don't? Or are y'all just "allowed" to do that because you old and we not? Maybe somebody can tell me what birthday it is that *we* get to start doin' all those things we're not *s'pose* to be doing, because frankly, I'm over it. I'm tired of people tryin' to tell me how to be, how to look, what to say, what not to say; I'm tired of all y'all *and* all them kids at school tryin' to decide what's best for me. Now don't get me wrong here, people: I'm *very* respectful toward adults. My mom raises me right and I am a child of God. I just don't think it's fair that y'all spend so much time telling us what's right

and wrong, when you sometimes don't even know you-selves. And for the most part, if you'd just "stop, look, and listen" (remember, that's how you learn to cross the street when you're little?), we figurin' it out *just fine*.

You wanna know what I think? (Probably not, but I'll tell you anyway cuz I got your attention now.) I think you don't know what's best for us sometimes and that scares you; *or*, you shut us down because you don't understand what you seein'. You hear us complaining about what's fair and what's not, you see us standin' up for ourselves, and you think back to when you were our age and used to do the same thing before *they* shut *you* down. I don't really know who "they" is, just whoever keeps doing this to every generation of us kids. Why don't you just do what we doin' and *talk back*? If you think about it, when we are talkin' back, we're not tryin' to be 'cheeky' or 'hateful' (well, some of them fools are, but you know what I mean)—we're just trying to make sense out of y'all bein' bi-polar and yellin' at us all the time. (Hilary says calling ourselves or other people bi-polar isn't a very "productive way of describing someone's behavior," but that's what it is, really. Sometimes people are all excited and happy, then the very next second they all sad or mad. Bi-polar. What's left to say about it?)

It kinda seems like y'all have become so used to not allowin' us to say what we think, decidin' we crazy due to "hormonal imbalance," ignoring us completely, or asking us to change how we think or feel when it doesn't match what *you* think or feel, that it's become kinda *normal*, hasn't it--like it's the *job* of adults. Our job, then, is to act all deranged and bi-polar? And for the most part, we're not. Deranged, that is. I'm not sayin' we don't contradict ourselves. Shoot, we do that all the time. But *so do you*! What I'm sayin' is that when we *try* to talk, you don't listen and you *should*. Instead of thinkin' we're "talking back," like in the "we're

so rebellious and impossible” sense, try lookin’ (or listening) a little *differently* some time--try listening to where *we’re* comin’ from. Because trust me, we’re comin’ from places.

Unexpected Manifestations of (Dis)orientation: Learning from Twelve-Year-Old Girls How to Talk-Back in Order to be Enough

The instability of levels produces not only the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our own contingency and the horror with which it fills us. --Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

Writing Myself Out of Unexpected Disorientation: December 2010

I am sitting in a chair early in the A.M. at my gym, across from a fairly new, youthful and confident 200 pound male trainer in need of clients who has been assigned to me for my “free consultation and personal training session.” I have just come from the gym’s new “bod-pod,” where I learned from another youthful and spunky female trainer that the percentage of fat compared to the percentage of muscle in my body (my BMI—body mass index) is “staggeringly high for my age, height, and gender.” Awesome.

Note to Self. I am a 37-year-old woman who is 5 feet, 8 inches tall and 145 pounds. I have been wearing the same size clothes (size 6 or 8) for least the past 10 years, and I have done boatloads of work on mu (many) perceptions of my body in order to be. . . enough, most days of the week.

Unfortunately, finding myself in this present circumstance, I haven’t been to the gym in almost a year, I haven’t worked out at home in a few weeks, and my body feels out of shape to me as I sit across from the 200 pounds of muscle in front of me. So ‘where I am located’ in this moment—my historical as well as the present life conditions which currently surround me—all attribute to the situatedness of the moment.

I was supposed to fill out a questionnaire for this youthful, confident trainer so he could have conversation starting points to make me feel as horrible as possible, I imagine, but being a qualitative researcher, I find questionnaires that are ridiculously constructed and only allow for

extremely limited answers very difficult to complete. And these questions *made sure* to remind this reader of them that she was not enough in the body she came to the gym in today, so I showed it and left most of it blank. “So you’ve been coming here for four years?” Youthful-confident-guy asks as he glazes over the practically blank form with much more surprise in his voice than I think he should have. “Wow. That’s a long time.”

I hear myself start rambling on to Youthful-Confidence about how I had to take some time off because of my neck and shoulder pain, and how I’ve been exercising at home with my husband, and I’m really just here to learn some exercises that will not hurt my neck so I can continue writing my dissertation every day. And on and on and on. Nervous babble because I am headed toward a downward spiral of bodily-not-enoughness right here in this very moment. However, I also recognize after my justification-ramble that I have had so many trainers and gone to so many ‘get fit’ classes and burned through so many exercise videos over the years that I indeed already know *hundreds of exercises* I could do that would not hurt my neck; hell, I could probably teach this kid a thing or two (about tact, anyway).

“Well, let’s see, you like to exercise, it says here—walking, some weights, some of the machines—but obviously you haven’t been doing these things like you should or your BMI wouldn’t be so high, right?” Youthful-Confidence smirks as he looks up from the paper to me. My heart starts racing and my palms immediately begin to sweat. I feel disoriented. My mouth is paralyzed, stapled shut; I want to get up and walk away. Instead, I just sit there, stupefied by his words that are now pounding on my body like 50 pound weights. Not privy to any of this internal angst I am experiencing, Youthful-Confidence continues whittling me down where he needs me: “You wrote here that you don’t want to change your body size, that you have worn the

same size clothes for a while.” This answer, of course, was in response to the most infuriating two-part question of them all posed on the questionnaire:

(a) How would you change your body if you could?

(b) How many clothes sizes would you like to decrease?

“That’s right,” I reply flatly, “I’m totally fine with my body size. I just want to learn some new exercises for my neck and lower back.” *Shit! Why am I letting this get to me? He’s like twelve and just needs a job. Why am I even still sitting here?*

“Are you *sure* you don’t even want to go down *one* size?” Youthful-Confidence pushes on, sounding very confused as to why this woman sitting in front of him who is obviously in need of his special trainer knowledge isn’t complying with the gym discourse he is used to. “I mean, if you want to reduce your BMI, you’re obviously going to reduce your clothes size too. You don’t even want to go down *one dress size*?”

Note to Self. *A sudden flashback to my ten- or eleven-year-old self, standing in the living room with my dad in front of the television. I had just told him I wanted to be a news anchor when I grew up, to which he replied, “That sounds great, honey. Just remember, those people on TV are really, really skinny.”*

Heart pounding, sweat building, I decide this final response to Youthful-Confidence will suffice: that no, I am not interested in losing weight, nor do I even wear dresses enough to want to ‘shrink my size in them;’ and I am writing my *Ph.D. dissertation* (if I say “Ph.D. dissertation” it might intimidate him) on this very thing of bodies and how our society puts too much pressure on bodies to be sucked, thinned, toned, shrunk, and smoothed; so why didn’t we just do this another time because I had a meeting at UGA with *very important people* and I had to go shortly.

“OK, sure. When’s good for you? Monday?” Youthful-Confidence asks in all of his trainer-gee, pulling out his calendar to pencil me in for my ‘free’ training session that will hopefully, for him, still lead to me hocking my road bike to pay for more personal training sessions so he can help me transform into “a smaller size,” some other time. I feel even more disoriented in this gym-hell and am even more surprised when I hear a voice, obviously someone else’s, coming from my body giving Youthful-Confidence a time for our replacement training session the next day. “Great. Well, you should have about 40 minutes left before your meeting today so that should be plenty of time for you get some hard cardio in for 20 minutes and then shower up.”

Fifteen minutes later, standing with my body stiff and tense in the shower as the scorching water pounded down on it, my heart was racing even faster (if that was possible), and my furry was building with every second. I was exasperated and jumbled as to how all of this had just happened. To ME, of all people: the person writing her dissertation on this very subject! I hadn’t even stayed on the elliptical machine to exercise because I was so incensed at what had just taken place, and my way of ‘showing him,’ I had decided (because it was the best I could come up with at the time) was by *not* doing “20 minutes of hard cardio.” But as I stood there in the shower, I could not feel the justice I yearned for, because a brief encounter with some arbitrary 20-year-old man had just brought into being *my own* bodily-not-enoughness; and I was enacting a “why me, why this, why now” vulnerability (or victimization) practically on cue.

And then I thought of my dissertation study again, this study of bodies. And the girls in the study. And how almost *every single time* a moment like this cropped up for one of them—a moment when someone or something told them they were not enough *of something* in their bodies—I expected to observe that not-enoughness come into being as something similar to *this*

vulnerability/victimization that I was experiencing this very moment. But what I had witnessed instead was their not-enoughness coming into being as some kind of *resistance-TO* vulnerability/victimization. I learned that they were always, already doing whatever they could to *not* become victims of or vulnerable to the injurious language and societal messages that permeate American culture, telling us every day, all day that we are not enough in our bodies. And if any *one* of them was here in my place, I imagined right then, she would have *talked-back-TO* this moment, this man, who was simply embodying the role of repeated and habitual actions that shape bodies over time (Ahmed, 2006). She might have raised her eyebrows, cocked her head to one side and said, “*Oh, I don’t need no trainer, honey! If you don’t like this body for what it is, then you gonna have to find someone else, because I don’t lose no weight for nobody, baby!*” ^{liii}

I got out of the shower, dressed, and went to find Youthful-Confidence; and (with the girls metaphorically backing me up) said something to this effect: “You know, I’m not going to come tomorrow. I’m not going to do a training session with you at all, actually. Because, why would you say those things to someone who actually feels *good* in her body, who is content with what she looks like? It’s not OK that you said what you said to me, and that’s why I’m not going to do a training session with you. You need to respect where people are when you’re talking to them about their bodies; you need to listen to what people want and then *maybe* you’ll be a good trainer.”

That should be the happy ending to this tale about bodies. But it is not. Because this is America. And I was talking to a trainer in a gym who lives in a culture obsessed with a thinness ideal that is both unrealistic and unattainable, an ideology that teaches more of us than not that we are “less-than” more days than not. “Well, this is America, like you said,” Youthful-

Confidence reminded me, in case I accidentally thought I was in Peru, “and there are fat people and there are skinny people, and about 99% of the women who come in here want to be skinny.” He smiled at me with pride, I’m guessing, because he used a percentage.

“And that’s because trainers like you say things like you do when they are not warranted and so people who look like me end up feeling like they are not enough in their bodies because people like you keep perpetuating this ridiculous obsession!” I smiled back, and then calmly walked away from that experience being more certain than I had ever been that we *have* to start talking about bodies in our country in ways *other* than how to FIX THEM!

Perhaps moments of disorientation are needed: bodily experiences that “throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 157), in order to remind us of our own contingency in the world, our own humanness. This bodily feeling of disorientation can indeed be unsettling; “it can shatter one’s sense of confidence in the ground or one’s belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable” (p. 157). The above vignette was an embodied moment of disorientation for me, a bodily experience that might not have shattered my sense of confidence in the ground, but that definitely shook the ground beneath me, which I depend on to feel ‘at home’ in my body. The giddiness in my nausea, however, was the realization that I was able to employ what I learned from the young adolescent girls who participated in my dissertation study as a tool to reorient myself on a cultural ‘line’ that has been both created by being followed and been followed by being created (Ahmed, 2006). By cultural lines, I mean those lines that direct our bodies in some ways more than others in American culture—lines of thought as well as lines of motion—*bodylines*, if you will, that “depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but that [are] also

created as an effect of this repetition” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 16). The bodylines that I refer to here are those which teach us how to *be* in our bodies—no, not just how to *be*, how to be *better*:

(W)thinner, (H)toner, (I)tighter, (T)lighter, (E)younger, (R)smarter

Yet, in the midst of this epoche of body destabilization (Orbach, 2009), I learned that resistance and resilience are still possible and lived by a group of twelve-year-old girls. Therefore, I “attempt to accomplish the impossible” (van Manen, 1990) in the subsequent pages: to explore the “rings of potentialities” (Caputo, 1988), which envelop the subtle structures of bodily-not-enoughness. I suggest that injurious language^{liv} was usually the intentional object that contributed to the girls’ bodily-not-enoughness coming into being as some kind of resistance, with me there, in a re-telling, a re-living, or in their writing, a resistance which I have named *talking-back-TO* that injurious language/message (not thin-enough, girl-enough, fit-enough, pretty-enough, academic-enough, wealthy-enough, English-speaking-enough, white-enough, Christian-enough, and popular-enough, to name a few), which in turn allowed for *being enough* in their bodies (rather than not) to become a situated truth for the girls during those moments. I present numerous *situated*, *sensitive*, and *embodied* (Ahmed, 2006) moments when some intentional object^{lv} was telling the girls they were not enough *of something* in their physical and lived bodies, and rather than that bodily-not-enoughness coming into being as some kind of vulnerableness^{lvi} (e.g., showing some kind of susceptibility to teasing, criticism, or slander), which I many times anticipated when in my “natural attitude,”³⁹ those moments instead seemed to manifest some kind of resistance.

I attend to some of the particularities attached to those moments, as well as the situated and sensitive locatedness of the girls (and me), in order to remain steadfast to the notion held

³⁹ For more on the ‘natural attitude’ and the ‘phenomenological attitude,’ see “Methodological Moments of Disorientation in Phenomenological Inquiry: ‘The Secret’ for the Perplexed.”

first by Husserl that lived experience always “contains a *plus ultra*; it always means more than ‘what is meant at that moment explicitly’” (Caputo, 1988, p. 40). Caputo elaborates on Husserl’s notion of *plus ultra*:

Properly understood, the principle of all principles is a principle of suspicion which suspects that there is more to what is given than it gives itself out to be. Thus the phenomenon is not taken by Husserl (1988) to be pure presence. . . but a complex of presence and absence, or better, the explicit and the implicit, the actual and the potential. The only way to stay with the given as given is to appreciate that it is always more than it gives itself out to be. “Consciousness of. . .” is always consciousness of something *more*, of hitherto unnoticed factors. (p. 40)

There was always something more to the moments I present to you in these pages—unnoticed factors, unexamined factors, under-examined factors—and there will always be limitless inaccessibility in lifeworld research because of that *plus ultra-ness* of lived experiences, my own locatedness and inaccessibility, and the limits of language. But what did come into being most of the time reminded me that it *is* possible for girls and women to reorient ourselves on those bodylines that have been historically created by being followed and followed by being created in order to be enough in our *phenomenal-bodies*.^{lvii}

Author’s Note. The scene that takes place below is written as a short story excerpt of the bodytalk that took place between a few of the girls and me when not-enoughness joined our conversation and some kind of resistance as a talking-back-TO seemed to come into being for one of the girls, Buttercup. The dialogue is taken directly from the transcripts of our first spring meeting in January 2009; no dialogue was altered, just written ‘around.’ The scene is meant to illustrate the injurious language the girls sometimes put on one another as some “I’m just joking” discursive rhetoric in which many Americans participate; as well as how Buttercup’s bodily-not-enoughness seemed to come into being as a talking-back-TO the injurious language put on her body.

*Precious unique special and loud
 I am what I am
 This aint fake, It's reality
 'Cause I am what I am
 No one can take that from me (Buttercup, 2009)*

"This is our first writing workshop, Whooop! Whooop!" I shouted excitedly into the recorder in my best animated cheerleader voice.

"...and I'm about to get another cookie," Buttercup interjected. The girls laughed at her attempt to mock my cheerleader excitement.

"...and it's going straight to your thighs," Sunshine responded to Buttercup from across the room. Multiple "Ooooooooo's," flew out from the other girls' mouths and a few looked to me to see how I would react, due to the three months prior we had spent together having multiple conversations about injurious language, which Sunshine was not privy to as this was her first day as a Purple Flower. "Noooooooooo!" I yelled in a dramatically descending voice. Sunshine looked up from the *J-14* magazine I had brought with a startled look on her face, as if she was confused about why I would even respond to this normally accepted discourse of negative bodytalk. "OK, first of all, I can't believe you just said that," I said to Sunshine, trying to keep a smile on my face and in my voice so she wouldn't think I was mad.

"Man, I know this," Buttercup added, putting her hands on her hips to mock my authoritative voice. I turned to Buttercup: "Girl you look good. Don't even go there," I reassured her, "there" meaning any kind of vulnerability that might have been lurking.

"You can see I'm still eatin' 'em!" She responded pointedly, cookie waving in one hand above her head.

"*Exactly.*" I said, in case she needed my approval to keep eating her cookie, I imagine? "Sunshine, we don't count cookies in here. Anybody can eat anything they want..." I said, still trying to keep a friendly face and voice so I didn't seem too "teacher-ee" on this first day of our 'new' writing group.

"*Hey,*" Buttercup snapped jokingly over to Sunshine, who was now looking with serious curiosity around the room, maybe due to this scene her response had caused. "I can eat as many cookies as I want!" Buttercup persisted, continuing to wave the cookie back and forth in front of her body. In lieu of Buttercup's mockery of my authoritative stance, I looked over to Sunshine and added, "Judger," and then gave her a wink.

"Yeah, don't judge us," Alice joined in, smirking.

"We eat and we write. And that's what we do" I said, as I grabbed a handful of Goldfish for myself, and then passed a cookie to Sunshine so we could move past this *cookied-moment*. In that same moment, as Alice was reminding me that she actually *ate*, *wrote*, and *drew*, in case I had forgotten since she showed me her most recent characters for her novel ten minutes prior, Buttercup waltzed over to the cookies, took another one, swung it back and forth over her head exaggeratedly while looking at Sunshine, and bellowed, "THIRD, number three! Look, third!" and then crammed the cookie into her mouth. As the girls began laughing, Paloma chimed in with a delayed response to my 'we eat and we write' claim with a, "YEH! And then when we get fat we can write about how fat we got." I shot a 'look' over to Paloma wondering why she was even mentioning getting "fat," in her slim body, and Sunshine glanced toward Buttercup and then back to her magazine and reminded her, "I'm just kidding. You can eat as many cookies as you want."

