Crossroad Moments with my Self:

Conversation, Perspective, and Choice

through Social Constructionism

Proefschrift

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Abstract

This dissertation is a result of an encounter with a quote from a book on social construction theory that suggested that the individual, autonomous self is dead (Burr, 2003, p. 23). This statement created a personal dissonance that I could not ignore. I felt that statement was incorrect because of my understanding of and experience with my Self. At the beginning of this project I took the stance that I needed to defend the existence of the Self within social construction theory. By the end of this project my perspective shifted and my thinking transformed through the application of relational and dialogic ideas and practices.

The first section has three chapters: an explanation of my personal framework called the Self and the Me, how I have used the framework throughout my life, and the theoretical and methodological foundations for this project. Section two contains five chapters, each of which is an analysis of my dialogue with one philosopher's work on the concept of the self. Section three discusses what I have personally and professionally learned from working on this project over a period of three years.

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My parents have been an integral part of my success in graduate school since I enrolled in my first graduate program in 1996. Thank you for being there

for me throughout my twists and turns. My studies would have been impossible without your assistance.

Finally, my husband, my partner, my friend—Richard Kaufman—deserves my appreciation for his patience and willingness to let my process unfold throughout the three years it took to complete this program even though the process was a mystery to him. Rich never fails to support me by being present with me at the crossroad, and for that I am incredibly grateful.

Contents

Section One

A few years ago I encountered a quote in a book on a social science theory called social constructionism that suggested that the individual, autonomous self was dead: "Macro social constructionism tends toward the 'death of the subject' where the person can be conceptualised only as the outcome of discursive and societal structures. The implication of this latter view is that individual persons, either alone or collectively, have no capacity to bring about change" (Burr, 2003, p. 23).[1] This statement caught my attention and created a dissonance that I could not ignore. I felt that statement was incorrect because of my own history with something I know intimately called my Self. On the other hand, I also resonated with social constructionism and wanted to continue applying its ideas to my life and my academic work. However, due to my past relationships with traditional methods of producing scholarship and ways of being called modernism, I thought that I would have to choose between my Self and social constructionism. If I chose the latter I thought I would have to give up the one thing that was most precious to me—my Self. If I chose the former I thought I would lose a way of being that I found full of empathy and compassion.

My graduate studies introduced me to social constructionism and for my doctoral degree I became fully committed to that school of thought, particularly the sub-school espoused by the work of an international cohort of scholars and

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[1] By no means do all social construction scholars agree with this statement. Instead they challenge the traditional notion of the self and offer new ways of understanding.

practitioners at The Taos Institute.[2] The Taos cohort emphasizes relational ways of being and creating scholarship through dialogue. Dialogue refers to the idea that people create shared understanding in the space between them through language. Monologue shuts down the interaction between people and leads to individuals closed to alternative views. Dialogue rather than monologue generates movement between two entrenched parties that in the past may have shut themselves off to positions outside their own. The movement can create positive change within and between the two parties, and the entrenchment shifts towards common ground.

In theory I resonated with The Taos Institute's ideas and wanted to study them more and apply them to my life and scholarship. But, I was under the impression that I had to let go of my Self. I felt entrenched, backed into a corner and afraid to engage in a dialogue with social construction. What was I to do? I thought I had only one choice: to fight for the existence of the Self within the social construction framework. However, I did not want to be monologic. I told myself I would be open to new ideas and really think about what others were suggesting, but to be honest, I held onto my concept of the Self with a death grip. I was unwilling to compromise on that one point. Thus, I became monologic though I had a desire to be dialogic.

This dissertation is the journey I took to resolve the conundrum I felt. I will spoil the ending for you: I transformed; I became less entrenched and more relational. I still hold onto my understanding of the Self, yet I do not feel as if I

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[2] "The Taos Institute is a community of scholars and practitioners concerned with the social processes essential for the construction of reason, knowledge, and human value." http://www.taosinstitute.net/

have to defend it or prove its existence to the detriment of all other conceptualizations. My transformation had less to do with academic theory than it did with ways of relating with others. My tone and the language I used became softer and less oppositional. I felt more comfortable with the feeling of not knowing the 'truth' and became more vulnerable and accessible. When I began this journey I had set up an either/or position—prove the existence of the Self within social constructionism, or give up either one of them. As I end this journey I have adopted the both/and position—my notion of the Self has a place in social constructionism.

The process I went through took many twists and turns. I am a professor of history at Salem State College in Massachusetts. My position in the Academy mirrored the dissonance I felt between my understanding of the Self and that of the quote that suggested that the individual self was dead: I teach history, but my PhD will be in Social Science; did I have to give up teaching history because I was not an historian? I decided to speak with my colleagues about their experiences in graduate school and as professional historians. Our conversations led me to shift the focus of my dissertation from the professional to the personal, as you will see when you read Section Two. Instead of examining the structure of the Academy and of my department in particular, I decided to examine how I have structured my notion of the Self. In the end I was able to bring the dissertation full circle and see connections between my personal and professional experiences.

Organization of the Dissertation

My dissertation contains three sections. The first section has three chapters. In chapter one I explain the meaning of the Self from my perspective. I also explain its complement I call the Me. This framework is used throughout the rest of the project. In chapter two I introduce the way I have used the framework of the Self and the Me during a period of time that was particularly challenging for me. I provide several examples of what I call the 'crossroad moment'. This is an imagined place I visit to have conversations with my Self and with others. These conversations at the crossroad help me make important decisions and choose the path that is right for me at a given moment.

In the third chapter I establish a theoretical framework for this project and also review the methods I used to complete it. I outline two complementary philosophies of producing scholarship and ways of being. On the one hand is modernism and on the other is postmodernism. I make an argument that postmodernism is a better fit for my journey and gives validity to the methods I employed.

Section two contains five chapters. In each chapter I discuss my analysis of the work of a philosopher on the concept of the self and my conversation with each of them: Charles Horton Cooley, Kenneth Gergen, Plato, St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, and Rene Descartes.

Each chapter in section two has four components: an analysis of the philosopher's ideas within his particular work, my reflections upon the analysis using the framework of the Self and the Me, reflections I imagine a reader might

have while reading the chapter, and re-reflections resulting from the transformation I went through as I worked on this project.

Section three has one chapter in which I discuss what I learned from working on this project over a period of three years, and the transformational experience I had that led me to think differently about my ways of approaching scholarship and ways of relating with others in life in general.

Chapter One:
The Self and the Me

An essential component of my life is the distinction between what I call the

Self and the Me. Not only are there two entities called the Self and the Me, they

also exist in two very different worlds. A clear description of these two entities is

paramount to help you walk along with me through this transformational journey

called my doctoral dissertation. In order to assist you, I must borrow others' ideas

for the moment. There is a field of philosophy that wonders if we are real human

beings living on a physical planet called Earth, or if we are participants in a

computer simulation yet think we are real (Bostrom, 2003). This philosophical

inquiry is not only fascinating to read, but the line of inquiry is helpful to me in that

I am borrowing the ideas and placing them into a metaphor in order to clarify the

nature of the Self and the Me. Let us begin with the Self and its world.

The World of the Self

Imagine a row of 6.5 billion computer stations (I choose that number

because it roughly corresponds to the current population of the Earth). At each

station is a unique, separate, autonomous and constant, (is, has been, always

will be) 'thing' called the Self that is not of planet Earth. Each computer has its

own hard drive that is self-contained, yet is also simultaneously linked with the

other 6.5 billion computers via a network. The Selfs' hard drives are only pre-

programmed for geography. In other words, the scene on the monitor is of Earth

rather than of Venus. Each Self has an avatar or simulated character in the

computer that is an extension of that particular Self user. However, the Self does

not have complete control over its avatar since the avatar has the ability to choose (free will). My Self's avatar is currently called Kara Kaufman. Kara happens to be aware of her Self and has figured out a way to communicate with her Self. Some of the other Self users' avatars are not aware of their individual Selfs, but that does not mean their Selfs do not exist.