"Because remember," I added, in my best 'researcher' voice, "what I am interested in is how culture and our society affects middle school girls and their bodies. When you feel like you're good enough---"

"And you're really contributing nicely," Buttercup interjected to Sunshine, "talkin' about how many cookies I ate. I'll eat as many cookies as I want."

"That's right," I echoed and clapped my hands like we were in a call-response-church moment. Buttercup took my cue and raised her hand up to her congregation: "I loooooove cookies! Cookies are my favorite!"

"That's right," I echoed again behind her, as the girls laughed at our tomfoolery.

"I'm gonna write A POEM about cookies!" Buttercup spouted as she grabbed her writer's notebook and mocked exaggerated motions of writing on the pages. Then, in her most authoritative voice, Paloma wrapped up our cookied-moment by reminding us what we were here for: "OK, let's get to writing. I brought my notebook and I'm ready to write."

Twenty minutes later, some of the girls were talking about their respective churches, what movies they thought we might need to see soon, and what magazines they wanted me to bring next time, when Buttercup casually walked over to get another cookie. "Y'all gonna make me fat." She said as she took a cookie from the plastic container.

"You mean *fatter*?" Paloma came back with, and sudden "Oooooooooos" echoed throughout the room. "Oooooo, you are mean." Sunshine shot toward Paloma, and then looked to Buttercup to see how she would respond. Buttercup conjured up a dramatically-purposeful pseudo-laugh and her jaw fell open in mocked *and* actual disbelief at what Paloma had just said to her. "I can't believe PALOMA said that," Buttercup shouted as she looked over to me, "I mean, I don't care, but I can't believe *Paloma* said that!" Buttercup

looked directly at Paloma as she strategically positioned her hands in the air and began waving them excitedly so her body could *express* this disbelief as she spoke, and her flailing gestures made Paloma laugh even harder.

“And she call ME mean!” Sunshine proclaimed to me from across the room, as I was also staring/glaring at Paloma quite puzzled, due to the rather reserved position she had taken during our writing group meetings three months prior to this day. Buttercup looked over to me, jaw still dramatically hanging open and said, “I don’t care about them saying it, but *PALOMA?*” The girls all began laughing, nervously, it seemed, not really sure if they *should be* laughing and not really sure what Buttercup was going to do next.

“I’m coming out of my shell!” Paloma cracked through doubled-over laughter in her chair. As she sat back up tears were streaking her face from laughing so hard, and Buttercup started toward her, climbing over desks and chairs, agreeing in a high squeal, “Yeeehhhhhhhh! I can’t believe YOU of all people said that about MEEE!” Wanting to “fix” this moment, I interjected, “Yeh, and she’s *not* fat!” Buttercup stopped in her tracks and folded her arms in a satisfied pose at my comment.

“I know. I was just playing with her.” Paloma reassured me, as she continued wiping the tears away from her eyes. And then it was as if this *intersubjective moment* happened, and some kind of resistance-FOR Buttercup seemed to come into being for a few of the girls as they began giving Buttercup “bodily assists.” Alice stopped drawing in her notebook and looked over to Buttercup reassuring her, “You’re *so* thin!”

“She’s petite. She’s so little. Girl, you little.” Sunshine added, and Buttercup looked at Sunshine with surprise, chuckling sarcastically back at her: “I’m short? Great!”

Again, I felt the need to ‘assist.’ “That isn’t what petite—petite people are short wasted, short...”

“---everything,” Sunshine filled in.

“I know, I was just messin’ with her.” Buttercup reminded me, and then plopped down in a chair next to Paloma and grabbed her writer’s notebook to let us know this cookied-moment-part-deux was over.

As this whole cookied-experience began to unfold, it seemed like Buttercup’s bodily-not-enoughness came into being as *a-talking-back-TO* the “I’m just joking” bodytalk Sunshine put on her (“and it’s going straight to your thighs”)—a resistance that might close-off a susceptibility to being wounded by the message(s) coming from the injurious language. And while Buttercup was *in* this resistance, it seemed to continue as this *talking-back-TO*: “Third, number three! Look, third!”/ “I loooooooooove cookies! Cookies are my favorite!”/ “I’m gonna write a POEM about cookies!” reminding herself and the rest of us that her body would not be a casualty of injurious language right then.

Paloma’s addition to the “I’m just joking” bodytalk that occurred later this day not only surprised Buttercup, it also surprised me. Paloma had been fairly reserved with respect to the “I’m just joking” discursive rhetoric during the three months prior, and when she “came out of her shell” that day, she seemed to not go back inside it. As for Buttercup, this resistance as a talking-back-TO that came into being was oftentimes *situated in humor*. Buttercup often embodied humor when something or someone was telling her she was not-enough in her body, as she did with this cookied-moment: traipsing all over the room, waving cookies in the air, cramming cookies in her mouth, and doing anything else she could to be theatrical in that

cooked-moment. Buttercup was exceptionally theatrical and often that drama played out as a comedy, while other times it played out as a tragedy; but either way, humor usually accompanied her embodied interaction with not-enoughness.

There was so much going on during that moment when Paloma interjected her “I’m just joking” bodytalk (“You mean *fatter*?”), and I was perplexed because I observed something different than what had taken place just twenty minutes earlier. When Sunshine made the comment about Buttercup’s cookie-eating, Buttercup’s not-enoughness, as I said before, seemed to come into being as a talking-back-TO that injurious language. However, when Paloma made the “You mean *fatter*?” comment, Buttercup’s astonishment of how *Paloma* could have been the one to make that ‘kind’ of bodied-comment about her, seemed to be more *disorientation* than resistance. Perhaps Buttercup was taken aback by Paloma making the “You mean *fatter*?” comment because she and Paloma were becoming friends *outside* of our Purple Flowers writing space, whereas she and the other girls did not share as much of that ‘social’ space outside of the writing group space. Buttercup was also referred to often by the Purple Flowers as “one of the popular girls in school,” as well as the “most popular” of this group; and this subject-position of popularity was a huge point of contention for most of the Purple Flowers, or at least one of the contributors to their not-enoughness. Buttercup spent time each week when we met reporting on how so many of her friends (outside of the Purple Flowers) called her “big” or “fat” as a “joke,” so perhaps she did not expect anyone in “this” group (girls who were not as popular as she was?) to engage in the “I’m just joking” bodytalk that her other, “more popular” friends seemed to do quite often.

These are only gestures of perhaps-ness, mind you, *intended thoughts* about the ‘background’ of Buttercup’s bodily-not-enoughness coming into being in a given moment

(Ahmed, 2006; Husserl, 1970/2002). Ahmed (2006) writes that phenomenology for Husserl meant apprehending the object as if it were unfamiliar, “so that we can attend to the flow of perception itself” (p. 37). What this flow of perception shows us, though, is not what is in *view*; rather, what is absent from the view—the partiality of absence. The *partiality of perception* is not “only about what is not in view, but also what is ‘around’ it, which we can describe as the background. The figure “figures” insofar as the background both is and is not in view” (p. 37). We single this object out “only by pushing other objects to the edges or ‘fringes’ of vision” (p. 37).

Additionally, Ahmed suggests that the object itself may *have* a background, which would be understood as “that which must take place in order for something to appear” (pp. 37-38). The background of Buttercup’s not-enoughness coming into being as this talking-back-TO the injurious language at first, and then seemingly becoming disoriented by Paloma’s later comment, then, could be about the social hierarchies that might dictate who is allowed to say what in the girls’ school; what Buttercup’s expectations are for different girls in the writing group and how she interacts with them; the possibilities are limitless. When exploring these possibilities and their limitlessness, I also have to remember that there was a partiality of absence in those moments. What I did not see (the back or side of the object, phenomenology-speaking), was hidden from view and can therefore only be intended (Ahmed, 2006). Meaning, I only had access to Buttercup’s embodied disorientation after “jokingly” being called ‘fatter’ by Paloma; and I had access to the humor that situated itself in and on her body during both cookied-moments, as well as other times I met with the Purple Flowers, that seemed to be a major part of Buttercup’s being-in-the-world.

Buttercup's bodily-not-enoughness seemed to come into being as this talking-back-TO in her writing as well; sometimes it came with humor, but mostly with the utmost sincerity. In a poem she wrote during our first writing group meeting in the fall of 2009, for example, Buttercup's not-enoughness seemed to come into being on the page as some kind of resistance, perhaps a talking-back-TO the white, middle-class dominant culture's standard of beauty, which Buttercup *clearly* understood did not mirror her own physicality.

I'm me. Not some perfect model you see on T.V.
 I'm me. I'm as real as it gets--not some fake Barbie doll
 I'm a prize. You have to work hard to win me
 I got an ego out of this world! Maybe the biggest in history
 I'm a smart black girl with attitude
 I'm a lover not a fighter
 I'm wonderful and free. I'm not the type that would fit your standards
 I don't have to be liked because I love me
 I'm not to be judged because God made me
 I have plenty of confidence. I trust my gush.^{lviii}

Buttercup narrates a powerful and telling situated confidence in these lines from a *raced/gendered/religious place-of-enoughness* ("I'm a smart black girl with an attitude/ I'm not to be judged because God made me") which seems impenetrable--as if she is the girl we want girls to be—self-assured and unscathed by fictitious representations of bodies constructed by popular culture in our society. The attributes she lists in the poem are beautiful illustrations of not-enoughness coming into being on *this* page, in *this* moment as a talking-back-TO the unattainable expectations for multiple bodies set forth by American consumerism. Buttercup writes that she is "a prize you have to work hard to win," she has "an ego out of this world. Maybe the biggest in history," she is "wonderful and free—not the type that would fit your standards," and she is a "smart black girl with attitude." These lines also point to her understanding of how bodies are disciplined in American culture, her awareness of how the way

she is trying to be-in-the-world probably does not coincide with the normalized standards set forth by dominant ideologies.

There were a multitude of other moments where Buttercup's awareness of dominant ideologies that have an effect on bodies of color was present, as well. She wrote in her writer's notebook, for example, about how she experienced life as a "light skinned" African-American girl in a region of the country where people questioned the 'black' of her 'blackness' due to the *lightness* of her skin.

Everywhere and anywhere I turn I'm reminded of what I am not. They all say, "You can't be black, look at you." Or "Why are you so light skinned?" Well, let me explain. I am a young African-American girl who feels that I am not enough because of my color. They say, "Are you mixed?" I say, "No." They look as if they are amazed. They act as if they've never seen a light skinned person before. They say, "Are you serious? You expect me to believe that your mama and daddy are both black?" "Yes," I say. They laugh and walk away. They call me a lie. I just want to cry. Someday I'll defend myself. I've proven it many times, but they're going to hear me. Dats a promise!

According to Fanon (1986), once race is inscribed on the body, it cannot be erased. Additionally, Banks (2003) suggests that once some kind of meaning is inscribed on the body, it may "control the readings we do of ourselves, our experiences, and others" (Banks, 2003, p. 25). This piece is a powerful example of how a *certain kind of* race was inscribed on Buttercup's body when the questioned was posed about her being "so light skinned": the racialized history of "passing for Black" (Fordham, 2010).^{lix} A *racialized*-bodily-not-enoughness, then, seems to come into being on this page as a resistance-IN-vulnerableness, as a talking-back-TO the injurious language people put on Buttercup's body, telling her she was *not-black-enough* because of the 'light skin' in which she was born. She writes that yes, people calling her a "lie" makes her want to "cry" because they do not believe both of her parents are African American due to the lightness of her skin; so the *racialized context* could have fragments of vulnerableness tethered to it, some susceptibility to being wounded by the denigrating comments people make.

However, this experience does not seem to *end in vulnerableness*. If Buttercup had stopped writing at, “They call me a lie. I just want to cry,” vulnerableness with no resistance-IN that vulnerableness might be something to explore. Consequently, this piece ends with Buttercup *promising* us that she will defend herself someday: she has proven it many times, and we *will* hear her! Her words demonstrate how racialized-not-enoughness comes into being on the page as a talking-back-TO a vulnerableness that could have been brought on by the injurious language. The important thing to note here is that there *was* some kind of resistance, a talking-back-TO that injurious language.

The telling lines in this next poem from Buttercup’s writer’s notebook also exhibit how Buttercup’s racialized-not-enoughness as a *teenage, female, African American body* came into being as a talking-back-TO those very same descriptors (teenage, female, African American) that were put on her as injurious societal messages.

“You’re slow,
 You’ll never make it!”
 They strive to see us African
 Americans fail.
 “You belong to me--
 You should be cleaning
 and preparing my dinner!”
 They think that women are made
 to be personal slaves.

“What do you know?
 You’re a 12 year old girl!”
 They figure we’re nothing,
 have no opinions.
 Just remember those 3 words
 that were in ALL of America’s
 hearts January 21, 2009:
 YES WE CAN!

The lines which open this poem, again, point to Buttercup’s astute awareness of the pervasive racialized (and gendered) messages that still saturate our classrooms, television

screens, and government policies, telling Buttercup (and millions of others) that she is not enough in her African American body, her female body, her teenage body; the lines which close this poem, however, illustrate a talking-back-TO those injurious messages: “Just remember those 3 words / that were in ALL of America’s / hearts January 21, 2009: YES WE CAN.”

Consequently, those three words, which themselves *embody* this resistance as a talking-back-TO the injurious societal messages, seem as if they are put on this page to *add momentary pause to*, or *close-off* any kind of susceptibility to being wounded that could have come into being for Buttercup’s not-enoughness. Again, the *situatedness* of the injurious messages could have brought vulnerableness to Buttercup’s experience—when she heard any one of those comments, or even when she recalled them on the page later; and yes, it is both nauseating and infuriating to be reminded of the incessant societal bigotry our youth of color continue to encounter; but these are the lines we have on this page, and just as Buttercup does not stop writing at “I want to cry” in the “Everywhere and anywhere I turn, I am reminded of what I am not” piece above, she does not stop writing in this poem until those three words: YES WE CAN. All spaced accordingly so we can breathe in the importance of their meaning just a little more.

In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou (1969) wrote, “If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat. It is an unnecessary insult” (Preface). In this next poem, I point you to Buttercup’s own awareness of her black-body’s displacement amongst white-bodies, and how this racialized-not-enoughness *again*, comes into being on the page as some kind of resistance-to that displacement; as a talking-back-TO the incessant malevolent messages she receives as an African American teenage girl.

I'm not just liked for my looks
 I am liked for my personality and smarts
 I am not just a 'little black girl'
 I am smart, talented, special, and loved
 I am not fake; if you're lookin' for fake
 buy a Barbie doll
 I am real and wonderful because I know
 what I want in life and I don't let people
 change that
 I am not what they say
 I am slowly learning not to take it to heart
 I am not mean
 I am sweet and sensitive
 I am not dumb or slow
 I am smart and funny, in my own ways
 I am not what they think
 I am what I know

These lines not only reveal the attributes Buttercup has that she brings forth in direct, binary opposition to the injurious messages being put on her body ("I am *not* just a little black girl/ I *am* smart, talented, special, and loved/ I am *not* what they say/ I *am* slowly learning not to take it to heart/ I am *not* mean/ I *am* sweet and sensitive/ I am *not* dumb or slow/ I *am* smart and funny/ I am *not* what they think/ I *am what I know*"), they also show the incredible resilience Buttercup's words *embody*, even when someone or something is insistent upon telling her she is not enough. As readers, we have no way of accessing the "they" in Buttercup's poems; we can only infer the background of this phenomenon as it manifests different layers of resistance, while also acknowledging the insistence of the words to resist and rise above the messages being put on her body. Maya Angelou's poem, "Still I Rise," which we read during writing group one week, reminds me of this embodied resilience that is so present in all of Buttercup's writing. I can read the resistance in these stanzas just as I read it in Buttercup's writing; and I might be able to understand Buttercup's own racialized-not-enoughness more deeply by reading Maya Angelou's racialized-not-enoughness also coming into being on the page as a talking-back-TO

the societal messages that continued to tell her she was not-enough in her African American body.

“Still I Rise”
--Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.
Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Embodied Writing

Maya Angelou's writing here seems to *embody* a similar talking-back-TO that Buttercup's writing did before it; and those lines composed by a twelve-year-old girl are just as powerful to me as those composed by an internationally recognized, Pulitzer nominated poet, because both of these bodies have been racialized in America, creating another layer of complexity in the phenomenon of bodily-not-enoughness: racialized-bodily-not-enoughness. And like Maya Angelou's words, Buttercup's words also repeatedly *embody* a talking-back-TO the injurious messages that have been put on her racialized body, telling those messages that some may shoot her with their words, they may cut her with their eyes, they may kill her with their hatefulness, but still, like air, she *will* rise.

Even though Buttercup's physical body does not occupy space in the writing above, I suggest that her writing is written *through the body*, that it is *embodied writing* (Alerby, 2009; Banks, 2003). According to Banks (2003), embodied writing "hedges because the body hedges, moves in fits and starts, pushes toward puberty and holds back, has days without knee pain and days with" (p. 25). When one writes *through the body*, as in Maya Angelou and Buttercup's writing above, and Alice's writing soon-to-come, the writing makes the same tentative steps that the body does, and as readers, we can identify with those moments as metaphors of our own

lived experiences (Banks, 2003). Moreover, what Buttercup's embodied writing is doing here is rendering our tacit knowledge about racial embodiment explicit (Alcoff, 1999), as embodied writing comes from embodied thinking.

When I read certain lines from Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise," for example, ("Does my sassiness upset you?/ Why are you beset with gloom?/ 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells/ pumping in my living room/ Does my sexiness upset you?/ Does it come as a surprise/ that I dance like I've got diamonds/ at the meeting of my thighs?"), those lines *become mine*, because even though we are writing/living as women with different bodily-descriptors, different histories, and different lived, racialized experiences, I understand the "sassiness" and "sexiness" of Angelou's body like I do my own. Additionally, I understand the "sassiness" of Angelou's body like I understand Buttercup's bodily "sassiness." When I read certain lines from Buttercup's writing, ("I am not fake; if you're lookin' for fake/ buy a Barbie doll/ I am real and wonderful because I know/ what I want in life and I don't let people/ change that/ I am not what they say/ I am slowly learning not to take it to heart"), those lines also become mine, because that twelve-year-old girl is embodying a certain way-of-being *through her writing* that I wish to embody as a thirty-seven-year-old woman. Perhaps this is similar to the "phenomenological nod" that van Manen (1990) describes from Buytendijk, where we can give a nod to a good phenomenological description because we recognize it as an experience we either have had or could have.

I not only read and connect with those lines from Buttercup's and Angelou's writing, I recognize them as embodied ways-of-being that I either live or want to live. I also eventually come to a place as a reader where I have read those lines, the lines of others, *with/beside/against* my own experiences, and theirs; experiences I may not have fully understood until my own historicity and those lines came into play together (Banks, 2003). I can now understand

Buttercup's racialized-bodily-not-enoughness coming into being as a talking-back-TO just a little more, as I understand Angelou's racialized-bodily-not-enoughness coming into being as a talking-back-TO, because I have *metaphorically mapped their bodies onto and through each other's, as well as my own* (Banks, 2003). The resulting "text" I now carry around in my head is neither Buttercup's nor Angelou's—it is now a "snapshot of the shifting relationship that developed as these amorphous 'texts' spoke to one another" (Banks, 2003, p. 26). And as Banks reminds me, the picture becomes blurred "because the film speed can't be fast enough to keep these boundaries distinct" (p. 26). Any "meaning" or "theory" I now have for *racialized-bodily-not-enoughness*, Ahmed's (2006), Angelou's, Buttercup's, and Fanon's (1986) is now 'personal': "I carry it in my body. I do not know where it ends and I begin" (p. 26).

Alice: My brain is an avocado light bulb.

Hilary: What does that mean?

Alice: Well, I'm smart, but at the same time, people don't think I am, and because of that they replace me with an avocado. Understand?

Like Buttercup and Angelou, Alice was also extremely aware of the injustices in our society. She lived both intellectually and quizzically in the world, and it was Alice's intellect and wittiness that accompanied this talking-back-TO whatever or whomever was telling her she was not enough *of something* in her body.^{lx} The talking-back-TO that seemed to come into being for Alice's not-enoughness was many times in response to the unjustness of being gendered in her family, school, and society; social-class; cultural beauty standards; popularity as it related to her own acceptance (or rejection) by peers; and teacher fairness. She wrote dozens upon dozens of poems and initiated even more conversations questioning the "why" of it all, informing us on the multiple ways peers/culture/teachers/family/friends were busy at work telling her she was not

enough in her body (as a girl, a Mexican-American-girl, a girl from a working-poor family, a girl who was not in the “popular” crowd); and this bodily-not-enoughness seemed to consistently come into being as some kind of resistance-TO all of these messages of not-enoughness on the page and in her talk, through a talking-back-TO.

This first poem, “I’m Not a Rose,” speaks to Alice’s not-enoughness coming into being on the page as a talking-back-TO whoever put the injurious language of being “ugly” on Alice’s body.

I’m Not a Rose

you called me ugly
and said I’m not a rose
well sit down and listen to what I have to say
I’m not the kind of girl who wastes her time to look thin
I’m not that kind of girl to run off with her boyfriend for no reason
I’m not mean buy honey I can get nasty
I’m not a rose but I do have thorns
I’m not pretty but I have a huge heart
I’m not perfect but I’m good enough
you say I’m ugly
but I’m sort of pretty
well little miss perfect
It’s your time to talk
when was the last time you gave someone a hug?
When was the last time you saw someone who was depressed and think I’m going to help them?
I might not look like a prom queen
and I know I’m not a rose
but if you took the time to listen you would know
you’re not even close.

Like Buttercup’s lines earlier, these lines from Alice are gripping. They are talking-back-TO peers at school, to society, to whoever imposed the injurious language on Alice. And in this moment on the page for Alice, like for Buttercup earlier, her not-enoughness seemed to manifest some kind of resistance-IN the vulnerableness that envelopes the situatedness of being called *ugly*—a talking-back-TO this malevolent message that was put on her body. These lines do not

reveal a girl dwelling in what could have been her situated truth: becoming a casualty in the beauty-bodytalk game of not-enoughness; instead, the lines point to the *embodied attributes* she possesses that allow her to *be enough in her body*, no matter what others say or think: “I’m not pretty but I do have a huge heart/ I’m not perfect but I’m good enough/ you say I’m ugly/but I’m sort of pretty.” Words taking hold of not-enoughness and talking-back-TO it: “When was the last time you gave someone a hug?/ When was the last time you saw someone who was depressed and think, ‘I’m going to help them?/ I know I’m not a rose/ but if you took the time to listen you would know/ you’re not even close.” Additionally, these lines, like Buttercup’s lines before, *name* the awareness Alice has of how others might perceive her as not-enough, yet she simultaneously lists the ways in which she can rise above those negative perceptions.

Another of her pieces that she wrote during school, “Unlock the Key Inside You,” illustrates how Alice used writing as a space to play with the layers of complexity within not-enoughness as this talking-back-TO.

Unlock the Key Inside You

ME: Unlock the key inside you.

The Girl: But how?

ME: Let’s just say the only person that can unlock the key is you. But the question is do you know you? Who you are?

The Girl: I am me, the smart intelligent me. I can do anything from learning the ABC’s to owning my own business.

ME: OK. If this is you than why don’t you show it to the world?

The Girl: Why should I show it to the world? It’s not like you respect me.

ME: Oh! I see, you're afraid of being yourself around people like this. Well, I have something to say: Being yourself is the only way you can survive in this world. Being you is going to help you succeed. Even if you're not one of the popular ones you still are counted as somebody in this world. You are counted as a person. A person that can help this world succeed to many heights. That can become popular without even knowing. That can do the strangest things. Let's just say everyone's special in their own way and you are different just like everyone else. **SO UNLOCK THE KEY INSIDE YOU AND BECOME YOU.**

Alice's writing is provocative here as her not-enoughness comes into being on this page as a talking-back-TO perhaps society, herself, and/or "one of the popular ones" in a manner that is so telling of how she and other girls in the Purple Flowers were *always, already* calling upon certain ways-of-being in order to be enough in their bodies. Alice artfully writes one girl as if she could be in some kind of vulnerableness due to the "world not respecting her," and she presents the girl as mistrusting of the world due to that lack of respect she receives from the world; yet, this girl who could be in vulnerableness because of this lack of respect seems to also be talking-back-TO that vulnerableness by asking why she should even allow the world to see her intelligence, her "learning the A, B, Cs to owning her own business," revealing Alice's keen awareness of how she is perceived by some in society. Alice writes the other girl as a teacher of this mistrusting girl, telling her how to "survive" and "succeed" by "being you," even if she is not "one of the popular ones.

As exemplified in the writing thus far and what will come, it was not always the 'white, middle-class thinness ideal' permeating our popular culture that contributed to the girls' not-enoughness coming into being in complex and multiple ways. Alice was very distraught, for example, by how gendered she believed our society was, and how gendered she believed her

familial-culture was. Almost every time we met, she would make some reference to how “girls are this” and “boys are that,” or how boys “*get* to do this” and girls “*have* to do that.” In these moments it seemed as if Alice was simultaneously unpacking the consequences of what it meant to be gendered, *and* deploying gender as a tool to be enough *in* her own girlness. Sometimes this simultaneous unpacking of and deployment of gender stemmed from the gendered roles she perceived to be in her family (e.g., her mother’s expectation that Alice should give up the computer if her younger brother wanted to use it; that she should acquiesce to her younger brother’s preferences for television shows; that Alice should make sure her brother was awake and ready for school each day). Other times her frustrations came from a gendered incident that took place at school (e.g., a comment made by a teacher that she perceived as sexist; how boys were “allowed” to do and say so much more than girls in many teachers’ classrooms; how boys did not get in trouble as much as girls for their behavior during class); or she might report to us some gendered moment she saw in a movie or television show that infuriated her (e.g., some cartoon on television where all of the girl characters were ‘evil’ and the boy characters were ‘heroes,’ or how many of the girl characters seemed so dependent on others—or “helpless,” as she put it, in their roles on the Disney Channel, while many of the boy characters seemed very independent). To write/right some of these injustices, Alice was making sure to have all of the girl characters in the novel she was writing be powerful and independent so they would not “need anything” from the “evil” boy characters.

One day Alice brought up her frustrations with the “boy/girl” binary, so I began talking to the girls about how I believed we are acculturated in our society through a gender binary and how sometimes those implicit and explicit messages that are put on our bodies can make us feel

like we are not enough in our female bodies, and this is why I wanted to do a study with girls.

The conversation below followed:

Buttercup: Why not boys?

Hilary: Because I wanted to start with girls, because that was an easier starting place for me.

Alice: Because boys aren't important. They're not smart like girls.

Hilary: They *are* important and a lot of boys have a lot of body issues too—but—

Sunshine: But we have much more to deal with—we have to go through pain—

Hilary: Yes, and boys contribute to how we—

Buttercup: But boys help in the making of us. Without boys—

Sunshine: I was just about to say that—

Hilary: That is true. And after that, there is a lot of male contribution to us having to work at *not* feeling badly about ourselves. So I'm starting with girls.

There were multiple and fleeting moments like this one, when some of the girls were trying to negotiate how things happen in the world, unpacking gender or social class or sexuality or race/ethnicity and how all of those categories fit or did not fit into their world, and how *they* fit or did not fit into those categories. While they were unpacking all of these categories, Alice was also creating her situated truth that, “. . . boys aren't important. They're not smart like girls.” A situated truth that was just one way her not-enoughness came into being as a talking-back-TO those societal or familial messages telling her she was not enough because she was a girl. Later on that same afternoon that the girls asked me why I did not have boys in the study, we were talking about where we should meet the following week for writing group, and Alice looped us back to gender and her family:

. . . Miss Hilary, you know how you said your gender and all that? My older sisters one time told me that my parents wanted me to be a boy, because like when my brother was born they didn't want him to feel lonely, right? Cuz he was the only boy, so they wanted to have a boy, right, but instead they had me. So I was supposed to be a boy and I wasn't. When Alice said this, the other girls fell silent (which was a rarity amongst the Purple Flowers) and looked around at each other with wide eyes and then me to see how I would respond. I asked Alice how she felt about her sisters telling her that her parents wanted her to be a boy, wondering if some kind of vulnerableness would come into being, and she responded with:

Well it just was proven that girls are better than boys, no matter what age, because my brother is really lazy—he's missed like 10 days of school already this entire school year and I haven't missed one; and yet I'm so talented, and I'm pretty (while saying "pretty," Alice flipped her long, black hair over her shoulder and laughed. The other girls laughed too). Sorry, I had to do that (she laughed again), it's my hair flip. And like, I'm artistic and I got an award for art and---well, there's just so much more that I can do than he can. And that's because I'm a girl and he's a boy. So it's just proven that girls are better.

Some scholars and theorists (see Butler, 1997; Youdell, 2006) posit that girls are inaugurated into subjecthood through gender discourse—that they “all at once become girls and subject to the rules of being girls” (Youdell, 2006, p. 44), and to me, it seemed as if Alice was also using this gender discourse (sometimes) to *reclaim* her subjecthood as a *certain kind* of girl, one who could push back against dominant patriarchal norms. She, like some of the other girls in the Purple Flowers, seemed to work both within this gendered discourse and against it, just as they sometimes worked within and against the discourse of disciplined bodies in our culture.^{lxi} Alice knew there were moments when she was being perceived or treated unfairly because of her

gender, and while she contributed to those same gendered discursive threads, like being a “good student,” which requires girls to continually cite certain rules in order to remain intelligible as a girl (Butler, 1997), she was also working to disrupt them.

There were so many moments I observed when *any one of the Purple Flowers could have* been wounded by something or someone—by the way she *could have* been *embodying* that vulnerableness: holding her head a certain way, shifting her eyes to the ground, shoulders slumped, disappointment in the voice. But as some scholars have argued (Butler, 1989; Sullivan, 1997) and I would agree, the body is not an anonymous body: I cannot assume that because another’s body mimics some posture that my own body has at some time held, that the other is experiencing the same thing that I did in that moment. That is why the sensitivity, the situatedness, and the historicity of these lived moments were always so important to how I perceived the girls’ bodily-not-enoughness coming into being as this talking-back-TO the injurious messages being put on their bodies, this *resistance-to* the cultural baggage these bodies have inherited, just like Buttercup illustrates quite beautifully here:

Today I am enough! No one can tell me differently. I am beautiful enough. I’m kind enough. I’m wonderful and unique enough. I’m tall enough, big enough, curvy enough. I’m enough. *Yes I am.*

CHAPTER 6

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF RACIALIZED BODIES

Letter to the Editor: Racialized Bodies

Sitting on the chair, body slouched—arms folded across her chest and eyes focused on the ground—embodying the absolute bewilderment of how teachers could even *think* those things about their students, much less say them out loud, Paloma described what had taken place in her social studies classroom a few days before. As Paloma talked more in depth about her experience, it was as if I could envision the denial of freedom her body had endured days before, because her body, at-present, seemed to be *expressing* that denial of freedom. Her now-racialized body *became* the personal existence that was the taking up and manifestation of a being in a given situation; and it was her *body* that expressed its existence during every moment of her re-telling, just like a word expresses thought (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002).

In that moment, I began to understand how all of those bodies in the Purple Flowers were linked *intersubjectively* as the body of this 12-year-old girl re-lived the demoralizing experience of one of her teachers talking to her as if she were *less human* than he, *less American*, at least. I viscerally *felt* some kind of vulnerableness linking all of our bodies together during that moment: the astonishment in her voice as she posed the “why would he be like that” question to no one in particular, leaving our bodies, these bodies connected to Paloma’s own disorientation, in total stillness; like our bodies were *physically* listening so intently, they might break. I felt my body exhale when Paloma paused to ask me, specifically, “Why he would be like that” again, not even realizing I had been holding my breath during her re-telling. I looked at this 12-year-old girl,

trying to think of *something* to say, anything, really, but all I could think of was the un-examined and complex history that resided on this racialized body as she questioned the nativism^{lxii} she had experienced just days before; and I realized *this* was the impact repeated and habitual actions have on *all* of our bodies, not just bodies of color. Minutes before, I had asked a few of the girls if they wanted to share the poems they had been working on that day in Borders, and I requested they read them in Spanish since that was how they had written them. The seemingly stifled excitement that instantly filled the air after my request confused me, so I asked why they were so “giggly” about me asking them to read their poems in Spanish. Paloma had said she was excited to read the poem she had written about the food and beaches of Puerto-Rico in Spanish because she was not “allowed” to write or speak Spanish in most classes at school.^{lxiii} When I asked her to talk more about that, she explained, along with Alice and Luna, that students were not allowed to speak Spanish in ‘most teachers’ classes, and if they did, they were either sent into the hall or to the office.

When I voiced my disgruntledness—that an educator would actually send a student out of the room, or even more, to the *office* for speaking in her natural language—Paloma told us that a few days before she was sent out of her social studies classroom because she made the mistake of asking her friends about homework *in Spanish*. The space our bodies *coinhabited* (Ahmed, 2006) in that moment transformed from excitement into frustration when Paloma added the details of the story, and Luna and Alice chimed in with their own details and frustrations. Paloma explained that she was asking Luna about the homework for that class, and when the teacher heard her speaking Spanish, he called across the classroom that she should speak English. Paloma stopped talking for a few seconds altogether and then asked another friend something else a few minutes later, in Spanish, to which the teacher, again, called out across the

room, “In America, we speak English!” and then sent Paloma out of the room. We all observed and listened to Paloma plead her case as a bilingual Puerto Rican American who moved in and out of feeling accepted by teachers and classmates: a twelve-year-old girl, proud of her family’s Puerto Rican culture, but who also did not feel safe enough to express that cultural pride in some spaces.

It was one of those moments where I was left both disgusted and disgraced: disgusted that there are any adults who would *want* to teach children when they carry that kind of xenophobia and ethnic chauvinism around in and on their bodies; and disgraced that I shared the same identity-marker with others who called themselves “teachers” who treat children in this way. bell hooks (2010) asks us to imagine this kind of experience:

Imagine what it is like to be taught by a teacher who does not believe you are fully human. Imagine what it is like to be taught by teachers who do believe that they are racially superior, and who feel that they should not have to lower themselves by teaching students whom they really believe are incapable of learning. (p. 2)

I *can* imagine what hooks describes here, but I *cannot* apply it to my own white-body, a body which can more easily extend out toward so many ‘objects’ (privileged experiences) that are in my reach than those bodies of color with whom I was sitting in that moment. Nor had I experienced what Paloma, Luna, and Alice continued describing that day at Borders; nor what any of the other girls described on *any other day* about the kind of racialized history their bodies inherited versus what my white-body inherited, because my body inhabits a *corporeal schema*^{lxiv} of a ‘*body-at-home*.’ Drawing on Frantz Fanon’s (1986) work, Ahmed (2006) reminds us,

If the world is made white, then the body at home is one that can inhabit whiteness. . . after all, bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which makes the world “white” as

a world that is inherited or already given. This is the familiar world, the world of whiteness, as a world we know implicitly. Colonialism makes the world “white,” which is of course a world “ready” for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach. Bodies remember such histories, even when we forget them. Such histories, we might say, surface on the body, or even shape how bodies surface. (p. 111).