Avatar Kara's Self has the ability to communicate with Kara, but again, the Self cannot control Kara. Over time, Kara has established a method of communication that she relies upon. Whenever Kara has a decision to make and she does not know what path to choose, she imagines herself sitting at a crossroad. In fact, she calls these times 'crossroad moments'. When Kara is stuck at a crossroad she asks her Self for advice on what path is best for her. It has taken some time to become aware of this pattern, but Kara has realized that whenever she asks for her Self's advice and takes it, she is peaceful, healthy, and happy. The Self's advice is privileged over any other advice because the Self does not have an ulterior motive to choose any particular path at the crossroad. The Self is only concerned with making sure its avatar is at her best (health, happiness, fulfillment, success etc). For example, Kara might be at a crossroad wondering if she should stay in an unhealthy relationship or leave. Kara cannot see what is best for her because she is too close to the situation. Kara has a stake in the stay-in-the-relationship option for a number of reasons—she is emotionally attached to her significant other, maybe she feels she will never find love again, perhaps she might have to move and is worried about finances. Kara consults her friends and family, a therapist, a priest; she is also influenced by the

norms of her society that flood her with messages saying a woman should be married and have kids in order to be a happy, fulfilled, 'true' woman. There are so many options, opinions, cultural 'shoulds' and 'should nots' flooding her crossroad that Kara cannot objectively decide for herself which path is best. The one thing that is her truth is that when she consults her Self, that guidance she receives is always in her best interest—even if that guidance causes her temporary pain or loss.

Sometimes the Self's guidance seems too painful for Kara and she decides to choose another path. Kara has learned through trial and error that to choose another path that avoids temporary pain only creates long-term pain. Part of the long-term pain is in the form of anxiety, which leads to depressed feelings. The anxious and depressed feelings are actually helpful to Kara because they signal to her that she has chosen unwisely. When the anxiety and depression become too much to bear she knows she has chosen an inferior path and returns to the crossroad to choose the Self's path.

The World of the Me

The computer game in which each Self's avatar interacts with other avatars is called the world of the Me. Due to free will, the only pre-programmed aspect of the game is the location on Earth when the avatar is born. After that, the avatar Kara affects and is affected by the other avatars in the game. The interaction between avatars creates realities for each avatar. The realities can be on multiple levels, all existing at the same time. Some of these levels of reality are fairly stable and others are always in flux. The relatively stable levels are

called cultural norms. To alter a cultural norm usually takes a long period of time and is often accompanied by societal strife in the form of violence. For example, part of Kara's reality is that she lives in a democratic republic where women are allowed to vote in political elections. This is 'normal' in that women are considered free, first-class citizens whose voices in elections are as valid as men's. This reality is stable in that it is not likely to change in the next moment, but it is not pre-determined that this reality is permanent. In fact, the cultural norm prior to the 1920s in the United States stated that women were second-class citizens and their position in society should not include politics.

The part of Kara's reality that is constantly in flux is the relational part. She might go through a day and interact with her husband, her mother, her students, her colleagues, her cat, and the owner of her favorite teashop. Each interaction, or relationship, shares a history of common values and understandings that grows as the relationship continues. Therefore, the state of the relationship 20 years ago may not be the exact same as it is now. Each person is a combination of multiple relationships that mutually affects the participants in any one interaction. For instance, Kara and her students have built a relationship on shared values of open dialogue, support, intellectual growth, and fun. When she interacts with her students, she often feels energized and elated and fulfilled. The emotional effects of that relational experience are with her when she changes her interaction and is in conversation with her husband at home. The on-going relationship she and her husband share and co-create will be infused from the previous interactions with her students. Simultaneously, her husband's relations

throughout his day will be with him and influence the relational experience he and Kara share at the end of the day. These multiple relational experiences create an infinite number of possible realities for the avatars of the computer game. Therefore, this level of reality is fluid.

Kara = Self + Me

Kara lives in the world of the Me and co-creates the Me with the other avatars. She is also her Self. Kara does not reside in the world of the Self, but is influenced by it when she chooses to be. When at the crossroad, Kara has to decide which path she will take. However, that is not an easy thing to accomplish since each part of Kara—the Me and the Self—often has different opinions. Which is she to choose? Kara often feels stuck when she wants to choose the Self's path, but if she does she feels lonely and ostracized because the Me presents options that are tied to cultural norms. In other words, if she denies the Me then she feels like an outsider without any validation from her community.

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The next chapter outlines the ways in which I applied the above framework to a difficult time in my life that began with a cross-country move to California to pursue a doctoral degree. You will see that I am aware of the two worlds and that I consciously interact with them. These crossroad moments are not metaphors or something I fictionalized after the fact to help tell a story. Instead, through internal conversation, I actively engage the two worlds.

Chapter Two:
My Story

My family jokes with me every once in a while saying that I am a perpetual student since I have been in one graduate program or another since 1996. It is now 2010 and I am 39 years old, married to a husband who is also a graduate student and we decided not to have children. Sitting here writing this dissertation is exactly where I want to be, even if it is outside the norm. So how did I get here? The answer is simple, I listened to my Self; however, the journey has been complex, intense and very painful at times.

After college I waited for two and a half years before enrolling in my first Master's degree at Salem State College in Massachusetts, USA. I studied American history with an emphasis on the male, gay subculture of the western world at the turn-of-the-twentieth century. Many people asked why I was so interested in gay men since I am a straight female. I could not really answer them until I 'met' Thomas while researching for my Master's thesis. He was a Catholic priest born in Northumberland England in 1907. I had read many personal documents for my thesis, but Thomas' was special to me; I had formed a life-long connection to the man on the pages. His interview given to scholars Jeffrey Weeks and Kevin Porter (1998) as part of a grant in the 1970s opened the door for me to consciously pursue the answer to the question, "Who am I?" through academic pursuits. In other words, connecting with others helped me reflect upon my own life.

Thomas was a priest, but he was also gay; neither could he give up for the other. As a priest he was bound by a vow of celibacy and was supposed to

believe that homosexuality was a sin and a danger to the Church as an institution. As a gay man, the priesthood was concurrently a haven and a prison. Being a priest fulfilled him and allowed Thomas a reason to provide friends and family as to why he never married a woman. However, in order to receive gay male sexual intimacy, he had to contradict the part of him that was a Catholic. Thomas became a perfect example for my central thesis: 'to thine own self be true', which ultimately became the title of my project. It seemed to me that he found a way to listen to his Self and embrace two parts of him that seemed on the outset contradictory. I connected with the gay men I studied, like Thomas, and wished they were alive so that I could have conversations with them. Perhaps their struggles would help me understand my own.

After graduating from Salem State College in 2000 with a Master's degree in history, I packed my belongings into a rental truck and made the cross-country trek with my dad so that I could attend the doctoral program in American history at the University of California, Davis. I was so interested in the stories of these gay men that I wanted to pursue another degree. I told myself and others that I wanted to be a history professor; however, that was just an added benefit I would receive. What I was really doing was continuing to inquire, "Who am I?"

I found in these men what I knew to be true for myself—there was something in their being that was their personal truth—something that was right for them even though it might contradict cultural norms. Whether they acted upon that truth ranged from story to story, but their truths were very much real for them. I knew there was a truth of my own that was unique, powerful, constant,

sovereign, and calming. I have since labeled it my Self. It is different from all other voices that exist in my being—those of my family, friends, employers, religion, politics, overall culture, and academia. Those other voices are products of what I have labeled the world of the Me. So, I was off to use another graduate degree to continue to cultivate my understanding of my Self.

While 3000 miles away from everything I had ever known, I was able to put some literal and metaphorical distance between me and the external influences competing for my attention. One external voice became very front-and-center—the voice of the Academy. UC Davis is a respected research institution with a highly revered history department. My advisor, an expert in cultural American history, published prolifically. I was thrown into a cohort of students who had various backgrounds. Once in seminar with them it became clear that I had some catching up to do—they would throw concepts like 'agency' and 'hegemony' and 'Marxist' around as if they were playing catch on a Sunday afternoon. The Academy voice tried to get me to fake it; pretend I knew what they were discussing and join the game of catch. My Self said something completely different. It said, "ask questions; you don't know what they mean so find out and ask as many questions as needed in order to feel comfortable." The Academy voice countered, "If you do that you will undermine your legitimacy; your inadequacy will be discovered and you will not be taken seriously." At assumed great risk, I decided to go with my Self (it will become apparent to you that feeling at and overcoming risk is an important part of the struggle at the crossroad). I soon became known as the 'one who asks questions'. I would interrupt the flow

of discussion every time I did not understand something and ask for clarification.