I listened carefully that day as Paloma, Luna, and Alice were intellectualizing their right to speak in their natural language, and as they continued to voice the lifetime of frustrations they had of being made to feel that they were *not-American-enough* in elementary school and now middle school. I heard their discontent and it registered in my own body, in the pit of my stomach, as the denial their bodies experience when trying to reach out toward those same objects that the world so easily puts within my reach. Luna interrupted my thoughts and asked, “Why don’t they understand?” and Alice followed with, “Don’t they understand how hard it is for us to translate everything from Spanish to English so quickly?” Luna then questioned why that teacher or any other could not understand that if she could think in English before Spanish she would, because that would make her life much easier—but because she thought in Spanish, it just “came out first.” As if she even needed to explain this to me, I sat there thinking. As if any of those girls should have to be trying to understand why they were positioned as ‘less-than’ (human/American) by those who were supposed to be teaching them about democracy and citizenship—and they had to endure this denial of freedom all because of the historical attachments their bodies had inherited being bilingual—a *treasure*, mind you, that when possessed by a child who is not wrapped up so tightly in the boxes which threaten the cultural and political integrity of America, boxes containing those who ‘steal our jobs,’ those who are

‘drug smugglers and gang-members,’ or those who ‘need to be sent back across the border, because they are interlopers who are having anchor babies’ is cherished and highlighted in school communities.^{lxv}

A few minutes later, Alice answered my question about why the girls thought this teacher did not want them to speak Spanish by explaining that their teacher thought they were talking about him when they spoke Spanish: *as if they would ever talk about anything related to him or his class anyway*, Alice reported with determination, *besides how boring he was and how boring his class was*. Luna threw up her arms and asked again why they didn’t get it. Stomach churning, head spinning, I sat in silence for about 5 seconds staring at a random chair, so I could pull myself together and continue this conversation sans tears.

This was the ‘race’ in ‘racism’ that so many refuse to acknowledge or have decided does not exist in our “post-racial” society; or that so many still claim is an invented social category,^{lxvi} relieving them of any responsibility to address it. And this became just another reason why phenomenology was so helpful to me: I was experiencing in that moment how race, ethnicity, and racism were *lived* in the bodies of these racialized subjects during a given cultural moment (Ahmed, 2006; Alcoff, 1999). I wrote later that day that phenomenology allows me to illuminate these experiences as they are lived by racialized bodies, because phenomenology “helps us to show how race is an effect of racialization, and to investigate how the invention of race as if it were ‘in’ bodies shapes what bodies ‘can do’” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 112). The complicatedness of that moment however, was how I could explain to the six pairs of eyes staring at me, waiting for some kind of explanation that might help them understand this any better than they already did so implicitly, that the teachers who had made malicious and denigrating remarks over the years were not actually talking to them, specifically—to that six, eight, ten, or twelve-year-old brown

or black body standing before them—they were instead weaving those six, eight, ten, or twelve-year-old black and brown bodies before them out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories that they had inherited (Fanon, 1986).

I pulled together my best reasonable voice and tried to explain that there were always power relations between people—teachers and students, adults and teenagers, caregivers and children, friends, to name a few—and some teachers felt the need to establish these power relations—and keep them in tact—by demeaning their students in order to feel better about themselves. All sentiment seeming to disappear, the girls sat there and listened to me ramble on, faces and bodies emotionless, unimpressed and unrelieved. *And this teacher, I continued, is probably extremely intimidated by you because you speak multiple languages and are brilliant, and he can only speak one language, and that makes him feel insecure; and more importantly, less-than you. So in order to make himself feel better about being monolingual, he has decided that everyone else will have to live that way in his classroom too. And some people in our country, I added, think that everyone should be monolingual because anything other than what they know scares them; so the fear of not-knowing something drives a lot of people to treat those who they don't know or understand in really horrible ways. But, I continued, you have to remember that being able to speak multiple languages^{lxvii} is an incredible talent to possess. So anytime any of your teachers tell you to speak English, and you know you'll get in trouble if you say something back, just look at him/her and think, it's too bad you can't speak anything other than English because that is making you insecure right now, and I am intimidating you because I can speak more languages than you. Then you can at least mentally shift that power relation right then—you will have the power in that moment.*

As the conversation continued, it seemed as if the non-Spanish-speakers in the Purple Flowers wanted to try and understand the Spanish-speakers' perspectives better. Buttercup pointed out, for example that she had "never thought about it that way" and it "made perfect sense," after hearing Luna, Paloma, and Alice talking about how difficult it was for them to translate their Spanish to English so quickly before they thought anything. Buttercup then voiced her own frustrations about not being able to understand the students at school who spoke Spanish, and how she wished sometimes they would 'just speak English' because she felt 'left out of the conversation.' So I asked, "Why don't you learn how to speak Spanish? Then you can understand all you want to." She agreed that after hearing how difficult it was for Alice, Luna, and Paloma, that she should pay more attention during her Spanish class; and Demi added that she thought it would be "cool" to learn Spanish so she could engage in conversations with more Spanish-speakers at school.

Buttercup, and Demi then talked briefly about how they too, felt slighted by teachers many times because of "the color of their skin" or "how they talked;" and all of the girls came to consensus that, yes, there were things taking place at their school that were unwarranted and unfair, and no, it was not all right with them. And I agreed. Stridently. Bodies shifted, postures inflated. Paloma began describing moments cooking with her mother and her family's love of Puerto Rican food, and as she did so, she stood up from her chair, pushed her shoulders back, and claimed her space in the room. The other girls showed their support with their "Go girl" comments, and Paloma shifted her head from side-to-side with just enough attitude, as she declared, "You know, sometimes *it's nice* to be Puerto Rican!" and then asked if we were ready to hear her poem^{lxviii} about Puerto-Rico. In Spanish.

The whole of this conversation took place in about 20 minutes; and in a matter of about 20 minutes, I both observed and lived some kind of vulnerableness linking all of our bodies together during Paloma's re-telling of finding herself as not-American-enough, due to the nativism that her teacher had put on her. The vulnerableness could have been about the powerlessness different bodies were experiencing: some powerless as to how their bodies were perceived and treated by others based on how those bodies were racialized; others powerless about how to fix or change things, therefore leading to some kind of defeat. Yet, there was also a resistance-TO that vulnerableness—perhaps a *resistance-in-vulnerableness* that came into being for all of us too—as all of our bodies worked intersubjectively through the injustices of being perceived and treated as “less than.” Eventually during that racialized-conversation, the bodies of the Purple Flowers came to a place where their bodies seemed to be *reoriented* on a line that had been laid by others for them to follow—a racialized line, perhaps? And as their racialized-not-enoughness came into being as this *resistance-TO* that line, I understood that those bodies were not going to walk *that line* that day in the way that others might have before them. This resistance-in-vulnerableness showed itself, in itself (Heidegger, 1960) as the girls' *racialized-not-enoughness* talking-back-TO that teacher and those injustices, and in *that* moment they were enough in their bodies.

Reflections on (My) Whiteness when Thinking and Theorizing Bodies of an Other

I often think back to all of those racialized-moments I experienced with the girls in the Purple Flowers and was left feeling so. . . Powerless? White? (How paradoxical.) There were multiple instances where the girls told me about a teacher who they did not think treated them as ‘fairly’ as she/he treated ‘other’ students, and when I asked them why they thought/felt this unfairness took place, there would never be a moment's hesitation as one of them responded with

what she knew had to be true: “Because she only likes kids who are her same race,” (sometimes that meant African American; sometimes it meant white); “Because of how she (white teacher) looks at me;” “Because the white kids don’t get treated the same way;” “Because I’m black,” or “Because I’m Mexican-American.” Or the same girl might say, “I’m not even Mexican! I am Peruvian-American! So why are they saying ‘the Mexicans’ shouldn’t be doing this or that when I’m *not even Mexican?*” Within all of this reporting, there would also be the occasional disclaimer, “Sorry, Miss Hilary, but. . .” or “I don’t mean you, Miss Hilary, but,” and the girls would describe white people or white teachers making some kind of denigrating remark to them, about them, or to another teacher about students of color.

These racialized re-tellings were frequent and fascinating, and some of them were recorded during our meetings, while others took place during their casual talk as I drove some of them home each week. The conversations had such a lasting and haunting impression on me, I could not wait to get home and write about them each week; and what I slowly realized (in all of my whiteness) was *racism* seemed to be integral to some of the girls’ not-enoughness, and this resistance that could have been coming into being was not the same kind of resistance I was used to reading about in critical theory—it was not the uprising of the oppressed realizing their oppression and taking some kind of action to right the wrong that had been done to them. The complexity within the complexity, if you will, about some of the girls’ *racialized-not-enoughness* was almost too overbearing for one to *imagine* writing about, much less *actually* write about, due to, well, the ‘starting points.’ Where would I begin when trying to describe racialization *as it was lived* in different moments by the girls, I wondered each week in my bridling journal, and during multiple discussions with professors and other doctoral students,

other than inserting whole chunks of transcript in the middle of my dissertation and writing, ‘Here, you start.’

So I guess what I am asking is, how do I write *phenomenologically* about these racialized bodies that ‘live’ racism when thinking about bodily-not-enoughness?

Sincerely,

HEH

Phenomenologist-in-training

Response to ‘Racialized Bodies’: A Phenomenologist Talks Back

I am writing in response to Hughes-Decatur’s question of how to write about the phenomenon of *racialized*-bodily-not-enoughness as it pertained to the girls in her study. So what *is* it that is happening in these various cultural moments being lived by these young adolescent racialized bodies when they are being told implicitly and explicitly that they are not-enough because of the continued racialization of bodies in American culture? To explore this question, I draw on the work of philosophers who have explored a “phenomenology of race,”^{lxix} such as Ahmed (2006), Alcoff (1999), Fanon (1986), and Weate (2000) to bring the “background” of racialized bodies to the forefront, *phenomenologically-speaking*. I describe how this background, which somehow continues to remain “hidden” from public-view works on and alongside those racialized bodies in the Purple Flowers; and how those bodies in turn, seem to be working to *reshape* the spaces they inhabit—even when they are not intended to inhabit those spaces occupied by other bodies, bodies more ‘at-home’ (Ahmed, 2006)—in order to open up spaces that have yet to be considered. I suggest that these lived experiences then give us the

possibilities to think “new” spaces, “new” objects, and “new” bodies when thinking about the racialized bodies of young adolescents.

When listening to our recently elected (2008) biracial president and what he does *not* say about race/ethnicity during his speeches and news presses; when listening to (some) news anchors and (some) government officials, or reading what those anchors and government officials have to say in public news about our new “post-racial” society and our recently elected biracial president; and when listening to (some) Americans as they pontificate the injustices of “who” is to blame for their current recession (insert inference here: recently elected biracial president)—because it is so much easier to see what lies directly in front of us rather than doing the difficult work of looking back to history—some ‘bodies’ might enter a state of confusion as to whether or not “race” and “racism” still permeate American culture. On the one hand, we have a biracial American president—most commonly referred to as the “first black president,” by the way—who has become quite the multifaceted symbol in this Celtic-knot-tug-of-war^{lxx} between the nominalists, the fascists, and, well, others of us. This presidential-racialized body is now called upon by those looking to create new lines for disoriented bodies to follow, bodies that have been inhibited from following such lines in the past. He is called upon so that those white-bodies that have historically and reproductively been at-home in the spaces they inhabit and can reach most objects (privileged circumstances) with ease on the lines they follow can call an end to this absurdist notion of any kind of existing racism; and he has been called upon by some of those same white-bodies so they can point to the destruction of the Earth *due* to his racialized presence as the leader of the free-world.

Phenomenologically-speaking, race and racism are real in America; we can see racism being lived during the midst of this contemporary skepticism about its existence, just as we have

been able to see it being lived in years past—we just have to look and listen differently if we want to see it. As Alcoff (1999) put forward over a decade ago, during the midst of any contemporary skepticism toward race (and racism), like the skepticism today, “stands the compelling social reality that race, or racialized identities, have as much political, sociological, and economic salience as they ever had” (p. 16). Yet, paradoxes run deep in America, so it is sometimes difficult to name those paradoxes as specific ‘objects’ to examine without protest from some of the public or justified claims from policy-makers and government officials. As Hughes-Decatur suggested in “What Do Bodies Have to Do with Education and Teaching,” we are a culture rapt by an obsession with bodies, yet we deny certain acknowledgements *of* bodies and bodytalk forcing the subject of bodies to be irrelevant. I would suggest the subject of race is similarly paradoxical in that it also has a history of being pushed to irrelevancy. As Alcoff (1999) posited, race constitutes the necessary background from which we (as Americans) know ourselves, so if race is our background, if it is behind what we do, then it is ‘what’ we do (Ahmed, 2006). And just like everything lived is everything bodies, so too is everything in America, at least, everything race.^{lxxi} It was eerily over a decade ago that Alcoff (1999) explained why race is more relevant than most would like to acknowledge; a notion that would seem as if I was just writing it in 2011:

The legitimacy and moral relevance of racial concepts is officially denied, even while race continues to determine job prospects, career possibilities, available places to live, potential friends and lovers, reactions from police, credence from jurors, and the amount of credibility one is given by one’s students. Race may not correlate with clinical variations, but it persistently correlates with a statistically

overwhelming significance in wage levels, unemployment levels, poverty levels, and the likelihood of incarceration. (p. 16)

Here are some quick facts for you. As of 2008:

- At a per-capita income of \$18,054, African-American earnings were just 57.9% that of whites' \$28,502.⁴⁰
- 6.6% of white Americans were making less than \$15,000, while 17.7% of black Americans and 14.6% of Hispanic Americans^{lxxii} were making less than \$15,000.
- 18.5% of children in America were below poverty level
 - 15.3% of white children were below the poverty level; while 34.4% of black children, 14.2% of Asian and Pacific Islander children, and 30.3% of Hispanic children were below the poverty level
- 10% of the white Americans below poverty level were male, while 12% were female
- 23% of the black Americans below poverty level were male, while 26% were female
- 21% of the Hispanic Americans below poverty level were male, while 26% were female^{lxxiii}

Although race is seen as working through the domain of the visible, and the experience of race is predicated on the perception of race (Alcoff, 1999), the statistics listed here are not perceived—they are *lived*. Let us turn to the racialized experiences of the bodies in the Purple Flowers, then, so we can render our tacit knowledge about racial embodiment explicit (Alcoff, 1999).

How Bodies Take Up Space

In “Unexpected Manifestations of (Dis)orientation: Learning from 12-year-old girls how to *talk back* in order to be enough,” Hughes-Decatur draws on multiple written pieces and

⁴⁰ Christie, L. (July, 30, 2010) http://money.cnn.com/2010/07/30/news/economy/black_pay_gap_persists/index.htm

conversations from the girls in the Purple Flowers to illustrate how bodily-not-enoughness came into being for the girls as some kind of resistance. Re-visiting various lines from that writing here, we see how Buttercup, for example, is *living* these assorted racialized moments; so that race, in a way, becomes a social as well as bodily given, “or what we receive from others as an inheritance of this [colonized] history” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 111). Buttercup wrote: “Everywhere and anywhere I turn I’m reminded of what I am not/ I am a young African-American girl who feels that I am not enough because of my color/ ‘You’re slow/ You’ll never make it!’/ They strive to see us African Americans fail.” We can *read* the ongoing and unfinished history of racism in these lines; we can read how racism is being *lived* by these bodies, and how racism continues to, according to Ahmed (2006), “orientate bodies in specific directions, affecting how they “take up” space. Such forms of orientation are crucial to how bodies inhabit space, and to the racialization of bodily as well as social space” (p. 111). Buttercup is astutely aware in these lines that she is perceived as a *racialized other*, even if she does not use those words, specifically; and she is able to beautifully illustrate the ways in which racism “stops” black bodies from inhabiting certain spaces by extending through objects and others (Ahmed, 2006; Fanon, 1986). Here, the ‘space’ I am referring to is any that allows a body to feel at-home in a world already in place (Ahmed, 2006).

According to Ahmed (2006) and Fanon (1986), the “familiarity of the ‘white world,’ as a world we know implicitly, ‘disorients’ black bodies such that they cease to know where to find things—reduced as they are to things among things” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 111). Returning to Buttercup’s writing, we can see how this racialized body has, in different moments, been *reduced to things among things* by the hostile white gaze; as well as how racism has disoriented her when trying to make sense of how she is perceived by others, or *the other*, because racism is

“stopping” her body from being at home in the world: “I am not just a little black girl/ I am not what they say/ I am slowly learning not to take it to heart/ I am not dumb or slow/ I am not what they think/ I am what I know.”

Buttercup’s lines also illustrate Fanon’s (1986) notion that racism “interrupts” Merleau-Ponty’s *corporeal schema*, Hughes-Decatur referred to in “Unexpected Manifestations of (Dis)orientation.” For Merleau-Ponty, our bodies are not objects in space; rather, they “inhabit and haunt” space and through them we experience the world and the other. Merleau-Ponty (1964) writes,

We grasp external space through our bodily situation. A “corporeal or postural schema” gives us at every moment a global, practical, and implicit notion of the relation between our body and things, of our hold on them. A system of possible movements, or “motor projects,” radiates from us to our environment. Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument, and when we wish to move about we do not move the body as we move an object. We transport it without instruments as if by magic, since it is ours and because through it we have direct access to space. For us the body. . . is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions. (as cited in Weate, 2001, p. 4)

This relationship between body and world for Merleau-Ponty is one of mutual transformation, and the corporeal schema lies *between* the body and the world, “as that which engenders communication between one and the other” (Weate, 2001, p. 4). For Fanon (1986), however, attending to the corporeal schema as Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes it is not sufficient for black bodies, because Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal schema is not made up of the right kind of elements. “Where phenomenology attends to the tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character of

embodied reality, Fanon asks us to think of the ‘historic-racial’ scheme, which is, importantly, ‘below it’” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 110). Fanon is suggesting, in other words, that there are historical and racial dimensions *below* the surface of the body described by phenomenology, and for the black body (and, I would add, other bodies of color) we have to look beyond the surface.

Ahmed (2006) takes Fanon’s notions a step further by suggesting that the corporeal schema is already racialized because race does not just interrupt such a schema but also structures its mode of operation. “The corporeal schema is of a ‘body at home,’ and if the “world is made white,” as Fanon’s work suggests, “then a body at home is one that can inhabit whiteness” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 111). When someone perceived Buttercup to be a certain way based on her skin color or other phenotypic features (e.g., “slow, dumb, mean”), then, in that moment Buttercup’s corporeal schema was *disabled*, impeding her bodily freedom in and with the world. Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal schema, which gives white bodies this freedom, or ‘direct access to space,’ could be considered a form of bodily privilege, I imagine, that for Buttercup is not attainable in those moments when someone questions her parentage because of her light skin color, or questions her intellectual or social capabilities, due to her blackness. These ‘stopping devices’ (Ahmed, 2006) keep Buttercup’s black-body from extending out in space so that it can move ‘freely’ in the world, as Merleau-Ponty suggests it should be able to do, reminding Buttercup that “for bodies that are not extended by the skin of the social, bodily movement is not so easy” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 139).

When thinking about Fanon’s notions of the “historic-racial-scheme,” we can also incorporate other bodies of color, such as those in Hughes-Decatur’s study who experienced ethnic chauvinism and nativism. Looking back to the “Racialized Bodies” article where Hughes-Decatur described listening to the girls in her study talk about the white-teacher-body that was

‘at-home’ inhabiting spaces it had inherited from Colonialism, we see that when this ‘other’ body (Paloma) tried to ‘extend’ herself in that same space (asking homework questions in her natural language) as to try and *coinhabit* that space with others in the room, “the politics of exclusion” embedded in the teacher’s ‘stopping device’ (“In America we speak English”) not only forced her body to be a body ‘out of place’ in that space, it also disabled Paloma’s corporeal schema—causing a momentary *paralysis of agency*. During this paralysis of agency, according to Fanon, there are no possibilities of freedom for the racialized-body in that present moment (Weate, 2001).

Moreover, when a xenophobic comment such as this is used as a ‘stopping device’ by teachers toward their students, like the one said to Paloma—a Puerto Rican American—by her white, male teacher, it all at once holds Paloma, as a Puerto Rican American, responsible for her body, for her race/ethnicity, and for her ancestors (Fanon, 1986). Rather than Paloma’s body being the site of possible variation of the cultural givens of bodily patternings (Alcoff, 2009), her body was instead demarcated by this teacher on the basis of a *linguistic phenotype*, if you will;^{lxxiv} so instead of her body having an “autonomous relation to the reproductive inflection of history” (Weate, 2001, p. 9), which Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal schema suggests, Paloma experienced her body as a metonym^{lxxv} for American nativism. Like Buttercup was reduced to a thing among things when comments or questions were posed that ‘stopped’ her body from moving freely in some spaces, Paloma’s body was also reduced to a thing among things here, an *object of disorientation*. Drawing on Fanon’s phenomenology of the black body, we can also think about how, by implication, this body of color was disoriented and as such became an object. Thus, this is another example of how some bodies, more than others, have their

“involvement in the world called into crisis” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 159). It reminds us, too, what Ahmed posits:

It is not just that bodies are directed in specific ways, but that the world is shaped by the directions taken by some bodies more than others. It is thus possible to talk about the white world, the straight world, as a world that takes the shape of the motility of certain skins. (pp. 159-160)

When someone told Buttercup that he/she did not believe Buttercup had two black parents because her “black” skin was “too light” for her to *be* a black body, she too, experienced that some bodies, more than others, have their involvement in the world called into crisis; and she too, became responsible all at once for her own black body, her race/ethnicity, and her ancestors. In those moments, when Buttercup either had a racialized comment put on her about her light skin (or any other racialized comment, for that matter), or later when she wrote about it, I wonder if she, like Fanon (1986), ran an objective gaze over herself and experienced her blackness, experienced her ethnic characteristics.^{lxxvi} Whereas Paloma might have been a metonym for American nativism, perhaps Buttercup, like Fanon, experienced her own skin as the metonym for a “parodic primitivism” (Weate, 2001),^{lxxvii} or perhaps, like Fanon, Buttercup’s corporeal schema collapsed in those moments, yielding to a “racial-epidermal-schema.” Like Buttercup’s provocative lines above revealed her experience of being racialized, Fanon described his own experience of being racialized after a small white child pointed to him on a train in France and said to his mother, “Look, a negro!” Fanon wrote that at first he was amused by this comment, but after the child added some ‘component of fear’ to his gaze toward Fanon, that amusement faded: “I could not be amused anymore because I already knew of the legends, the stories, history, and especially, the historicity I learned from the Jaspers.^{lxxviii} Then the corporeal

schema collapsed, assailed at various points, yielding to a racial-epidermal schema” (as cited in Weate, 2001, pp.7-8).

The racialized experiences Hughes-Decatur describes in both “Unexpected Manifestations” and “Racialized Bodies” are highly illustrative of the ways in which racism indeed interrupts those moments when bodies are supposed to be our expression in the world, the visible forms of our intentions; as well as the freedom that Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal schema ensures the anonymous body with its direct access to space. The racialized bodies of Buttercup and Paloma, though, seemed to experience freedom in those moments more in the form of a *denial of that freedom* (Fanon, 1986). Perhaps if we begin observing those experiences differently, if we begin listening differently, we could turn “*how* we notice” certain things about young adolescent girls of color into a different kind of work: a work that acknowledges that *yes*, some spaces are already occupied and take the shape of the bodies that occupy them (e.g., schools); and while bodies do also take the shape of the spaces they occupy, they *also* take the shape of the work they do.

Sometimes when we look and listen differently, we reach something unexpected. A space, however it was occupied previously, might now be taken up by *another* body—and when bodies take up spaces they are not intended to inhabit, something other than that historical reproduction might happen. Perhaps we can begin acknowledging the work that these racialized bodies are doing to *reshape* the spaces they inhabit; and in turn, those spaces will begin *reshaping* what is available or in reach for those bodies. And maybe, hopefully, the historical reproduction will eventually fail, and we can begin to see new impressions surfacing on the skin of these bodies, new lines emerging, new objects, and yes, maybe even new bodies (Ahmed, 2006).

Of course, as Ahmed (2006) reminds us, this “new” work would not involve the loss of the background. “Indeed, for bodies to arrive in spaces where they are not already at home, where they are not ‘in place,’ involves hard work; indeed, it involves painstaking labor for bodies to inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape” (p. 62). Having arrived in these spaces, however, these bodies can acquire new shapes—and spaces, can in turn, acquire new bodies. These new shapes, new spaces, new objects, new bodies are the possibilities when what is behind us, *the background*, does not keep us stagnant, but allows us to follow lines others than those we have already taken.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS OF BODYTALK AND LEARNING TO LISTEN DIFFERENTLY

On Listening, by Luna

We kids get really frustrated with you adults sometimes. It's like you won't listen to us. You think you know better because you're older than us, but we know a lot. *Sometimes* more than you, even. What's annoying is when we ask you questions or want to talk to you about something we don't think is fair and you either tell us, "That's just the way it is," or "Because I said so," or you won't even *be* in the conversation. Just think back to when you were in middle school: how listened-to did *you* feel? Did your parents and teachers tell you the same thing you tell us? "When you are older. . ." or "You're just too young to understand. . ." *Whatever*. When I'm older I'm going to make sure every kid in the United States gets listened to. Even when the popular kids don't deserve it.

Sometimes if you guys would just listen you might learn a lot from us. Miss Hilary probably learned a lot. She was always saying stuff like, "I learn so much from you girls; you are awesome!" We know that, of course, but it's nice to hear because, obviously from what you're (hopefully) picking up from my writing this, we don't hear it often enough. I mean, you sit in boring class after boring class, day after day, doing pointless standardized test-prep worksheets for like 50 hours, or stare at a whiteboard full of math problems that mean *nothing*; you get yelled at by the teacher because you: (a) didn't do your meaningless test-prep homework; (b) aren't paying attention to her boring-ass power point lecture that's like 50 hours long and sucks anyway because it isn't going to help you figure out how to get your mom to buy

you a freakin' Apple I-pad that other kids already have; or (c) aren't being 'whatever' enough, like Susie-freakin-perfect sitting next to you who, the teacher reminds the class, *always* turns in her homework, listens to the boring power point lectures and gives some BS response to make the teacher feel good about her meaningless lecture—oh, and who *never* misses an opportunity to let you know how liked you are *not* by the teachers.

Then when we complain about school being boring or pointless, you tell us it's because *we're* not 'engaged' or 'listening,' or 'paying attention.' But what about *you* not listening to what *we're* saying? We're trying to tell you that we *would be* listening if you taught us stuff that was cool. Some of you do teach good stuff, don't get me wrong. We have this one teacher that we really like. We told Miss Hilary that she's kind of like her because this teacher actually asks us what we think about things and she's interested in what we like in life and all that. And she HATES those stupid standardized tests just like we do! She even told us in class one day to do something if we hated the test so much, right? So I go talk to the Board of Education. . . and they won't do *nothing* about it. And Miss Hilary, she told us too: if we don't like something, like how teachers aren't teaching us anything, we should say something—but you guys, you just don't understand.

Like with those teachers who *totally* play favorites, then swear up and down that they have *no idea* what you're talking about when you say something about them playing favorites? This one teacher we have—she's *awful*. She has this one group of kids that she loves and let's them do whatever they want in class. They can stay in her room during break if they want to; she has them cut other classes to come do her hair; I'm pretty sure they don't even have to do the worksheets she gives everyone else. She's awful. But she'll never be fired because they won't

believe us when we tell them how awful she is. They'll be all, "Well what did *you* do wrong?" or "What can *you* do differently?" Like it's always *us* and never *you*.

So some of the other girls told Miss Hilary one day about this math teacher they have, right? How she totally plays favorites with some of the classes—oh, wait, I remember, it's the kids in the *advanced* math classes—but she totally ignores the kids in other classes. She gave some pizza party to all of the advanced classes but not the other ones or something terrible like that. Sunshine, Blossom, and Alice even wrote Miss Hilary a letter explaining how horrible this teacher is to them because they're not in the advanced class—like how she told them she'd give them a pizza party too when they asked, but then had one for all the other classes *except theirs*. I'm serious too. AND she left all the pizza boxes outside her door so people could smell it all the way down the hall. *Who does that?* So we got all pissed and talked about how this happens all the time, and Miss Hilary was all, "You all are so good about telling me things you don't like, why can't you do that with your teachers?" and I was thinking, *you just don't get it, Miss Hilary!* So I told her: "They are our *teachers*. We see them every day of the year. They could lower our grades. You aren't grading us so we don't care what we say to you." Miss Hilary said she didn't think they would do something like that, but I told her she don't know them like we do. I told her if we tell on *that* teacher or *any* teacher to the principal or whatever, the teacher would just make an excuse because teachers always make up excuses for why things aren't fair. And it's not fair! They don't end up paying for it!

And you know what the worst part is? We told Miss Hilary this too: the students gloat. The ones that get all this attention and favoritism from those teachers, they gloat. I get it that some of you want us to talk to you and tell you when things aren't right when a teacher is doing stuff we don't like; but from my experience, and I'm just being honest here, no one won't do

anything about it. It'll just be the same. They'll just give her a warning and say, *if you do this again*, and she does it 20 more times, they won't do anything. Just give her another warning. And you know what else about this whole 'fairness' thing? Teachers even tell us at the beginning of the year: *We don't give parties; we give academic rewards*. So my math teacher—different from the one Sunshine, Blossom, and Alice wrote the letter about—he tells us he'll give us a pizza party if we all get 100% on our homework, right? So we're all like, we got this—it's in the bag. So we try our best, do everything we're supposed to do, turn in our homework, and then one day we see all these other classes getting pizza parties because I guess they got 100%. We got like 96%, he said, so we didn't get no pizza party. Just because one person didn't do their homework. Because they were absent. And that's when all that gloating happens, you know? All the other students who are having these pizza parties. They gloat.

I'll give Miss Hilary some credit. She really does try to talk with us about why things might be the way they are. Like she was on one of her rampages one day (not in a bad way—she just does that), telling us we could make a difference, even when we're kids and all that. She was telling us how like 50 or 80 years ago (I can't remember what she said *exactly*) women couldn't even vote in our country, and because some women got mad and they did something about it, we can vote now. (Well, when I'm 18.) And how women have all these rights we used to not have back in the day, but how men still make more money than women in America even after all those women did all that work to make things better. And personally, I think that's wrong—that men get paid more, I mean. I think the reason is, they think men are smarter than women. When it's really the reverse. Men can be really stupid. There are men in our school right now that are really stupid. Girls can be smarter than men. *Full-grown* men.

Like, did Miss Hilary tell you about Blossom's teacher who totally made fun of her in class for getting some answer wrong during his boring lecture, and then yelled at her? Yeah, so Blossom said the wrong answer and he made fun of her in front of the whole class, right? So Blossom said something to him like, "You shouldn't talk to kids like that." And you know what *he* said? "Well, life's a bitch, isn't it?" I mean, *really*? First of all, he *shouldn't* talk to kids like that; and second, really? *That's* your comeback? Stupid. Anyways, he sent her out to the hall and went out and yelled at her or something, telling her not to talkback to him. Man, she was pissed about that one. You should have seen her going off to Miss Hilary about him. I was like, man, I would have told him off. But I guess I really wouldn't have. And he won't get in trouble, I bet. You watch. It's just not fair.

Learning How to Listen Differently

It was March 10, 2011 and I was living a bit more on the depleted side of life than the invigorated-isn't-it-*fun*-to-be-writing-your-dissertation side so many professors kept suggesting I should be experiencing right after the staple PhDness question: *How's the writing going?* I was to be the guest speaker on this day-of-depletion for an undergraduate research class in a program across campus, a program not quite as familiar to me as my own. The instructor—another graduate student—had asked me to come talk about my dissertation research about a month prior, and I had agreed, thinking then that March 10 would be the day I would hand over my completed dissertation to my advisor, so this experience would be a nice way to remind myself why I loved doing this work. But that had been a month ago. And my dissertation was not complete, nor had I handed it over to my advisor, completed. I had, instead, rescheduled my dissertation defense date because I was still writing. Always writing. So on *this* day, I needed to

be reminded what bodies really did have to do with education and teaching, because I could not seem to remember anymore.

My grandmother's father was a Baptist preacher, and how my family tells it, that man's sermons—his words and the way he delivered them—filled the room and the bodies in it with incredible energy and spirit; I imagine it to be that he *embodied* his sermons and those bodies in his congregation *felt* his sermon residing in and through their bodies. I had to go home to Florida recently for my grandmother's funeral, and as we were all sitting around rehashing hilarious tales about how my great-grandmother 'handled' my great-grandfather, my great-aunt (the preacher's other daughter; my grandmother's sister) told me the most frustrating thing for her, as she is about to turn 80 this year, is that she can barely 'hear' her favorite sermon from my great-grandfather—her father—in her head anymore. She told me she has 'played' whatever that sermon was in her head since his death over 30 years ago because it was so important to her and carried so much relevance in her teaching life and personal life, and now it is only a faint whisper with missing parts of importance. That is how I felt about the importance and relevance of my research topic on the day I went to speak to the undergraduate research class: I had been so close to my work—perhaps too close—it seemed to have lost its gumption for me. Or so I thought.

The classroom full of bodies I walked into when I arrived that day was a bit disorientating. I was used to our classes in my building that were usually filled with predominantly white female (docile) bodies, with a very small number of male bodies and bodies of color. And I usually taught about 20-25 undergraduate-bodies in the methods classes that mostly arrived ten minutes early, even for an 8a.m. class. But when I entered this room, there were about 37 undergraduate bodies bustling about trying to find seats, opening laptops, texting

on their Smartphones, and chatting it up with each other like class had just ended rather than just begun. A handful of students even came a few minutes late, right in the middle of their instructor's request to put away their laptops and phones because they had a speaker. *Did other programs not discipline student-bodies like we did*, I wondered as I looked around in amazement to see those bodies carrying on with business as usual—with no intentions of putting away their laptops or their Smartphones.

The bodied-color scheme pretty much mimicked what I was used to, but the gender difference was a bit overwhelming to me, as there were about as many male bodies as there were female bodies. I had talked about bodies and bodily-not-enoughness with my own preservice teaching students in the fall—quite a bit, actually—but I only had one male student; whereas there, in that crowded space, I was looking out on 16 or so male bodies: buff bodies, slender bodies, athletic bodies, fraternity bodies, and some bodies who might have been cut from fraternities during Rush. The female bodies also 'looked' different to me—a majority of them dressed in workout clothes or sweats and wore baseball hats (actually resembling how I was used to dressing). The female bodies I was used to usually showed up at 8a.m., dressed for success: showered, hair flat-ironed or blown out to perfection, make-up situated perfectly, and if baseball hats were worn it was purposeful. I liked this space, seeing these unfamiliar bodies of undergraduate students, but my own body was still disorientated in this space—I was out of my element—so the fear that had crept in when I first arrived about what I would say kept growing.