My female colleagues would later tell me (there were only three of us in a sea of

men), that my endless questioning was courageous and extremely helpful to

them since they did not feel as if they could speak up when they did not

comprehend. I also received an evaluation from a professor at the end of one

seminar who stated that it was refreshing to see a student have the courage to

admit she lacked information and ask questions:

> Kara [Kaufman] is a wonderful graduate student. She is the only
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> student I have taught recently who is not afraid to admit publicly
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> that she does not know something. Most of her peers are afraid to
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> make that type of confession publicly. The ability to do this is the
>
> sign of someone interested in ideas. Kara's work in this seminar
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> was superb and reflected her interest in the study of history. She
>
> asked good questions and actively participated in the class
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> discussions. (C. Walker, personal communication, December 2000)

The reticence females showed about contributing to discussion during one

of our courses on American cultural history soon became an issue for the

professor (coincidentally, this particular professor and my advisor were one and

the same). In the middle of the quarter, as a class period was coming to a close,

the professor asked if the three women in the room would wait for the men to

leave to have a conversation with her. After the men left, she strongly advised us

to 'play the game' and not let the men overrule us. "Speak up, be like the men,

don't be yourselves," was the message. I felt a surge of anger course through

me. This conversation was not just friendly encouragement from an understanding female professor who once found herself in our shoes; instead, this was the voice of the Academy personified (Halttunen, 2002). The subtext said, "play the game or get out." Now I was faced with a crossroad moment between my Self and the voice of the Academy (part of the world of the Me). I decided not to take a risk, but to appease the outside voice because I thought I had to in order to succeed. I could hardly stand contradicting that which was best for me—following my Self—but I did it anyway.

By the end of the academic year, I was exhausted. Not only was the work rigorous and demanding, but continually going against my Self was wearing me down. I realized I no longer wanted to play their game called 'Research Historian'. The final straw came when I presented my research on the construction of masculinities in the gay American novel in the early 1900s at the University of Nevada, Reno campus, for an American Studies conference. I was on a panel of four and the chair of my panel was someone unknown to me. It was my time to present and everything went smoothly until the chair opened up the floor for questions and discussion. The chair asked a question that was so abstruse I could not understand it. I started to sweat. I asked him to repeat and rephrase his question. When he did, it became even more abstruse. Again, I asked him to explain since I did not know what he meant. Now, not only was I sweating, I also started to shake. There were scholars, professors, and students in the audience and I could not even answer a question from my own chair. He answered with an equally confusing 'explanation', but this time he did so with

annoyance and condescension in his voice. The awkwardness in the room was palpable and some members of the audience, with sympathy in their eyes, tried to clarify for me what he meant. Each time, he would say, "no, that was not it," all the while getting more and more frustrated. Finally, I ended the fiasco by saying that I was sorry; I could not answer his question because I honestly did not understand it. I could have faked it, but that would have been contradicting my Self. I sat through my colleagues' presentations and tried to make a quick exit once the session ended, hoping no one would talk with me. Unfortunately, the man who humiliated me in front of very important people blocked my path to the door. He cornered me and felt the need to humiliate me even more by offering me 'clarification' of his question. Yet again, I did not understand what he was asking. The anger I felt could hardly be contained and I feared that I might cry. I did not want this man to witness that. I excused myself by apologizing for my obtuseness.

Shortly after the Reno disaster and towards the end of the school year, a friend and I decided to take a break from studying on a Friday evening and went to a local pub for some pizza and beer. My friend's sister came along as well. I had never met her before so I inquired into what she did for a living. She said that she was a graduate student studying spiritual psychology in Santa Monica, California. The moment she said those words my Self did its best to get my attention. This wave came over me that produced a feeling that is extremely hard to describe. It is not an emotion, it is not a thought, it is more of a sense of peace.

This experience was becoming more and more familiar to me. It is my Self's calling card and it was saying, "pay attention, this is important."

After she explained the meaning of spiritual psychology, I said to her, "that is exactly what I want to be doing. I had no idea a graduate program like that even existed." I knew then and there that my doctoral studies at UC Davis had come to an end. Again, I decided to listen to my Self even though to do so had the potential of great risk. Here I was, at a prestigious research university, in great standing with the department and every door open to me as far as research, teaching, and mentoring. All I had to do was successfully complete the program and I would be on the tenure-track job market. The picture this scenario painted was enticing, but I had no problem giving it up. My Self had spoken and thus far whenever I decided to listen to my Self the negative consequences I thought might come from that decision never actually materialized.

I applied shortly thereafter to the spiritual psychology program and was accepted. I knew I had to inform my advisor and my colleagues of my decision to leave Davis. A few days later the opportunity presented itself for me to graciously make my exit. Faculty and graduate students both had separate list serves in order to communicate with each other all at once. Since it was nearing the end of the school year, those who decided to leave were using the list serves to say goodbye. Here is the actual email I sent:

Dear colleagues, faculty and staff,

Following Jeff's footsteps, I, too, would like to say to all of you, at once, that I will be leaving this program to do a Masters degree in Spiritual

Psychology at the University of Santa Monica. This was a difficult decision to make since the Davis History Program, my professors, my colleagues and students have helped me change my life for the better. I came to Davis having lived my entire life in a small town in Massachusetts knowing absolutely no one here, and scared out of my wits to move 3000 miles away. The Master program from which I graduated at Salem State College had all of 6 graduate students in it, and I had never experienced a seminar situation as intense and profoundly stimulating as the ones at Davis. Needless to say, having no friends and no family here, and attending seminars where they are throwing fifty-cent words and concepts around like they were everyday colloquialisms made me take on the attitude of either join them or pack up and return to Massachusetts. I'm glad I stayed.

In response to the email dialogue of yesterday, the following is just one person's opinion. Please realize that I understand that this does not apply to everyone, nor will it work for everyone. I just want to share my experiences and thoughts with you on what worked for me.

I learned very quickly that a Ph.D. program demands a life of rigorous discipline and sacrifice. However, I also, just as quickly, decided not to give up some things that were more important to me than anything else in this world—namely my health, sanity, sleep, friendships, family and an outlet each day to which I could turn for myself, by myself. I decided that anxiety, fear, worrying and an unhealthy over-desire to please others compromised the above priorities. Therefore, I tried my hardest to do my

best academically while doing my best for myself. Amazingly, it worked for me: I took courses, received excellent grades in those courses, wrote great papers, contributed to discussion (once I got over the fear of opening my mouth) AND played soccer twice a week, worked out at a gym at least 3 times a week, gave myself one full day where I could do anything I wanted for myself in order to stay healthy mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Why was I able to go through this program my first year with minimal stress while I watch many people for whom I care tremendously slowly, literally kill themselves everyday? That is the question I have been pondering ever since I got here. Don't get me wrong, yes, I stressed over things, but I refused to let it run my life and break down my health. My only answer to this question that I can come up with is that I participated in this program FOR MYSELF AND NO ONE ELSE (even when I thought I was going to finish it). Are you in this program for any reason other than because in your heart this is truly what YOU want to do? For example, are you in this program because some outside party is pushing you to live up to expectations that are not yours, or that this is what you thought you wanted to do all your life but are not sure now but might as well go on anyway? If you push yourself to the point of sickness, pain, frustration, anger, sadness etc. because you need to please your professors, significant others, bosses, the ominous job market etc. then are you truly happy, are you truly doing what is in your heart? If the answers to any of

these questions do not sit well with you, please rethink your motivation for remaining in whatever situation in which you find yourself. In the end, compromising your health, happiness, and love of self is just not worth it.

I sincerely hope this has offended no one. I wrote from my heart and speak for myself and no one else. In the beginning of this letter I stated that Davis helped change my life for the better. If I had not come to this program, I would not have learned how to live for myself while still trying my hardest to perform to the best of my ability within the boundaries I set for myself…and succeed at it. (K. Kaufman, personal communication, 2001)

I received emails in response from students and faculty. One person in particular said that my email provided the words for his feelings he had been experiencing but could not sort out. He was a veteran in the program and was floundering, not sure where he wanted to go. Apparently my courage to listen to my Self and write about the experience gave him courage to do something similar.

I moved to Los Angeles, California (LA) to attend school in nearby Santa Monica. Not knowing anything about the city, rented an apartment in one of the most notorious, gang-infested neighborhoods of LA. (I imagine that you have just said to yourself something like, "wait a minute, her Self told her to live in the middle of hell?" At first glance this might seem an accurate interpretation, but keep reading). The morning after I moved in, I awoke to helicopters circling my block for hours. I had no idea what that meant. I later learned that just a few

yards up the street a gang member was murdered and the helicopters belonged to the media and the police.

One week after moving to the neighborhood I heard a commotion and went to the window. A man selling produce from a van on the street was being robbed right in front of me at high noon on a Sunday in the middle of a busy neighborhood. As I approached the window I saw the thief punching the seller and they eventually moved their fight from the sidewalk to the small yard in front of the building next to mine. I took a few steps forward toward the phone with the thought of calling 911 in my head, but I froze before I could reach the phone. I turned back toward the window and saw that the seller was kneeling on the grass and the thief held a gun to the seller's head. At that moment as I looked away, my arms flew in front of my chest and I curled my torso into a fetal-like position while still standing up. Time slowed down and I thought as hard as I could, "just don't shoot, just don't shoot the gun." The sound of a door slamming shut pulled my attention to the window again, and I saw the thief race away in the seller's van. The seller, with blood dripping down his face, walked in between my building and the one next to me, saying in Spanish, "help me, call the police." I could have helped him; I had a phone and I could speak Spanish. But I could not move; I was frozen in place, shaking, hyper-ventilating and crying.

My reaction to that event put me on a path that has been my greatest challenge of my 39 years on this planet. The horror I felt during and after witnessing that violent crime, and the guilt I felt for freezing up when I could have helped him made me question the wisdom of my Self and turn away from my

Self's direction for many years. I know now that my painful, difficult journey back to listening to my Self is the greatest gift I could have received. Therefore, I am able to look back upon my time in LA with gratitude.

As a result of the gun incident, I ended up with severe post-traumatic stress symptoms that left me incredibly anxious, panic-stricken, depressed and suicidal. I worked at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the neuropsychological department and my supervisor was a very astute, empathetic person. One day she told me that I absolutely had to seek counseling or I would not be welcome at my job any longer. I made an appointment with the counseling center for staff at UCLA. I knew that I needed help, but I could not make myself listen to the direction my Self had been giving me all this time—which was get the hell out of LA. Instead I kept listening to the voice from the world of the Me that said to me, "you're weak, you can't go home, you have to prove to yourself that you are strong. So stay in LA." I had become so distraught that I would sob for fifteen minutes every day when I got to work, (I was there a half hour before anyone else so no one saw me sob). I began shutting myself up in my apartment, always keeping the blinds closed, and the thought of going outside threw me into a state of high anxiety. A few nights before visiting the counselor, I was washing my dishes and as I was cleaning a sharp knife, the thought came into my head that said, "go ahead, the hell you're in will be all over once you do it."

As I was walking to my first appointment with the therapist, I knew that if I said I was a danger to myself she would be professionally obliged to do something to help me. I could not do anything for myself so I put responsibility

into someone else's hands. Once in the appointment we made small talk for a few minutes, she asked me what brought me to therapy; I relayed the 'gun incident' and broke down completely. She asked if I had suicidal thoughts and I said that I had thoughts *and* a plan. She then took over from there and I felt so relieved. Ironically, I ended up in the neuropsychiatric emergency room at UCLA, (a part of the department for which I worked) on suicide watch. My one and only acquaintance that I knew in LA came to be by my side.

While in the emergency room, my friend told me that we were not leaving until I had made a decision about my life and came up with a plan to implement that decision. I said that no decision had to be debated; I was going home to Massachusetts. Within a week I quit my job, packed up my apartment, arranged for my possessions to be shipped across country, sold my car and flew home with my two cats in an under-the-seat carrier.

Within a year and a half after I moved to California to pursue my doctorate, I was home with no degree, no job, no car, and no clue as to which direction to go from there. What I did possess was daily panic attacks that left me on the floor sobbing, horrible anxiety and depression, and a lack of courage to listen to my Self. For a few years after I returned home I chose to listen to direction from various voices from the world of the Me, until I woke up one day to realize that I was in an unhealthy relationship, a temporary job I hated, and a pattern of psychological distress that increased as time went on. I knew I was choosing to listen to the Me voices that kept me in this very dark place; however, listening to my Self felt too risky. For the few years after I returned from California

it seemed safer to ignore my Self—sometimes it truly seems easier to deal with the evil you know than the potential evil you think might be around the corner.

Eventually I found the courage to start listening to my Self again and in the fall of 2003, I enrolled in a Master's degree in psychology at Salem State College while teaching history there as well. In 2006 I graduated with the skills and education to be a counselor, but decided that field was not for me. Rather than listening to the Me messages that said, "are you crazy? You just spent three years, a lot of money and went through an intense internship so that you could walk away from a job in psychotherapy?" I listened to my Self say, "follow what you really want to do." And what I really wanted was a doctorate in interdisciplinary studies that would allow me to write about my understanding of the philosophy of the self. I also really wanted to continue teaching at the college level. And that is where I am right now.

Applying my Story

Within this story are two main trends that apply to my project: the first trend was developed through a culture within the world of the Me called the Academy. I was trained through my graduate studies to embrace a philosophical stance that was rigid and defensive. I was taught to attack and to be the expert. When writing I had to make an argument and support it with evidence. While interacting with my colleagues I could not show uncertainty or vulnerability; I had to be hard not soft. This way of being is monologic, not dialogic. It sets up entrenchment rather than common ground. This stance seeped into my personal

life and created the same way of being I took with my family and friends. My husband unfortunately received the brunt of it since he is closest to me.

The second trend that the story demonstrates is a different philosophical stance coming from my Self. This stance is dialogic. The Self's way of being is in line with the school of social construction theory espoused by the scholars in The Taos Institute: they both encourage opening up, inquiring when in doubt, finding common ground, listening to what is right and good for you even if it contradicts what is expected of you, and allowing others to explore what is right and good for them. This way of being is soft and vulnerable and inviting.

When I read that a social construction scholar suggested that the self was dead I was thrown into panic. If I had to let go of my Self to embrace social constructionism, then according to my framework I was left with the world of the Me. As you witnessed from the above story, when I felt that I had to choose the world of the Me I devolved into a dark state of mind. On the other hand, if I continued to embrace the Self I thought I would have to let go of social construction theory. If I did that, I would not possess a philosophical foundation for scholarship and for relating with others. That notion also left me with a feeling of panic. The rest of this dissertation develops how I solved this conundrum through transforming my framework.

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In the next chapter I will explain my understanding of the philosophical foundations of this project—postmodernism and its complement modernism in general, and move into social construction theory specifically. Then I will demonstrate the methodology this project used within the postmodern and social constructionist stance.

Chapter Three:
Theoretical Foundations

The Influence of Postmodern Philosophy and Social Construction Theory

There are multiple versions of postmodernism and social constructionism; each author has his/her particular understanding. Thus, reproducing one clear, concise explanation here is virtually impossible. The following is *my* understanding of the concepts and how they have shaped the ways in which I live, think, and relate overall, and more specifically the ways in which I produced this dissertation. Not only will I discuss the concepts, but I will also show how they influenced my methodological approach.

Modernism

Before discussing postmodernism, I will first address the concept that postmodernism challenges—modernism. A modern view of the world is objective, universal, and privileges reason. Modernity is based on progress through study of the workings of the world and the human beings in it. The progression of humanity is written into a grand narrative that is applicable to everyone no matter who you are or where you live. Any deviation of this grand narrative will place you in categories labeled abnormal, insane, criminal, sick, invalid and so forth. It privileges methodologies based in the intellectual realm through the utilization of reason and logic. Any knowledge that comes from the bodily realm like the emotions is secondary at best, and defunct at worst.

The scientific method is a specific example of a modern approach to research. Using the scientific method, we can study any part of our world and get to a truth that applies to everyone without fail. The modern or positivist approach

to research is rigid. You as a researcher cannot be involved in your project personally. You have to separate yourself so that you are outside of your data, objectively recording the truth of the situation. You have to accumulate enough data that statistically you can prove that your study can be generalized to others, thus demonstrating universality. The researcher's voice is authoritative and right, and the researcher assumes that there is something essential within his/her subjects that must be discovered. Modern researchers have a goal of mapping an entire landscape of human civilization. Once that landscape is complete research is effectively over. Some historians, for example, at the turn of the twentieth century claimed that eventually the discipline of history would become unnecessary since all of history would have been recorded (Novick, 1998).