I had not really planned anything for this talk, so as I sat waiting for them to take care of class business, I decided I would have this group do the exercise I had professors and graduate students do during my job talk when I visited other universities for my interviews: I would have them write about a time they felt like they were not enough in their bodies. The first time I had

done this, I mostly received blank stares and maybe one or two people wrote something down; the second time a professor who had come to watch my job talk from the counseling program reassured everyone in the room they did not have to worry because she was there if they needed her. I had never, however, asked a group of undergraduate students to do this exercise, much less, a group of students who had never laid eyes on me, so when I said, “What I would like you to do is think of a time—any time in your life—when you felt like you were *not enough of something* in your body. You will not have to share this with anyone, and you can either think about it or write about it. Also, think about what or who it was that influenced that moment, if you can remember, and try to recall what you *did* in that moment—the moment you realized you felt like you were not enough.” Anxiety? You betcha. Some faces seemed perplexed, others inquiring, others apathetic, and others, well, they were busy on Facebook. I did not know how to get the students to stop looking at me after my request, so I quickly added, “I know. I always like to begin on a positive note—really get you feeling good about yourself.” The laughter cut into the tension, so I figured we would be all right and I hopped up on the table to sit and wait for them while they explored their own bodily-not-enoughness.

As I sat there on that table looking around, I saw over half of those bodies scribbling or typing with purpose, as others were probably still on Facebook, and a few others were still staring at me with blank expressions; but after two minutes had passed I actually had to ask the class to stop writing. *Interesting*, I thought, *where might this go?* I was supposed to talk about the processes of the study—theoretical perspectives, participants, design, analysis, etc.—and I might have mentioned some of those things, I do not remember. What I do remember is hearing myself talk, and thinking I was babbling incessantly about something that only made sense to me as I heard it coming out of my mouth. I heard myself quoting statistics about girls’ bodies and

body dissatisfaction in America and other countries; I heard theorists and philosophers from phenomenology mixed with my frustrations with writing, at the same time I heard myself explaining the disciplining of bodies that happens in our culture. Some bodies scribbled notes, some *closed* laptops, some rolled eyes, and some perked up.

I felt the energy surge that I used to get when I started talking about the girls in my study and the amazing resilience they embodied; I felt the passion and the excitement and the frustration and all of the research literature and philosophy I had been reading the past five years surface. Before I knew it, my body was off the table, pacing back and forth with elation as I interrupted myself with several, *You know what I mean's*; but when I realized there were a few stunned and blank faces looking back at me, perhaps not knowing what I meant—that elation faded and I sat back down on the table. “I mean, don’t you all see?” I heard myself say rather loudly as I sat back down on the table, “how important bodies are and why we need to be talking about bodies everywhere and anywhere? And what about how bodies are disciplined in education;” I rambled on, “how all of you sitting here, now, are bodies that have been disciplined your whole lives to do just this, for me, right now: sit and listen, and give me eye contact, and be polite, and have questions prepared. Well, except for those of you who have been on Facebook this whole time.” Bodies shifted a bit and looked around, *How did she know?*

I tried to read those bodies sitting before me—tried to spot any nods of connection, any emotion. *Did* they get it? Did they care? Had I just said everything in Latin? Because it felt that way. In my peripheral vision, I saw a hand go up on the far left side of the room from a rather good-looking stoic male body that had not moved the whole time I was talking, except to look down at his shoe laces or roll his eyes a few times. He had not written one thing during my ‘not-enoughness exercise,’ and each time I said something about not-enoughness not just being

about female bodies, that male bodies were affected by certain body ideals as well, he either smirked or performed the beautifully rehearsed eye-roll.

“I don’t mean this to be mean,” he began—*Oh crap*, I thought, *get out the body-armor because I am going to need it*—“but how do you expect to *do* anything with this research when you only had six or eight or however many girls you said in your study?” *That was it?* I thought. *He’s been eye-rolling this whole time because he’s a quant-guy?*

“I am really glad you asked that question.” I responded in my best professorial tone. “Do you mean, how can I do anything with this because this was a qualitative study and I cannot generalize the resistance I saw in the girls to all young adolescent girls, or at least all young adolescent girls of color, like I could if it was a large-scale quantitative study?” He shook his head in agreement. This was good practice, I decided. I could try out my implications on this kid and see where it got me. “I guess one of the major implications of my study is in *response* to those large-scale quantitative studies, for a few reasons. Almost all of the studies I have read over the years come out of psychology and sociology, reassuring many in education that the subject of bodies should be left to those disciplines—I even had a professor tell me that during my ‘job talk’ when I was at a job interview last month.” I remembered, also remembering how I had to tell that guy I appreciated his comments and I needed a second to think about how to answer his question so I could breath deeply and not drop the F-bomb in response to whatever ignorant comment he had inserted in between his mini-lecture to me about how the “subject of bodies belonged” to those in sociology and his question about how I thought I might incorporate the “subject of bodies” in any way into a curriculum.

“But as I am arguing in my study,” I continued, “everything education *is* everything bodies, so I do not understand how we can keep acting as if we are solely in the business of

educating minds when it is the body and bodily experiences that make the surrounding world meaningful for us. You know?”

Heads began to nod and a few hands went up. I told those who had questions I would get to them in a second; I just wanted to finish answering this question first. (I mean, I had a lot more I wanted to say and I had a captured audience, right?) “In addition to those large-scale quantitative studies only coming out of psychology and sociology, the questions researchers are asking girls about how they perceive their bodies and/or live in their bodies—as well as how girls think *other people* think about their bodies—are asked on surveys; not many have actually been *asking* girls, talking to them. They have been distributing surveys to thousands of girls between the ages 5 and 18 that have pictures of various body-silhouettes on them, asking the girls to circle the picture of the body they think they have, to circle the body they think they should have, and to circle the body they think their friends think they should have. Has anyone ever seen the other questions on a body image/perception survey?” I continued full steam ahead, really only posing that as a rhetorical question. “They ask girls to ‘please describe’ how they feel about their body image; and to ‘please describe’ how they feel others would rate their body image on a 1-5 scale: 1 being ‘very unattractive’ and 5 being ‘very attractive.’ The key word for me here would be ‘describe,’ when there is no description, no dialogue between human beings.

A survey I was looking at recently also asked the girl to circle A, B, C, or D according to which letter best represented her opinion of herself. The choices were: “I think I am. . . (a) underweight; (b) normal; (c) overweight; or (d) obese,” and then it of course asked the same question about how the girl thought ‘others’ would describe her body size with those same choices.”

“But what were they considering a normal body?” A male voice from the other side of the room chimed in.

“Yeah, that doesn’t seem right when different people have different ideas of what a normal body is.” Another female voice added.

“My thoughts exactly,” I responded with gratification, “who was it that got to first decide what a normal body should look like?” Silence. No response. “And that’s not my only problem with these studies,” I continued, not worrying about answering my own question. “They are grouping five-year-olds with eighteen-year-olds, and even when they control for age, they still group five-year-olds with fifteen-year-olds and then make huge generalizations about those bodies ranging from five-to-fifteen or five-to-twelve-years-old. But they are not talking with those bodies, not *being-with* those bodies. A theorist in phenomenology, Max van Manen, says if you want to try and understand the lived experiences of children, go hang out with them—go be in their world and *listen* to them. And I am adding to that in my own study by suggesting we need to start listening *differently*.” Several A-mens rang out around the room and I looked back over to the guy who asked the question. “Do you see where I am coming from with this?” I asked, hoping he did not roll his eyes again, because frankly, that was getting on my nerves.

“Yeah, I get what you’re saying.” He replied to the wall. And that was that. I flashed him my best “fuck you” smile and continued on my rant for about ten more minutes, explaining that yet another thing those large quantitative studies did—while helpful, because we should be relying on both quantitative studies *and* qualitative studies, I reminded the students—was compare a limited number of bodies of color with large numbers of white bodies, always coming to the same conclusion that white female bodies (from middle or upper-middle-class backgrounds) had more body dissatisfaction than most bodies of color. “I experienced

something very different with the girls in my study,” I said, wondering how this one was going to go over with the crowd. There was one body of color sitting amongst this class of 37 undergraduate bodies, and when I began talking about the African American girls in my study who seemed to be negotiating a ‘double-body-battle,’ as I refer to it—having to negotiate the white thinness ideal permeating our culture, and having to simultaneously negotiate a historical narrative that purports African American women’s satisfaction with shapely “larger” bodies—I observed that same squirming uncomfortableness when the topic of race/ethnicity comes up that I do when the topic of bodies comes up.

“Bodily-not-enoughness as body dissatisfaction is represented in the literature as mainly a white, female, middle-class problem, but it has transcended race/ethnicity, social-class, gender, sexuality, religion, abledness, and any other category you can think of.” I said with certainty as I tried to use my own eye contact to shift all of the other eyes in the room off of the lone African American male body staring at a special spot on his desk. *Yet another reason why we have to start having more conversations around bodies AND race in this freaking country*, I thought, trying to repress my intolerance for some people’s white privilege not allowing them to be in uncomfortable conversations without *wearing* a history of guilt or avoidance on their bodies.

“One of the girls I wrote a lot about in my dissertation, Buttercup, talked all the time about needing to work out or lose weight and how all her friends at school ‘jokingly’ called her ‘big’ or ‘fat’; yet she also talked all the time about how she wasn’t going to change her body for anyone, or lose weight for anyone—and still, fifteen minutes later she would mention the need to work out because her arms were ‘so flabby’ or stop eating so much. And I also worked with a group of girls in the 8th grade on some writing strategies after school one day who talked about cutting

and throwing up because of body dissatisfaction. So this is not just a white, female problem, y'all."

Hands flew up one after the other asking incredibly thought-provoked questions—some for the class assignment,⁴¹ I am sure, but some of the other questions soon led to the most amazing discussion, which I can safely say had nothing to do with the class assignment. "This is SUCH an important topic," one girl said, "How can you get this kind of conversation into the schools? And what are you planning on doing with your research to make a difference? Because this work needs to be out there." She said with sincerity.

"Great questions," I replied. "If you have suggestions, I'll take them."

"You said boys have body dissatisfaction, too." A male student began, "So will you do work with boys eventually?" "YES!" I jumped off the desk again. "I'm not sure what the guys in here wrote about when I asked you to write about a time you felt like you were not enough of something, but EVERY time I talk to a group of people about this, I either have mothers of sons or men, themselves, telling me how this bodywork is so important to boys too." A future Foucauldian scholar raised his hand and gave the most impassioned speech about how he absolutely agreed with me that bodies in our culture were disciplined—especially in education—and talked about how he had been reading Foucault all semester and how Foucault really 'spoke to him' about how power is everywhere...*and, and, and*... I shot a quick look of pleasant surprise over to the instructor and she beamed, as she was currently using Foucault in her own work.

And then BAM! Bodytalk everywhere. Another male student sitting behind future-Foucault raised his hand and I nodded toward him wondering if he was about to give me some

⁴¹ The class had a few people come talk to them about their research, and they were to ask questions about methodology and then their assignment was to choose one of the speakers' methodologies to write a paper about.

kind of smack-down because he resembled the quant-skeptic who had asked me the question about what I could do with my study earlier. This guy was a beefcake; meaning, he had not missed any days at the gym—he was buff! “You know what you said about boys having body issues and all that,” he began softly, not really wanting me to answer—so I didn’t and he continued—“I know exactly what you’re talking about. I was a wrestler in high school. If you look at me now you probably would never guess it, but in high school I was wrestling 150. I am 6 feet tall and right now I weight 220 pounds.” *Holyfuckingshit!* I thought. *Just keep nodding and don’t look like you just thought that*, I quickly told myself. “I didn’t have anyone telling me it was ‘bad,’ what I was doing to my body—especially my coach—so I didn’t know what would happen to my body. But I do now, believe me.”

I saw that I was not the only amazed face in the room as I looked around and saw beefcake’s classmates staring at him in disbelief. I had no idea what he meant by knowing what would happen to his body, but I did not ask because I did not want to put him on the spot (really because I did not want him to know I did not know). Just as I was trying to come up with something to say, future-Foucault interjected and told us that *he too* had been a wrestler—but in middle school—and he was always smaller than everyone else, never able to “catch up” to the other guys on his team. “Because no one was talking to me about my bodily-not-enoughness, I didn’t know what to do, so I started verbally bullying people to make myself feel better. So yeah, we have to start having conversations in schools with girls *and* boys about bodies and bodily-not-enoughness.” *WTF?* Where was I? Had I been teleported to some alternate universe? The dude was even using my term! I was so caught off-guard by the guys’ stories that I felt myself standing there, looking blankly out of the window in the back of the room. My face felt hot and I felt like the students could see my heart beating faster in my *neck*. What was I

supposed to say to these twenty and twenty-one year old bodies sitting in front of me, waiting for a response? I hadn't really come prepared for *this* kind of dialogue, so I winged it: "I was just thinking about how important what you both said was, and I really appreciate you sharing your not-enoughness stories from middle and high school, because it reminds me even more how important this work is, as well as how not-enoughness is not only about girls."

For the next fifteen minutes or so—what felt like the next hour and a half—other hands went up—female hands and male hands—all asking questions about the 'plan' for my research: how would I get bodytalk started in schools? Would I do more studies like this? What had I noticed about the difference between the girls in my study and the girls I taught in Colorado with bodily-not-enoughness? Why were girls cutting? Was it different depending on the region of the country? Was I planning on writing about my work for teachers or just researchers? All fantastic questions I answered as best I could, trying not to giggle because I felt like I was at a press conference: I had no idea how I would get bodytalk started in schools because, I explained to the class, education seemed to be stuck in this mind/body dualism that I did not know how to disrupt just yet, and the "subject of bodies" was so taboo in our culture it was going to be a long journey. Heads nodded in agreement and a few more shared some bodied-stories. Yes, I hoped to do more studies like this one; and yes of course bodily-not-enoughness was different for everyone, but yes, I had seen glimmers of the resistance that I was talking about in my dissertation study in the girls I taught in Colorado.

In the midst of all this bodytalk, the solo African American male raised his hand and said, "Those girls you were talking about earlier, the ones who were throwing up and stuff, what was their race?"

“They were African American.” I said, and I felt the stillness take over some of the white bodies in the room. I suddenly wondered if I had accidentally said something other than “They were African American.” Again, I had to remind myself that some people did not force themselves to participate in uncomfortable conversations like I did sometimes, so I needed to get over myself. “But were they *all* Black?” He asked me.

“The girls who were talking about cutting and throwing up, the 8th grade girls I was working with one day after school who were not in my study were all Black; but the girls in my study, no, not all of them were Black. Paloma, who I mentioned earlier to you all, she was Puerto Rican American; and Luna was Peruvian American; Alice was Mexican American; and Blossom was Lebanese American; and while Blossom didn’t really make reference to herself as any specific identity category, the other girls *made sure* they were referenced in this way, let me tell you.” A few laughs, but not enough to deflate the sudden (and confusing) tension I was breathing in.

“I guess I’ve been stereo-typing my race like everybody else,” the student said as he played with some nondescript spec on his desk, “because I can’t believe any Black girl would ever be throwing up or cutting herself. That’s just crazy and shouldn’t be happening.” I nodded in agreement and looked out at the other bodies before me who had finally exhaled, and I said, “Yeah, this *is* some crazy shit, man. And you’re right, it shouldn’t be happening. To anyone in this room or to any kid in any classroom, so we *have* to figure out a way to start talking about bodies any way we can so the subject of bodies isn’t so taboo. I mean, we are a culture obsessed with bodies, yet we can’t even make reference to our bodies? There is something wrong with that.” I thought this might be the conclusion to the provocative bodytalk that someone had obviously paid this classroom full of students to initiate, but as usual, I was incorrect.

The high school wrestler told me he was really glad I was doing the work I was doing, and he hoped I figured out how to start some kind of conversation around bodies in schools because it was important, and he hoped I really was going to include boys somehow in my work, because that was important to him. “We can’t ignore the fact that so many kids in this country are overweight, though.” He added. “And the obesity rate is higher in this country than in most. So how are you addressing the obesity issue in your research?” Damn! Who *were* these kids? Was I being punked by my committee for an early dissertation defense?

“You bring up a great point.” I replied to beefcake. “I want to make sure to address obesity in my future work, because that is also bodytalk we have not been talking to kids about in America. Luckily, that is something Michelle Obama has made her mission as First Lady, and she is doing some really cool stuff with her campaign. Obesity is a very serious issue and I don’t want people to think because I write about this thinness ideal so much that I am not also acknowledging the education we need to be implementing about healthy bodies—not in a Jillian Michaels-kind-of-way.”

And *that* would be the last of it, the concluding remark to this bodied-hour, I was sure. Nope. Students began looking at watches, closing laptops, and getting ready to go; and I was thanking them for having me come and for listening to my spiel, and this random girl in the back of the class—last row, last desk, hadn’t talked the whole time—raised her hand. But they were all packing up and talking and moving and leaving, so I didn’t really know what to do. “Yes, you have a quick question before we go?” I asked, gathering my things as well.

“I just want to say that this work, this bodily-not-enoughness work, this is really important work. I know you know that, but I wanted to say it, because it is. Because some of us have dealt with this not-enoughness our whole lives. And it’s just...really important.”

“Thanks.” I said, really trying to be sincere in my response as people were leaving class.