Modernism has been helpful in that it uses logic and reason and strict methods to discover previously unknown or correct misinformed aspects of society. However, it also creates pictures of our world that does not correspond to some people's lived experiences. For instance, feeling left out, disenfranchised, oppressed and abused, some in the United States after World War II questioned our old ways of being through the civil rights movements of minorities, women and gay people, along with the protests against the government's involvement in the Vietnam War and our traditional sexual mores. This real-life call for legitimacy caused academics, artists, scientists, psychologists and others to search for alternative means of understanding their worlds. Scholars tend to call this awakening the 'postmodern turn' and place its start in the mid-twentieth century (Lowe, 2000).

Postmodernism

The postmodern turn challenged our traditions in scholarship with

questions like the following: if modernism assumes a traditional, grand narrative

of progress, what happens to the myriad of local narratives that do not

correspond with the overarching one? If modernism privileges the intellect,

reason and logic, what happens to the other ways of knowing that people have

utilized and preferred in certain cultures for eons? What happens to modernist

ideas when these questions gain momentum? Are there other ways of

understanding our world besides the modernist tradition? For example, the

powerful 'winners' of the world have written the historical narrative many of us

have learned in school. In the United States and Europe, white, elite, rich men

have held onto power for quite some time. Their version of events, and that

which is/was meaningful to them, has been the 'truth' of our collective historical

record for centuries. Do black women and men agree with the historical grand

narrative? How about the aboriginal peoples of Australia and New Zealand?

What about the poor, the infirm, the injured, or even the non-human among us?

How do they understand and make meaning? What are their stories? (Best &

Kellner, 1991; Burr, 2003; Gergen, K.J., 1999; Gergen, K.J. & Gergen, M., 2004;

Gergen, K.J, & Gergen, M. 2007; Lowe, 2000; Sampson, 1993; and Ward, 2003)

These questions opened up so many alternatives that several specific

theories eventually evolved out of the general genre of postmodernism. A short

list includes feminist theory, queer theory, critical theory, cultural studies like

African-American, Native American or Chicano/a Studies, and social construction

theory. Throughout my graduate studies I have been involved with the social construction aspect of postmodernism. The next section will give an overview of the main components of this school of thought.

Social Construction Theory and Practice

If you dissect the term 'social constructionism' you will find its inherent meaning. To construct is to build. A skyscraper does not come into existence fully formed in a one quick moment in time. Rather the building is the collaborative effort of people from different backgrounds working together. Architects, business moguls, engineers, carpenters, landscapers, interior decorators, electricians, etc., all need to work together in order to safely construct a building that will last for years. Within this collaboration you will find the term 'social' put to use. Each of these people must engage with each other for the common purpose of creating the building. They each bring with them their specific area of expertise in order to produce a structure common to all.

When used as a theory to explain the creation of knowledge, social constructionism is not unlike building a skyscraper. In relationship with others we produce meaning and value. Each person in relationship brings with her/him a history of past relationships, past knowledge, past traditions. As our relationships change we co-create new knowledge with new value and significance adding to our personal histories. This way of constructing our worlds through social interaction is fluid and local rather than fixed and universal.

Social construction theory, just like postmodernism in general, has many offshoots. Think of a wheel: the center or hub of the wheel holds it together while

spokes shoot from it. The hub is social construction theory while each spoke is a version of it. For example, some might consider Foucauldian discourse as one spoke; Derrida's deconstructionist ideas would be another. For my theoretical foundation, I chose the spoke that the scholars and practitioners from the Taos Institute espouse. This spoke discusses co-creating realities through dialogue, and privileges relationships, community, dialogue that is opening and transforming, and mutual respect and responsibility.

Dialogue.

At the June 2007 Taos Institute Conference hosted by the University of New Hampshire, one of the leading social construction scholars, Kenneth Gergen, gave a keynote address. He spoke about social constructionism and the emphasis on forms of dialogue—some create openings and some create closings. He suggested that transformative dialogue is co-creating, opening and an infinite type of construction. If we do not position people as 'others' then we no longer need to see their positions as wrong. When we 'other' a person or a group we create an 'us versus them' type of scenario in that there is a group with a set of rules and a dogma that is correct and right and good, and there is a group with a set of rules and a dogma that is incorrect and wrong and bad. The good group develops predetermined ideas and descriptions regarding what the bad group will think and how they will behave based on unconfirmed assumptions. The opposite happens as well, but the bad group sees itself as the good since the label 'bad' comes from the other side rather from within that group (see also Sampson, 1993).

There are many examples of this 'othering' scenario. Look at any current war. Let us take the war the United States is fighting in Iraq. Former U.S. President George W. Bush labeled Iraq, Iran, and North Korea 'The Axis of Evil' in his January 29, 2002 State of the Union address. Through the act of labeling Iraq 'evil', he established Iraq as the bad and the United States as the good. He even went further and said that those countries that are not with us will be considered against us. This statement effectively placed any country in the 'other' or bad group if that country criticized the actions of the United States. This act of encamping the entire world in one group or the other shut down diplomacy (a way to employ transformative dialogue), and created a horrific war that continues without an end in sight. If we dismantle the notion that 'we' are right and 'they' are wrong then 'we' do not have to bully or manipulate 'them' into coming over to 'our' (right) side.

Gergen asserts that the more society embraces social construction ideas the more we will actually practice them, not just talk about them. He suggests we need to start with challenging the traditional, inherited view that we are individual silos that are unique and contained and that reality happens within us. Instead he asks that we think of ourselves as relational beings that create realities between us through our use of language. He asks, "Can we create new genres that will move western cultures from bargain to transformative dialogue?" (Gergen, 2007) His answer is yes, and that one step toward that goal would be the idea of coordination. Everything is a game and each game takes coordination. If we do not know the rules of individual, closed-off games then there is no coordination

between people. Create a common game between people through dialogue and we have achieved coordination without the ideas of right/wrong, good/bad and us/them.

Language.

This idea of games created through dialogue comes, at least in part, through Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. When studying Wittgenstein's body of work on language as a whole, the reader discovers that the philosopher went through a transformation of ideas. Early Wittgensteinian philosophy took a modernist stance toward language in that each word had a corresponding object to it. The word chair had a material thing attached to it, and the meaning of chair corresponded to an objective outside reality. However, later in his life Wittgenstein abandoned his previous ideas and suggested that language is alive and is not linked to any essential reality. He introduced the idea of the 'language-game' to help the reader understand what he meant:

> And this multiplicity [of kinds of sentences] is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten…Here the term 'language-*game*' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. (Wittgenstein, 1958, § 23, emphasis in original)

In Wittgensteinian terms, Gergen's idea of transformative dialogue is a language-game and George W. Bush's idea of the Axis of Evil is another

language-game. Each way of being has rules to it, just like a board game, and the language both corresponds to and helps create that certain way of being. For example, the word 'evil' most probably would mean different things to Bush than it would to Gergen. However, to develop what 'evil' means in their respective games you would need to use language since 'evil' does not have an objective, universal reality attached to the word.

The concept of 'family resemblances', developed by Wittgenstein, makes it possible for Bush and Gergen to make sense to one another. Even though 'evil' might mean different things to Bush and Gergen, they both realize they are speaking about a similar genre called 'evil'. If they were to have a conversation at a table they would understand that they were swimming in the same pool so to speak, rather than one thinking he were discussing zebras while the other thinking he were discussing computers. What makes the two men realize they are in the same genre, yet have such disparate notions of the same word? Wittgenstein concluded:

Instead of producing something common to all that we call

language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in

common which makes us use the same word for all,--but that they

are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because

of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all

'language'…I can think of no better expression to characterize

these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various

resemblances between members of a family: build features, colour

of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the

same way.—And I shall say: 'games' form a family. (Wittgenstein,

1958, § 65 and § 67, emphasis in original)

Using Wittgenstein's idea that language is fluid and multiplicitous, Gergen

suggests that through dialogue we can achieve common ground; we can become

relational rather than ostracizing each other into polarizing, closed-off camps of

'us versus them'.

Relational*.*

The idea of being relational or in relationship is a central component to this

spoke of social construction theory. At the same June 2007 conference, I

attended a two and a half day workshop hosted by Dian Marie Hosking and

Sheila McNamee. They covered many topics of social constructionism, yet their

main focus was on the relational aspect of the theory and practice. They

emphasized that the concept of the contained individual is problematic. When

creating within dialogue, they suggested we should de-center the rational agent.

In other words, we in western culture have been operating on the tradition for a

few hundred years now that we have the ability to act upon our own will, that we

are free to choose at any given moment, that we are first and foremost rational,

thinking beings and that our individuality is the key to our empowerment. Instead,

we should strive to de-center this traditional idea and privilege the ideas that we

make meaning through relating with each other, that dialogue is the catalyst to

meaning-making, that language is the tool the catalyst uses and that nothing is

innate including the self (Hosking & McNamee, 2007). Kenneth Gergen and Mary

Gergen in their book, *Social Construction: Entering the Dialogue* (2004)

summarize Hosking and McNamee's point well:

> From an individualist standpoint we are invited to see the social
>
> world as made up of fundamentally isolated beings. We learn that
>
> we cannot penetrate the minds of others, so we cannot fully know
>
> or trust each other. Because we presume that everyone is out for
>
> himself or herself, we require moral training in caring for others.
>
> Self-regard becomes the pivotal dimension around which we live
>
> our lives, fearful that we may be scorned, seeking always to be
>
> better than others. (p. 30-31)

At the Taos Institute workshop at the University of New Hampshire in

November of 2007, scholars of social construction ideas, Harlene Anderson and

Sheila McNamee, also explored what it means to be relational. Again the concept

of the contained individual was called into question and an alternative view was

presented that focused on relational dialogue. One definition of dialogue

investigated during the workshop was that dialogue is a 'tension between holding

your ground and letting the other happen to you' (Anderson & McNamee, 2007).

In other words, we can all have our positions on issues, but we can also grant the

other person the right to have his or her position. Rather than visualizing the

exchange as 'us against them', we should strive to see it as 'us plus them'.

Responsibility.

Another influential concept discussed at the latter-mentioned workshop

was responsibility in relationship. Critics of social constructionist ideas tend to

suggest that people who practice this type of relating might become weak or apathetic, and that attitude might lead to abusive situations or tyrannical dictatorships (Burr, 2003; Gergen, K.J., 1999). Anderson and McNamee suggest that relating to one another through social constructionist practices does not mean that we need to give up the idea of making decisions that are right and correct for us. In order to make decisions or to practice choice, we must take stands on issues. However, making a decision or practicing the right to choose does not mean that our individual choices are universally right or good and others' are universally wrong or bad. They assert that we need to come to our decisions after collaborative engagement with others. If we come to a decision after experiencing others' realities as good and right as well then we are taking a stand responsibly. Knowing our decision is right for us and their decision is right for them all the while respecting each other then the possibility for common ground on contentious issues has been created. The decisions are made, but there is room to go on from there.

In the next section I will discuss how these concepts influenced my methodological approach to producing this dissertation.

Methodology Through a Postmodern Stance

Researchers realized that if they were going to offer an alternative to inherited traditions of the modernist stance, they needed to find methodologies that stood outside of that very tradition. But, how do you actively engage in postmodern methodologies? How do you 'do' postmodern research? Since postmodernism is a reaction against modernism, there cannot be just one

universal way of doing postmodern research. That would contradict the nature of the term. Rather, there are infinite ways of researching, but there are some tenets that scholars have mostly agreed upon. Some common denominators to postmodern research methods are: remove the false notion of objectivity and embrace subjectivity; de-center the researcher as the authoritative voice; remove the idea that there is something that essentially exists in a situation, a group or a people and replace it with the notion of multiplicity; incorporate a reflexive approach to your research; realize that there is no such thing as a reality existing 'out there' that you must harness as accurately as you can; be as respectful and humble as possible when involving others in your research through centering their voices; and allow your research participants to play an active role in the research through viewing them as co-researchers (Anderson and McNamee, 2007; Best and Kellner, 1991; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Gergen, K.J. and Gergen, M., 2004; Hosking and McNamee, 2007; Kvale, 1996; and Lowe, 2000).

Frustrated with the rigid, traditional rules of academia, I too am drawn to new and inventive methodologies. I desire the freedom to explore and blur disciplinary lines. Rather than fitting my research into a methodological box, I allowed the methodology to change as my research led me on various paths. In the following sections the reader encounters the methodological paths taken to complete this project. The reader will see that dialogue opened up new roads for me to follow; in this way conversation became generative and transformative.

Generative Conversation

Conversation is at the heart of my project. I am having many conversations simultaneously and constantly. I talk with my Self, with my advisor, Harlene Anderson, with my colleagues at work, with the authors of scholarship for background research, with the five philosophers in section two, with you the reader and with my family, friends, and colleagues. These conversations generated and continue to generate new ideas, different ways of understanding concepts I had encountered before, and the courage to pursue lines of inquiry I was afraid to pursue. The results of any one conversation led me to another and another and another. Rather than choose before-the-fact which conversations I would have with whom and when, I allowed myself to stay in the position of not knowing where I would be led. That opened my mind as a researcher; I was not the only director of this project. The people I dialogued with had as much a say in my direction as I did. Had I taken the stance that I was the sole director and laid out a map prior to doing research I might have closed myself to new and interesting ideas and ways of being.

Identity crisis.

My first major generative conversation took place with immigrant students during the application process for entrance into the PhD program. I have worked with many first-generation immigrant college students and noticed that they navigated in two worlds: the world of their ancestral culture and that of their new American culture. Their identities were continually challenged and constantly in flux. It became apparent to me that we had something in common—I also had

issues of identity and belonging with which I was struggling, though of a different nature.

My identity issues had to do with adequacy in a particular academic field. I have taught World History since 2002 at Salem State College. Imagine trying to cover all of history throughout the entire world in just a few short weeks. It is virtually impossible. My department gave me the freedom to play and create new possibilities of engaging students with the subject of history. However, my creativity kept pulling me toward integrating history with other social science disciplines. My Self suggested employing a postmodern stance to my approach to history, but the more my courses borrowed from other subjects, the more I questioned my professional identity. This nagging questioning came from the modernist academic voice in the world of the Me getting me to doubt my abilities. The voice of the Me and the voice of the Self competed for my attention. This conversation about identity—a result of the prior one with intercultural students—generated some questions that I wanted to research. I did not have a PhD in History and I was pursuing a PhD in Social Science from a European university. I asked myself: was I an historian? What did it mean to be an historian? How should history as a discipline be conceptualized and subsequently taught to students? Did I bring value or detriment to my department?

A pivotal moment.

These questions led me to have conversations of a different sort—reading through the scholarship produced by people who had identity struggles in the Academy, as well as historians' perspectives on their discipline and their identity

construction within the ivory tower (Archer, 2008; Boylorn, 2006; Churchman, 2006; Halttunen, 2002; Novick, 1998; Wurgraft, 1995). These conversations did not take place face-to-face, rather I was the reader interacting with their words on a page, much as you are the reader interacting with the words I have written on these pages.

Since I could not dialogue with them in real time (I did try to contact one author but she respond), I decided to have face-to-face conversations with my colleagues in the history department to learn about their experiences in graduate school and their jobs as history professors in various states of tenure. Seven colleagues in the department (two women and five men) graciously agreed to talk with me. I went into those conversations expecting to hear their stories and perspectives on the structure of academia, the ways in which gender, class and race influenced my colleagues' experiences, and their ideas about the nature of and the future of history as a subject. Here is an example of where I tried to map out the flow of the conversations prior to their occurring. I took on a modernist stance. I felt the need to be the sole director rather than allow the conversations to unfold naturally. To my surprise then but not now, I left those conversations with something completely different than what I was seeking, yet something so much more precious: I saw my story in theirs.

As I listened to my colleagues' stories I placed my framework of the Self and the Me on their lives. I saw them having their own 'crossroad moments'. My colleagues would find themselves at a crossroad, having to make difficult decisions that would change their lives forever: a) each had to choose whether or

not they were going to comply with the traditions of the academic systems and settle on something they did not want, or go against the system; b) each feared that making the latter choice had the potential risks of losing something vital to each of them (for instance, their job, their status, a place in graduate school, a publishing contract, their significant other, the support or love or a family member and so forth); and c) each also felt that the latter choice was somehow 'right' for them, and in the end chose that path.