“I think this is really important work too, and I needed to come here today and talk with you all to remember that.”

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ In an article titled “Remaining Skeptical: Bridling for and with One Another,” I wrote about my first encounters with phenomenology:

The first I heard about phenomenology was in my first qualitative research methods class during my first semester in grad school. I thought it sounded like a load of fluffiness. . . . I remember thinking, how could someone research a feeling or a state-of-being, and not being able to come up with a plausible answer in my mind. (Hilary, 2–16–08) (Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009, p. 358)

ⁱⁱ Husserl took up Brentano’s existing work with *intentionality*, which is sometimes referred to as the “aboutness” of things; meaning, our consciousness is always a consciousness *of* or *about* something. The choosing of the word “intentionality” is more of a play on the etymological roots of the word than how it is used today. Originally, *intention* derives from 12th century Old French—*intencion*—as an act of *stretching*; or even earlier from Latin, *intendere*, referring to the *action of straining or directing the mind or attention to something; a stretching out* (<http://www.oed.com.proxygsu-uga1.galileo.usg.edu/view/Entry/97492?rskey=Zyj3Bk&result=1&isAdvanced=false#>).

Therefore, in phenomenology, *intentionality* can be envisioned as our consciousness *stretching out toward* or *directing itself toward* some mental object in order to apprehend it in perception. Mind you, this object is not just a physical object; it can also be a *mental object*—a memory, an illusion, a hallucination, an emotion, a feeling, a thought—it is of no consequence. It is our consciousness apprehending an object in perception and trying to sketch out the structures of those experiences that Husserl made the premise in his philosophy of phenomenology.

ⁱⁱⁱ The ancient Greek meaning of *psyche* is “breath, or life (identified with or indicated by breath); the animating principle in man and all other living beings; the source of all vital activities, rational or irrational; the soul or spirit (as distinct from its material vehicle, the body)” (<http://www.oed.com.proxygsu-uga1.galileo.usg.edu/view/Entry/153848?redirectedFrom=psyche#>).

^{iv} Dahlberg, 2006, p. 16

^v Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 1995

^{vi} Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2003; Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009; van Manen, 1997

^{vii} Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009

^{viii} www.dictionary.com

^{ix} Butler, J. (1997) as cited in Rasmussen & Harwood, 2003, p. 29

^x Rasmussen & Harwood, 2003, p. 29

^{xi} www.dictionary.com

^{xii} Denzin, 1997, p. 224

^{xiii} Denzin, 1997, p. 225

^{xiv} Sermijn, Devlieger, & Loots, 2008

^{xv} Schuh & Cunningham, 2004, p. 325-326

^{xvi} Gadamer, 1960

^{xvii} Thich Naht Hanh, 1987

^{xviii} Moran, 2002

^{xix} Husserl, 2002/1981, p. 125

^{xx}

PHENOMENAL WOMAN, Maya Angelou
 Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
 I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
 But when I start to tell them,
 They think I'm telling lies.
 I say,
 It's in the reach of my arms,
 The span of my hips,
 The stride of my step,
 The curl of my lips.
 I'm a woman
 Phenomenally.
 Phenomenal woman,
 That's me.

I walk into a room
 Just as cool as you please,
 And to a man,
 The fellows stand or
 Fall down on their knees.
 Then they swarm around me,
 A hive of honey bees.
 I say,

It's the fire in my eyes,
 And the flash of my teeth,
 The swing in my waist,
 And the joy in my feet.
 I'm a woman
 Phenomenally.
 Phenomenal woman,
 That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
 What they see in me.
 They try so much
 But they can't touch
 My inner mystery.
 When I try to show them,
 They say they still can't see.
 I say,
 It's in the arch of my back,
 The sun of my smile,
 The ride of my breasts,
 The grace of my style.
 I'm a woman
 Phenomenally.
 Phenomenal woman,
 That's me.

Now you understand
 Just why my head's not bowed.
 I don't shout or jump about
 Or have to talk real loud.
 When you see me passing,
 It ought to make you proud.
 I say,
 It's in the click of my heels,
 The bend of my hair,
 the palm of my hand,
 The need for my care.
 'Cause I'm a woman
 Phenomenally.
 Phenomenal woman,
 That's me.

^{xxi} Although scholars have been trying to disrupt the normalized notion that body dissatisfaction resides only within a white, middle-to-upper-middle-class, and female discourse (see Bordo, 1993, 2003; Jones & Hughes, under review; Love, 2010; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Orbach, 2009), a

majority of quantitative studies in psychology and sociology still report white, middle-class girls as the highest effected group by body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Over a decade ago, Thompson (1994) reported that the literature on eating problems among African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American women, as well as working-class women and lesbians should cast doubt on the accuracy of the white, middle-class profile often presented in the literature. She argued instead that rather than reflecting the actual prevalence of eating problems, the focus on white, middle-class females in the research literature more accurately reflected the populations of women that had been studied—or not studied. Consequently, Thompson’s studies offered nuanced analyses of Latina and African American women who suffered from eating problems and “found that while many of them thought their culture *was supposed* to accept bigger or more curvaceous bodies, they did not believe their own ‘chunky’ bodies were accepted by family members or the broader society” (Jones and Hughes, under review, p. 12).

^{xxii} This is a writing assignment I use from Stephanie Jones called “From Where Do I Read the World”—I gave them a list of prompts/questions from which they could choose to respond if they wanted to but did not have to.

^{xxiii} This includes social justice teacher educators who often construct the mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual, monolingual preservice teachers with whom we work as “problems” because of the categorical indicators just listed. (For examples of scholars who have been writing about this, see Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004; Bridges-Rhoads, forthcoming; Hughes, 2010; Jones & Enriquez, 2009)

^{xxiv} For scholars who have written about this, see Bettie, 2003; Fordham, 1996; Hankins, 2003; Jones, 2003; Lesko, 2001; Pollock, 2004; Reay, 1998; Reay, Crozig, & James, 2011; Walkerdine, 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001; Youdell, 2006.

There is also the additional *angst* some of us experience when trying to bring bodies and bodytalk into teacher education classrooms, due to the pressures we feel from the discursive academic overlords (patriarchy, tenure and promotion, student evaluations, etc.) and the discursive histories that have shaped what is “acceptable” (or not) in university classrooms. Questioning what educational spaces allow for, Jones (2011), for example, describes the pressures of student evaluations and promotion and tenure lingering in the back of her mind as she decided whether or not to have her preservice students practice saying “vagina” and “penis” out loud during class, so they could feel more comfortable talking to their own elementary students when the subject of bodies came up.

^{xxv} A recent 5-year longitudinal study on the predictors of “risky sexual behavior” of young adolescent African Americans reported that the early onset of sexual practices can be contributed to African American youth who “more than likely” come from low socioeconomic statuses, families that are not “intact,” or families where the parental supervision is low (Houlihan, et al, 2008). This study also reported that African American adolescents tend to “initiate” sexual behavior at earlier ages than do other ethnic groups, but the only other “ethnic group” statistics represented in the study gathered from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention were for Caucasian adolescents. The meaning intended from the language used in studies such as these

(“families that are not intact”) comes from a deficit perspective that privileges a monolithic white, middle-class body. In addition, when suggesting that African American youth “initiate” sexual behaviors earlier than other ethnic groups, the meaning attached to the word “initiate” seems problematic, because it reflects some kind of sexual autonomy the girls have, some kind of agency-filled choice they are making to have sex earlier than their ethnic peers in the study—Caucasian youth—which seems extremely totalizing and essentializing of African American youth.

Another significant study by Guilamo-Ramos, et al., (2008) focused on adolescent sexual risk behavior in inner-city youth and used a framework which analyzed 668 middle school students’ *intentions* to engage in sexual activity. 75% of the students polled were Latino and 25% of them African American, and the framework reported high levels of predictability for the teens’ intentions to have sex based on several variables from the multiple categories the researchers were using as predictors. Expectations about advantages and disadvantages of having sex, emotional and affective reactions, and self-efficacy were a few of the predictor categories used on the self-administered questionnaires the students filled out. This work focusing on young adolescents is largely needed because, as Guilamo-Ramos, et al (2008) point out, most of the major data sets in the United States used to study adolescents ignore *young* adolescents, and it also perpetuates the totalizing of Latino youth from a deficit perspective, in that the study is for the “prevention of adolescent *problem behaviors*.”

^{xxvi} I understand that it probably was not the *cookies* as much as the two months we all spent together getting to know one another as writing confidants and trustworthy companions that created the spaces where the girls felt comfortable enough to enlist this discursive body-rhetoric they often engaged in, putting injurious language on one another’s bodies (“If you eat another cookie, it’s going straight to those thighs.”), or on their own bodies (“Look at my arms; they’re all flabby. I need to start working out again.”); because we ate plenty of chicken nuggets, lemon bars, and brownies during those first two months and there was a complete absence of this negative bodytalk.

^{xxvii} These cultural practices are not limited to America, mind you. According to Orbach (2009), in Brazil, the government is willing to provide publicly funded breast enhancements to treat low self-esteem, considering it cheaper than psychotherapy. Meanwhile, one can peruse Western newspapers to purchase a holiday vacation that combines cosmetic surgery with trips to Singapore, Thailand, Hungary and Columbia. And as these practices become “ever more available and widespread, people will soon ask why you haven’t remodeled your body, as though it were a shameful old kitchen” (Orbach, 2009, p. 103). Additionally, Bordo (2003) writes about the Fiji islands not having access to television until 1995, when a single station was introduced that broadcast programs from the US, Britain, and Australia. Until that time, according to Bordo and anthropologist Anne Becker who reported in her study that most Fijian girls and women—no matter their body size—were comfortable with their bodies, Fiji had no reported cases of eating disorders. In 1998, just three years after the television station began broadcasting, 11% of girls reported vomiting to control weight and 62% of the girls surveyed reported dieting during the previous months (Bordo, 2003, p. xvi).

^{xxviii} I chose *discourse* here rather than *ideology*, because a discourse theory view “characterizes subjects as engaging in their own constitution, acquiescing with or contesting the roles to which they are assigned” (Mills, 2004, p. 41); meaning, people are allowed some kind of agency in all of this—to resist *and* participate in the discursive body practices simultaneously and maybe even contradictorily, as I do when I write these pages trying to create some kind of change in education, before and after I go to the gym and take breaks from this writing to do squats and lunges. An ideological (Althusserian) view, on the other hand, might instead see this dis-ease of not being enough in our bodies as a false consciousness, a way that people are called upon to see themselves as particular types of ‘fixed’ (bodied) subjects, as if they are taking up a position that is already established in culture and does not allow space to think about how it might be possible to intervene (Mills, 2004).

^{xxix} For more on “English Only,” see Alcoff, 2009; Macedo, 2005

^{xxx} Jenny Craig® states that its clients, on average, “spend just a \$1 a day more on Jenny’s Cuisine® than the typical American spends on food. (*Average Jenny Craig client expense versus U.S. resident food expenditures as reported by USDA, Economic Research Service. Food CPI, Prices and Expenditures, Table 15, Per Capita Food Expenditures: 1953 to 2007 --adjusted 4.5% for inflation to reflect 2008 expenditures).

(http://www.jennycraig.com/programs/faqs/our_program#three)

In 2007, the diet industry was a multi-billion dollar enterprise, **averaging over 40 billion dollars**; with its existence depending on American’s failures. “As America gets bigger, so does the weight loss business”

(http://marketplace.publicradio.org/display/web/2007/05/30/our_loss_diet_industrys_gain/);

And just 3 years later in 2010, it was reported that the **59.7 billion dollar diet industry** seemed to be “slowing down,” due to it being the year of the “value diet.”

(http://www.cnbc.com/id/37492840/It_s_The_Year_of_The_Value_Diet).

^{xxxi} Michaels goes on in the interview to explain her ‘calling’ to comfort (‘fix’) those who are “most vulnerable,” because that’s how she felt as an overweight 12-year-old with no support from her parents, and she vowed to “never have that feeling again” (par 6).

<http://www.womenshealthmag.com/life/jillian-michaels-workout>

^{xxxii} Collecting women’s stories about their bodies from around the globe, playwright and author, Eve Ensler interviewed Helen Gurley Brown, and Gurley, who was 81-years-old at the time of the interview, was doing 100 sit-ups twice a day, and reported that through *Cosmo*, she has been able to help women everywhere, *just not herself*. Writing Gurley’s words from the interview as a creative short act for her play/book, *The Good Body*, Ensler (2004) relayed the editor’s advice about bodies as such:

(*Doing sit-ups again*) Don’t get things fixed, Eve. Don’t do it. (*Stops sit-ups*) If you do, another thing always breaks down. I had my eyes done when I was forty. I thought that would do. But no. Tried it again when I was fifty-six. First full face-lift at sixty-three. Second at sixty-seven. Third at seventy-three. I’m desperate for another, but there’s no skin left on my face. Yesterday they took some fat out of my backside and they shot it into my cheeks. I think even you would approve, Eve. I’m recycling. (p. 13)

^{xxxiii} Bordo (2003) argues that the artfully arranged bodies represented in magazine ads, videos, and other popular culture devices are powerful lessons teaching girls how to see their bodies. She elaborates further:

...they offer fantasies of safety, self-containment, acceptance, immunity from pain and hurt. They speak to young people not just about how to be beautiful but about how to become what the dominant culture admires, how to be cool, how to “get it together.” To girls who have been abused they may speak of transcendence or armoring of too-vulnerable female flesh. For racial and ethnic groups whose bodies have been marked as foreign, earthy, and primitive, or considered unattractive by Anglo-Saxon norms, they may cast the lure of assimilation, of becoming (metaphorically speaking) “white.” (pp. xxi-xxii)

^{xxxiv} Over a decade ago, Thompson (1994) reported that the literature on eating problems among African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American women, as well as working-class women and lesbians should cast doubt on the accuracy of the white, middle-class profile often presented in the literature. She argued instead that rather than reflecting the actual prevalence of eating problems, the focus on white, middle-class females in the research literature more accurately reflected the populations of women that had been studied—or not studied. Consequently, Thompson’s studies offered nuanced analyses of Latina and African American women who suffered from eating problems and “found that while many of them thought their culture *was supposed* to accept bigger or more curvaceous bodies, they did not believe their own ‘chunky’ bodies were accepted by family members or the broader society” (Jones and Hughes, under review).

^{xxxv} See Bourdieu, 1977; Brown, 2005; Ferguson, 2005; Fine, 1992; Fordum, 1996; Gay, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Gladson-Billings, 1994; Jones, 2003; Lesko, 1996, 2001; Thompson, 1998; Walkerdine, 1997; Youdell, 2006

^{xxxvi} According to Koro-Ljungberg (2004), Kuhn (1996) defined paradigms as “sets of theoretical assumptions, rules, and scientific beliefs shared by a group of scientists. Crotty (1998) explained that for scientists, prevailing paradigms represent matrices that shape and frame the realities to be studied” (p. 602). Also drawing on Guba (1990) and Popkewitz (1984), Koro-Ljungberg added that paradigms also conceptually guide scientists so they can make sense of their social worlds; “they provide a framework for the scientists’ thoughts and actions. Thus, differing paradigms explain the divergence in scientific vision, custom, and tradition” (p. 602).

^{xxxviii} Numerous scholars have proposed a variety of conceptual and theoretical approaches to address validity or any of the terms associated with validity (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Freeman, et al., 2007; Giorgi, 1997, 2002, 2008; Koro-Ljunberg, 2004, 2010; Lather, 1993, 2001, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Maxwell, 2010; Polkinghorne, 2006; Preissle, et al., 2006; Reissman, 1993; Richardson, 1997; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; St. Pierre, 1997, in press; Vagle, 2009; Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009), demonstrating that validity can be approached in a multitude of ways, and can, according to Koro-Ljungberg (2010) “function differently based on epistemological and theoretical variations” (p. 603).

^{xxxix} Alcoff (2005) suggests that the complex political reality for ethical and political accounts of justice for Latinos in the United States comes from “the fact that Latinos are in the United States for a very wide variety of reasons” (p. 537). She posits that the diversity of causes is less true for Native Americans and African Americans, because generally, these two groups experienced annexation of land and enslavement, respectively. “Mexican Americans experienced annexation, Puerto Ricans and some other groups experienced colonial invasion and colonization, many Central Americans experienced military invasions from the United States either direct or by proxy, and some South Americans experienced CIA-organized government overthrow, torture, and murder” (p. 537). All of these groups, according to Alcoff, (except the Mexicans who experienced annexation), had something of a “forced march north in order to flee war, violence, and poverty aided and abetted by the government they are now living under” (p. 537)

^{xi} Derrida actually wrote first about ‘the absolute secret,’ because for him, hermeneutics was always the mistake of trying to “arrest the text in a certain position, thus settling on a thesis, meaning, or truth” (Caputo, 2000, p. 2). Derrida’s belief was that hermeneutics seeks to “decode The Meaning, to break through the play of signs to the Meaning of the Author who gives meaning to the signs he uses, to find The Truth behind the structure of the sign” (p. 2). He argued that hermeneutics is “searching for The Secret that sits silently behind the text, like Husserl’s pre-expressive *Sinn* silently awaiting a *Bedeutung* and an indicative sign to escort it into the world” (p. 2).

However, I agree with Caputo (2000), that if Derrida gets to distinguish “The Secret” from a “more originary experience of the secret,” then it is only fair for me to also distinguish my phenomenology from a more originary experience of phenomenology: a “radical” or “queer” phenomenology, if you will, which acknowledges I have given up Husserl’s dream of pre-expressive *Sinn*, so that I can live and dwell (Heidegger, 1960) in constant play with multiple, plural, and fragmented meanings (Caputo, 2000; Vagle, 2010). I might have to also agree with Caputo (2000) and Rorty (1998) here, that when all is said and done, “Derrida, too, thinks he has found The Secret and its name is the non-name of difference” (Caputo, 2000, p. 7).