I was fascinated by what I was learning and felt a kinship with my colleagues' crossroad moments. I started to ask my colleagues about specific times in which they remembered themselves at such a decision-making point, and could they elaborate for me. I was struck by the initial responses I received: they did not understand my question, they could not relate to my question, they could not think of an example, or they fell silent. When I brought their attention to this phenomenon of the crossroad moment, the conversations stopped. Again, I was directing based on what I saw rather than allowing them to make their own meaning. I slipped into a modernist stance.

I started to take on a modernist stance rather than a dialogic one because I realized that my attention was on my own experiences at the crossroad rather than what they experienced and how they made sense of their own journeys. In other words, I put myself at the center of the inquiry rather than centering and privileging their voices. I had a choice to make: either 'pivot the center' (Gunasekara, 2007) or shift the focus of my dissertation completely. I chose to shift the focus.

Dialogue led to change of direction.

After the conversations with my colleagues, I refocused my dissertation to study the concept of the self in western society. I made myself the center of my project and at that center would be the crossroad where I would sit and dialogue with my Self and with others, like my advisor for instance. This is where the suggestion that the traditional idea of the self in social construction theory is dead comes into play. That one comment questioned the validity of my framework that has held such significance for me throughout my life. Rather than being dialogic I really slipped into modernism and went on a quest to prove that the concept I held so dear, the Self, does in fact exist and should be reinstated into social construction theory.

At once I found myself in two different academic worlds—the traditional and the postmodern. I wanted to allow myself to be the center of my dissertation and let dialogue direct me to discover new ways of producing scholarship and relating with others, yet I also wanted to prove to social constructionism that the Self was not yet dead. Navigating between the two worlds created tension for me personally and has had a direct affect upon this project's methodology. As my methodology unfolded through generative conversation, I heard the voice of the traditional Academy criticize my choices. For example, it would say: "You should have done a more comprehensive literature review. Yours is not good enough." Implicit in this critique is the history and the values the Academy has cultivated over the years. One of the values (or language-games) this critique holds is

'being an expert'. In order to achieve expert status, the researcher must complete a vast literature review that leaves no stone unturned.

The relational social construction culture values the position of not-knowing (Anderson & McNamee, 2007). If I had chosen to bring the language-game of 'being an expert' into this project I may have hindered my overall methodology—generative conversation. 'Being an expert' may have shutdown or stunted ideas that would have come from a not-knowing position. A not-knowing position does not mean that I have no background knowledge of social construction theory. Rather it means allowing myself to expect the unexpected; not anticipating a predetermined result based upon another scholar's work.

This dissertation is not only about ways of producing scholarship; it is about personal relational transformation. A not-knowing position has been personally valuable to me as well; it allowed me to transform organically and in the moment. When at the crossroad with another conversational partner I was able to let go of any pre-conceived notions of how to be, which helped me shed my defensive 'I'm right and you're wrong' language-game.

In order to quell the tension I felt between the two disparate cultures and methodologies, I decided to split the difference. I reviewed scholars' works in order to gain a foundational knowledge of social constructionism in general and from a relational point of view specifically (Anderson, Burr, Gergen, Gubrium, Holstein, Hosking, Lowe, McNamee), *and* I decided to return to the literature after the bulk of my dissertation was complete to do a more comprehensive review. Rather than engaging in the language-game of either/or, I chose the language-

game of both/and. I allowed the two cultures to come to the crossroad and converse with one another and with me. I found a way for each culture's values to be heard and present and work together.

Reading works on social construction theory created the desire to go to the well myself, so to speak. I wanted to know what past philosophers thought about the notion of the self. Rather than depending upon scholars' interpretations of what the philosophers said, I wanted to find out for myself. The first book I chose was Charles Horton Cooley's *Human Nature and the Social Order*. After dialoguing with him, I read, in order, Kenneth Gergen, Plato, St. Augustine and Rene Descartes. I did not initially decide to read them in chronological order because I was not playing director before-the-fact. Even with my modernist position to defend the existence of the Self in tow, I allowed myself to be directed to each piece of scholarship based upon the reflections I had with the previous work. While reading Cooley, for example, I found myself wondering if contemporary scholars agreed with his notion of the 'looking glass self' (a concept I discuss at length in section two). In another instance, while reading Gergen I wondered what Plato would have said about Gergen's idea that the self is not determined in an a priori way.

My conversations with the philosophers generated imagined conversations with you the reader. I would reflect upon the philosophers' ideas and then imagine what your reflections would be while reading my own. While dialoguing with you, the philosophers, and my Self I would periodically converse with Harlene or with my husband. Harlene's conversations helped remind me of

the dialogic path rather than the modernist one. She would gently remind me, and encourage me, to stay with the not-knowing stance and allow things to happen organically rather than play sole director and map out my routes before-the-fact.

Transformation.

After writing the chapters on the five philosophers' ideas about the self, I began to bring the whole project together into a discussion that concluded the dissertation. As I was writing that chapter I felt like I did not make any progress. My modernist position saw that nothing really changed; I still held on to the Self and continued to feel uneasy with social construction theory that suggested the self was dead. I started to worry that this project was worthless from a scholarly point of view. I was certain a reader who took a modernist stance would agree with me on that point for I did not prove or disprove anything. As my angst became more palpable I did what I always do, I went back to the crossroad. I took a risk and gave up my entrenched stance and allowed myself to be open and vulnerable. I came out of that conversation with a whole new outlook. I did not have to prove anything. I did not have to be right. I did not have to choose between my Self and social construction theory. All I had to do was shift my stance. Take off modernism and put on postmodernism. Get out of my monologue and into dialogue. With a shifted stance I reread my initial reflections and imagined reader's reflections again. I saw some of those reflections in a new light and recorded these moments as re-reflections post transformation.

Artificial end.

The methodology created through generative conversation is an on-going one. This dissertation is only a snapshot of approximately three years—the time it took me to produce the final product. The manufacturing of the product stops, but the conversations do not. I would not be surprised to find myself facing my defense committee in The Netherlands a few months from now having a slightly different perspective as a result of the continuing dialogue with my Self, my advisor, my husband and authors of works I will be reading in the near future.

Post script.

My dissertation is just about finished and I have been reading scholars pertinent to the progression of social constructionism and the self like Michael Billig, Marissa Beyers, Nigel Edley, Harwood Fisher, Jonathan Potter, Joseph de Rivera, Theodore Sarbin, John Shotter, Margaret Wetherell, and Richard Williams, and more works on relational theory by the scholars I have already engaged such as Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, Mary Gergen, and Sheila McNamee.[3] As I am reading these works I have discovered something amazing: I am able to read the books as if they were novels. Since I now, as a result of going through this dissertation process, have such a personal, internalized, real-life grasp on the application of their theories, I do not find myself struggling over the profundity of their intellectual ideas. Had I read them before-the-fact I would have struggled to comprehend the concepts, as I had previously experienced when enrolled in a program in a traditional Academic culture.

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[3] See Appendix A for a list of sources.

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With the framework of the Self and the Me and the philosophical backgrounds established for you, I move to the next section in which I dialogue with five philosophers' ideas about the notion of the self. It begins with a conversation with Charles Horton Cooley, a turn-of-the-twentieth-century American professor of sociology.

Section Two

In this section, there are five chapters and each chapter is a crossroad of conversation with one particular philosopher. Within each chapter the reader will encounter and join in multiple layers of conversation. The first layer is an overview of a philosopher's ideas as I understand them. While reading a philosopher's book I would journal about my inner dialogue with him. These reflections became the second layer of conversation in each chapter. As I reflected upon the philosopher's ideas I imagined you the reader sitting on my shoulder whispering questions and suggestions to me. My inner dialogue between you, the philosopher and me is the third layer of conversation. The fourth and last layer is a secondary reflective process woven into the second and third layers. After I completed Section Two and was writing the last section of this dissertation, I had a transformative experience. I changed my philosophical stance from a modern point of view to a postmodern point of view and revisited my primary reflections on the philosopher's ideas and my imagined conversations with you. That re-reflective process (the fourth layer) demonstrates the significant difference perspective makes when in relationship with someone— imagined or face-to-face.