^{xli} See “I’m not Giorgi, but...”

^{xlii} Johnson (2005) describes her extremely challenging and frustrating experiences acquiring IRB approval, due to her ‘sensitive’ and ‘vulnerable’ topic of teachers’ affairs with their students by first writing about the event as an ‘act of betrayal,’ and then she re-examined the event to explore its complexity. She writes,

What had at first seemed like a betrayal was in fact much more complex. I had been caught in a, you’re-either-with-me-or-against-me binary, which was hypocritical given my supposed poststructural theoretical stance. I revel in shades of gray, but I had unfairly and self-righteously fixed these professors’ locations in black and white. If I ever am in a position like theirs, I cannot now say unequivocally that I will vocally champion qualitative research when it may well be in my students’ and the discipline’s best interest for me to lay low and practice subversive resistance. (pp. 53-54)

I value the work Johnson shared in her dissertation, exploring her own lived experience of IRB within PhDness, because these are the things we do not know we need to think about when

designing qualitative studies that involve human subjects—what it really means to have a vulnerable topic or vulnerable research participants and the effects our work might have on them.

^{xliii} I included Alicia's response to the 'cleanup,' to reiterate the importance of having someone who knows the 'colloquial language' you need translated rather than relying on a computer program's literal translation; and the brilliant idea she gave me to include in the letter that you do not speak the language you are communicating in so the reader will not be confused—as *several* of my Spanish-speaking parents were at first:

Wow! That was such a bear! Do I get a Big shout out in your PhD resource notes now?! You probably can call it a "taller" (I've seen that word attached to stores, but it does mean workshop in the literal sense), I just think "grupo" is better. Also, I had to change it to "reunión" (yes, it means reunion or meeting) in some instances because of your context of workshop. The things I changed were mostly from literal meaning to more colloquial. The main problem in translating stuff like this is the wordiness of English. I feel like Spanish documents are more to the point with fewer passive sentences. Do you want to add that you don't speak Spanish? Sometimes getting forms like this confuse Spanish speakers because they assume you actually speak Spanish. Just a thought.

^{xlv} I would like to mention here that this notion of 'critiquing one's pre-understandings of a phenomenon was not newly introduced by St. Pierre (1997). Husserl's (1913/1983) notion of critiquing one's own knowing is part of the phenomenological reduction, and in order to employ the reduction, the researcher must do two things: "bracket" personal past knowledge and all other theoretical knowledge not based on direct intuition, regardless of its source" so that full attention can be given to the phenomenon as it 'appears' to his or her consciousness (Giorgi, 2008, p. 3); and the second expectation is that the researcher not make any claims that the object or event actually 'exists' in the way it appears; this, according to Husserl, is what made this or that a 'phenomenon' (Giorgi, 2008).

^{xlvi} How I *anticipated* collecting my data and how I *actually* collected my data was part of a wonderfully maddening and intellectually disorienting process, but I learned (slowly) that qualitative inquiry is a messy and complex process; and work with young adolescents is a messy and complex process; and all of that makes sense to me now in the larger discourse of doing any kind of body-work, because *bodies are a messy and complex process*. Thus, my *anticipated* methods of collecting data looked something like this:

- Audio record weekly writing group meetings
- 'Close' Observation
- Field notes/Bridling Journal
- Lived experience descriptions/protocol writing
- Phenomenological Interviewing
- Photo elicitation
- Writing from writers' notebooks

What *actually* took place, however, looked more like this:

- Turned on the tape recorder and left it on the table during our weekly writing group meetings (until one of the girls grabbed it and sang into it)

- Collected Writings (poetry/prose) from their writers' notebooks and the Purple Flowers Blog
- Car conversations (yearning for the tape recorder)
- 'Close' Observations—moving back and forth between natural attitude and phenomenological attitude
- Field notes/bridling journal
- Shoeboxes for 'shoebox poems, which we never wrote'; but incredible conversations recorded around the magazines we were using to create the shoeboxes for the poems we never wrote

The girls in my study had their own agenda, and they were not really interested in interviews or protocol writing or using photos as talking points in interviews (since they didn't want to *do* interviews). So I collected dozens of pieces of their writing, transcribed all of the weekly meetings each week so I could think about what to try and talk to them about the next week; took detailed field notes while I was with them or just after; wrote voraciously before and after meeting with them each week in my bridling journal; collected the shoeboxes they used for a writing exercise we never completed; and I ended up with beautiful data.

^{xlvii} Van Manen's (1990) suggested use for a lived-experience description (pp. 64-65):

1. Describe the experience as you lived through it. Avoid as much as possible causal explanations, generalizations, or abstract interpretations.
2. Describe the experience from the inside, as it were; almost like a state of mind: the feelings mood, emotions, etc.
3. Focus on a particular example or incident of the object of experience: describe specific events, an adventure, a happening, a particular experience
4. Try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time
5. Attend to how the body feels, how things smelled, how they sounded, etc.
6. Avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology

^{xlviii} There are suggested ways to go about analyzing data in phenomenological projects (see Dahlberg, et al., 2008; Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 2008; Vagle, 2010; van Manen, 1990), but I am not going to discuss those in length here, because my more radical-hermeneutical-phenomenological-self took me in different directions than my mentors listed above. I did refer to Vagle's (2010) 4th component for post-intentional phenomenological research when considering how to approach tackling my data, and that seemed to be a helpful starting point—because we need those starting points, Elena, and *then* we can begin from where we are! I will say too that I read all of my phenomenology mentors' approaches (Dahlberg, et al., 2008; Vagle, 2010; van Manen, 1990) *several times*, while continuously reading a few others' approaches (e.g., Davies, 2004; Richardson, 1994; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Sprague, 2005; St. Pierre, 1997, in press); all who seemed to complement my phenomenological mentors, creating this beautifully messy amalgamation of 'how-to' in my head.

^{xlix} The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the 'old' meaning for *prejudice* as a *prejudgment: a preconceived opinion not based on real or actual experience*. According to Gadamer (1960),

The history of ideas shows that not until the Enlightenment does the concept of prejudice acquire the negative connotation familiar today. Actually, *prejudice* means a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined...The German legal meaning comes from a provisional legal verdict before the final verdict is reached. The Latin meaning (*praejudicium*) is adverse effect, disadvantage, harm, giving it a negative connotation, but it's only a derivative of the word. (p.270)

Thus, when I use 'prejudice' here, I am referring to it as Gadamer did, in that I mean its original intent of a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined.

PhDness is what Sarah Bridges-Rhoads and I named the complexity within the processes of *being* a Ph.D. student: all of the expectations, structures, and (developmental) steps on the ladder that one has climb and check-off in order to achieve the doctoral degree. (Bridges-Rhoads, S. & Hughes-Decatur, H.E. (2010, December). *Are we qualified yet? Developmentalism and data analysis in qualitative research*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of The University of Georgia Student Qualitative Inquiry Group. Athens, GA.)

^{li} Actually, Granville Stanley Hall probably could have benefited from examining/bridling his own rather twisted upbringing in the late 1800s by his extremely religious parents who taught him he could only refer to his genitals as "the dirty place," as well as the other haunting tales his father told him to instill a fear of masturbation. Then G. Stanley might have come to understand how those rather peculiar ideas might have not really inhabited his consciousness as much as *colonized* his consciousness and perhaps influenced his conceptualizations of adolescence.

^{lii} For scholars who have been writing about young adolescents in ways other than in the traditional sense, see Andrews, 2008; Bean, 2005, 2006; Brown & Saltman, 2005; Giroux, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2011; Gutstein, 2006, 2007; Hughes, 2010; Lesko, 1996, 2001, 2005; Li & Vagle, 2010; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995; Vagle, 2011

^{liii} Original quote: "*Oh, I can model any size I am, honey. They gonna have to pay me or they gonna lose something special...I don't lose weight for nobody, baby.*" (Buttercup, 2009)

^{liv} Other intentional objects included societal messages about their bodies as not-enough because of race/ethnicity/language/social-class/gender/age/aesthetics, from teachers, each other, me, themselves, friends, family, religion, magazines, television shows, music lyrics, popularity, to name a few.

^{lv} When thinking about intentionality in phenomenology, philosophers write about an *intentional object* (mental/physical) in which our consciousness/bodies are directed toward, in a sense. Therefore, I use *intentional object* because these objects are what our intentional threads are 'reaching out to.' Heidegger (2002), for example, writes that "*Intentio* literally means *directing-itself-toward*. Every lived experience, every psychic comportment, directs itself toward something. Representing is a representing of something, recalling is a recalling of something,

judging is a judging about something, presuming, expecting, hoping, loving, hating—of something” (Heidegger, 2002, p.258).

^{lvi} *Vulnerableness* is a derivative of *vulnerable*, which originates from Latin: *vulnerabilis*, meaning *wounding*; and taken passively in accordance with the more usual sense of *—ABLE*, (suffix), *vulnerable* as an adjective for the purposes of this study means, 1) **susceptible of receiving wounds**; 2) **offering an opening to the attacks of raillery (teasing/joking), criticism, calumny (slander/libel), etc.** I choose *vulnerableness* because it allows for the adjective to take on its noun-ness for the purposes of exploring bodies and the noun-ness of bodily-not-enoughness.<http://www.oed.com.proxygsu-uga1.galileo.usg.edu/view/Entry/224872?redirectedFrom=vulnerable#>

^{lvii} I use *phenomenal-body* here in multiple ways: Merleau-Ponty (2002) writes of the phenomenal body as the embodied way we live in and have contact with the world: “I do not make contact with the world through simply thinking about it, but through experiencing it with my senses, acting on it, in ways ranging from the most sophisticated technology to the most primitive unreflective moments, and having feelings about it, which again range in their complexity and subtly” (Matthews, 2006, p. 89). It is through this contact with the world through our own bodies, Merleau-Ponty believed, that results in the things around us having any kind of meaning for us—not as detached objects, but “as having practical, emotional, sensual and imaginative meaning” (p. 89). Additionally, I read these *phenomenal-bodies* with whom I spent a year with through Maya Angelou’s poem, “Phenomenal Woman.”

^{lviii} “Trust my gush” comes from a ‘found poem’ I made from a passage in Tom Romano’s book.

^{lix} In “Passin’ for Black: Race, Identity, and Bone Memory in Postracial America,” Fordham (2010) writes the lives of Black people are still so polluted with the violence that accompanies racism that our racialized identity has become a master status, superceding everything else about us. In recent academic debates, Blackness has been problematized as an artifact of the distant past or an artifice of performance (Young, 2007). But this conceptual flexibility has yet to reshape the American system of racial classification. Today, passing not only involves the willful violation of recognized racial boundaries (Kroeger, 2003), it also suggests that the constructed identity itself—Blackness—is stolen. Passin’ for Black is symptomatic of the fragile and fleeting nature of social categorization in contemporary America. (p. 10)

^{lx} Alice seemed *so* confident in her body that I had to (and still do) as a 37-year-old woman, constantly interrogate why I did not want to accept that a 12-year-old could live in the world embodying that much *enoughness*.

^{lxi} Lather (2006) writes about working “within/against” methodologies, so I borrow that concept here to argue that the girls in my dissertation study were both following the bodylines that have been created by being followed and followed by being created, and they were also pushing back against those same lines in order to (re)orient themselves on those bodylines.

^{lxii} “Nativism” refers to one of Alcoff’s (2009) ‘axes of racism’ that permeates American culture, mostly targeting immigrants, and relating to the xenophobia and ethnic chauvinism that occur when a racialized other somehow threatens the imaginary identity of the United States (p. 116).

^{lxiii} This conversation took place during the 3rd meeting for my pilot study in the fall of 2009—on Saturday, September 26, 2009 to be more specific—and I did not use a recorder for the pilot study; however, I took notes as the conversation was taking place, just after it ended, and later that day when I was reflecting on it in my bridling journal.

^{lxiv} Merleau-Ponty's corporeal schema describes the way in which the body's agency makes manifest the historical world. For Merleau-Ponty, our bodies are not objects in space, rather they inhabit space and through them we experience the world and the other. The relationship between body and world is one of mutual transformation, of "reciprocal transfer" (Nielson, 2009, par 3). <http://percaritatem.com/2009/02/18/fanon-merleau-ponty-and-the-difference-of-phenomenology/>.

For more on corporeal schema, see "Response to Racialized Bodies: A Phenomenologist Talks Back."

^{lxv} In the United States today, as it has been in the past, there is xenophobia and ethnic chauvinism against numerous groups, but not all of these experience racialization. According to Alcoff (2009), "all immigrant groups are not racialized in the sense of universalizing negative values onto a group that is demarcated on the basis of visible features, nor subject to the essentializing of their cultural characteristics as static" (p. 116). For example, "European immigrants are not tagged as inassimilable cultural inferiors nor is their difference racialized in the way that some Latinos, Arabs, and Asian Americans experience" (p. 116).

^{lxvi} Alcoff (1999) describes the three basic positions of how race is constructed in society: 1) Race is not real because science has invalidated race as a salient biological category; "it is the biological meaning of racial concepts that have led to racism. Therefore, the use of racial concepts should be avoided in order to be metaphysically accurate as well as to further anti-racist agenda" (p. 16). 2) Race is always politically noticeable and the most important element of identity. "Members of racial groups share a set of characteristics, a set of racial identities are stable across history" (pp. 16-17). 3) Race is "socially constructed, historically malleable, culturally contextual, and produced through learned perceptual practice" (p. 17). Whether or not we should use racial concepts as though they are 'valid,' and whether or not "their use will have positive or negative political effects, depends on the context" (p. 17).

^{lxvii} I say 'multiple languages' because two of the girls could speak Spanish, (conversational) French, and English; and Alice was teaching herself German, in addition to already being able to speak conversational French.

^{lxviii} Its kinda nice to be Puerto Rican
Spanish girl over here
"Boricua" y no "Morena"
Mi pelo largo
Comida deliciosa
Pastelillos, biscochos, pudin, flancocho,
Hay que ricoooooooo.
These foods are like a wonderland of flavor

Puerto Rican Proud
 La isla del Encanto.....
 The island of Joy...
 Puerto Rico
 The beaches, the sea
 Walk step by step around sea shells
 See dolphins Makes you feel at home
 See the wonderful beauty and soul of your true Puerto Rican self!
 Be proud and glad....
 Truly know you're a Puerto Rican
 "Soy Boricua y no Morena"
 It's nice to be Puerto Rican!

^{lxix} For my purposes, I am using the traditional manner of differentiating between *race* and *ethnic* categories of identity (Alcoff, 2005). I borrow Alcoff's (2005) reference of ethnicity as being about a "culture that a group has created through historical experience; it is about subjective life interpretations, conscious practices and beliefs" (p. 541). Whereas race is more defined "in relation to physical appearance over which an individual has much less control... Ethnicity is about the subjective features of a people, the practices they have invented and carried forward, about their interpretation of their history and its meaning" (p. 541).

Additionally, I borrow Alcoff's (2009) definition of *racism* as a "negative value or set of values projected as an essential or noncontingent attribute onto a group whose members are defined through genealogical connection—that is, as sharing some origin—and who are demarcated on the basis of some visible phenotypic features" (p. 115). According to Alcoff, antiblack racism is the most virulent and persistent form of current racisms, "and it informs and infects other forms," but it is not the only form, nor should it be the model for all forms of racism (p. 115).

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^{lxxi} I would also add here, social-class, abled, heteronormative, and gender as categories of 'what we do' in America; as everything bodies is everything raced, classed, abled, straight, and gendered.

^{lxxii} According to the U.S. Census Bureau Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2011, those of "Hispanic Origin" may be any race.

^{lxxiii} U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2011

^{lxxiv} Although *phenotype* is traditionally used for physical characteristics when referring to racialized bodies, I am using 'linguistic phenotype' here because I believe Spanish-speakers in our country are often racialized automatically when someone hears them speaking Spanish—in addition to then being racialized by their skin color, hair, and other physical features.

^{lxxv} I chose *metonym* here rather than *metaphor*, because metonyms work by the continued *association* of two concepts, whereas metaphors work by the *similarity* of two concepts. If I say ‘The White House asked for a press release,’ for example, you would know that I am using ‘White House’ as a direct (and continued) association to the president, so that the two concepts are always associated with one another rather than simply being similar to one another. In this instance, then, the Latino body would be a metonym for nativism, because the Spanish-speaking-body is often associated in America with the imaginary identity some have that is threatened by that Spanish-speaking-body.

^{lxxvi} Fanon here

^{lxxvii} In “*The Lived Experience of the Black*,” Fanon (198) describes his ‘amusement’ during a moment when first arriving to France because a child on the train says to his mother, “Tiens, un negre!” (“Look, a Negro!”) The amusement is annulled just seconds later, however, when the child continues badgering his mother, “this time adding to the expression of the gaze a component of fear” (Weate, 2001, p. 7). The fear of the child is read, according to Fanon, as all that Fanon’s skin represents. “The child is no longer merely pointing to the skin difference as a form of naïve wonder at a rare site—the curiosity of seeing a black human being...the black skin is already operating as a kind of metonym for the child, representing a specific imaginary-historical construction of otherness” (Weate, 2001, p. 7). Thus, when Buttercup hears the disbelief in people’s voices about the history tied to her skin color, she, too could become this kind of metonym for whomever is expressing this ignorance/racism, representing a “specific imaginary-historical construction of otherness.”

^{lxxviii} Fanon is referring here to Karl Jaspers (1961), *The Question of German Guilt*