The first philosopher you will encounter is Charles Horton Cooley. He made significant contributions to the field of sociology at the beginning of the twentieth century, and is famous for coining the phrase 'the looking-glass self'.

Chapter Four
Charles Horton Cooley: The Social Self

Historical Context

At the turn of the twentieth century and into the first few decades in America there is a shift in thinking about and understanding the self. This transition has since been labeled the pragmatist turn and the three main figures associated with it are William James, Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead. James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium in their book, *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (2000) summarize nicely the pragmatist position. They see it as a turn away from the Cartesian 'transcendental self' and towards a self co-created in the interaction between people and societal structures:

> If Descartes thought and therefore was, the position from which he
> did so was detached from the swirl of social life. This
> transcendental self was disembodied, separated, and distinguished
> from the very corporeal body upon which it otherwise
> philosophically mused and cast judgment. If anything, social life
> and the body spoiled the logically envisioned, transcendental self;
> they certainly didn't participate in inventing or producing it. (p. 18).

The pragmatists overturn the universal, absolute version of the self as a rational entity that exists in the mind. Instead they are concerned with the 'practice' of the everyday self; they ground it in social interaction. The self becomes empirical rather than transcendental. In other words, it exists through experience, not as an objective entity outside of our experience.

Charles Horton Cooley's philosophy of the self is a radical break with former scholars in the field. He suggests a social self, grounded in social interaction. Cooley becomes famous for coining the term the 'looking-glass self'. The job of a looking-glass (or mirror) is to reflect an image back at us so that we interact or relate with it. The image allows us to observe or criticize or enjoy what we see. It gives us information about that which is reflected in the mirror. If we are looking at ourselves in the mirror something happens within our imagination. We see things that are not necessarily visible or real, and then make judgments upon them. For example, I might look at myself and concentrate on how short my hair is. I may associate long hair with beauty and femininity and surmise that since my hair is short I am not as feminine as I could be. The visible object in the mirror is my short hair, but I bring to the visible object the judgment that short hair equals ugly and not feminine. Thus my reality includes that I must be ugly and unfeminine since I have short hair.

According to Cooley, when we apply the mirror concept to the self it becomes the method by which the self is created. This is how it works: we have a set of judgments and assumptions about us and others. We imagine what another person thinks about us. Then we imagine how that person judges us based on his/her thoughts about us. And then, based on our imagination, we feel one way or another about the whole story we have just created. Since the person in the mirror looks one way today and another way tomorrow, the imagined story continually changes. Thus, Cooley suggests that our version of ourselves changes depending upon our experience in the mirror.

Human Nature and the Social Order

      Instinct.

      Cooley writes at a time when the concept of evolution is at the forefront of many scholars' minds. He suggests that everything we are in the present has a history to it, and that history is transferred through generations by the 'germ-plasm' and is labeled at times as instinct:

> The stream of this life-history…appears to flow in two rather distinct
> channels…a stream and a road…The stream is heredity or animal
> transmission; the road is communication or social transmission.
> One flows through the germ-plasm; the other comes by way of
> language, intercourse, and education. The road is more recent than
> the stream: it is an improvement that did not exist at all in the
> earliest flow of animal life… (Cooley, pp. 4-5)

Added to instinct are the interactions between people, which makes the raw material—instinct—refined and acceptable. He suggests that, "When our individual life begins the two elements of history from which it is drawn, the hereditary and the social, merge in the new whole and cease to exist as separable forces" (Cooley, p. 15). Much like when two ingredients are mixed together—for instance sugar and water—once mixed we are unable to distinguish one from the other. It creates a new product rather than just a sum of its parts. Both the sugar and the water are equally necessary to make the end result. Cooley states that both the instinct and the social are needed to improve each subsequent generation of people. Therefore, he is arguing that social

interaction is absolutely necessary in order to create and/or improve our selves and, by that measure, our society.

Individual's place in society.

Cooley explores the individual's place in society. He states, "the social whole is in some degree dependent upon each individual, because each contributes something to the common life that no one else can contribute" (Cooley, p. 35). He adds:

> …man's psychical outfit is not divisible into the social and non-
> social; but that he is all social in a large sense, is all a part of the
> common human life, and that his social or moral progress consists
> less in the aggrandizement of particular faculties or instincts and
> the suppression of others, than in the discipline of all with reference
> to a progressive organization of life which we know in thought as
> conscience. (p. 47)

The societal component that humans need comes in the form of language, education, conversation etc. These tools need individuals because the tools would not be available or alive without people. The human creates the language and education needed to refine the instinct that is inherited at birth. Without the individual, society would be moot. However, the individual is equally influenced and motivated and molded by the social environment in which she lives.

Free will and choice.

There is a difference between free choice and free will for Cooley. Free will is more of an academic thought exercise and should be obsolete:

> There may be some sense in which the question of the freedom of the will is still of interest; but it seems to me that the student of social relations may well pass it by as one of those scholastic controversies which are settled, if at all, not by being decided one way or the other, but by becoming obsolete. (p. 56)

However free choice is alive and well:

> …and choice…is, in its individual aspect, *a comparatively elaborate process of mental organization or synthesis*, of which we are reflectively aware, and which is rendered necessary by complexity in the elements of our thought. In its social aspect—for all, or nearly all, our choices relate in one way or another to the social environment—it is *an organization of comparatively complex social relations*. (p. 53, emphasis in original)

Since our choices "relate in one way or another to the social environment" the notion of a completely free, autonomous will that is separate from the social does not exist. Instead, the will is relegated to decision-making between choices, and the mind is where the choices are made.

As civilization goes from simple to more complex, the social environment also goes from simple to more complex. Since the individual and the social work

congruently, our minds must be able to advance along with society in order to deal adequately with the choices we face:

> …in a simple society choice is limited in scope and life is comparatively mechanical…It is the variety of social intercourse or…the character of social organization, that determines the field of choice; and accordingly there is a tendency for the scope of the will to increase with that widening and intensification of life that is so conspicuous a feature of recent history. This change is bound up with the extension and diffusion of communication, opening up innumerable channels by which competing suggestions may enter the mind. We are still dependent upon environment—life is always a give and take with surrounding conditions—but environment is becoming very wide, and in the case of imaginative persons may extend itself to almost any ideas that the past or present life of the race has brought into being. This brings opportunity for congenial choice and characteristic personal growth, and at the same time a good deal of distraction and strain. There is more and more need of stability, and of a vigorous rejection of excessive material, if one would escape mental exhaustion and degeneracy. (pp, 75-76)

The time in which Cooley's book is published (the revised edition) is a transitional, fast-paced world. World War I has just ended, the American industrial machine is in full force and American society is in the middle of an economic boom. Competing suggestions, especially in the form of material

acquisition, are bombarding the average citizen at a rate previously unknown. Cooley is reacting to the social pressure coming at him from all angles and taxing his mental acuity. The more social the world becomes the more suggestion is put in front of us. Thus, the more choices with which we have to work and the higher the thought process needs to be.

Looking-glass self.

As introduced above, the looking-glass self is the concept for which Cooley becomes famous. Acting like a mirror, society interrelates with our imaginations and we construct our selves based on the stories our imaginations create. Cooley states:

> We have no higher life that is really apart from other people. It is by
> imagining them that our personality is built up; to be without the
> power of imagining then is to be a low-grade idiot; and in the
> measure that a mind is lacking in this power it is degenerate. Apart
> from this mental society there is no wisdom, no power, justice, or
> right, no higher existence at all. The life of the mind is essentially a
> life of intercourse. (p. 97)

The life of the mind is reality rather than reality being some objective form that exists universally and forever without change. Cooley writes:

> I conclude, therefore, that the imaginations which people have of
> one another are the *solid facts* of society, and that to observe and
> interpret these must be a chief aim of sociology. I do not mean
> merely that society must be studied *by* the imagination…but that

the *object* of study is primarily an imaginative idea or group of ideas

in the mind, that we have to imagine imaginations. (p. 121,

emphasis in original)

According to Cooley, reality lives in and is consisted of whatever we can imagine.

Self-feeling.

Cooley asks how the concept 'I' fits in with the social self, if it does, by

introducing the concept of self-feeling. However, he makes a slight distinction

between instinctive self-feeling and the self-feeling created through social

interaction. The instinct with which we are born allows us to realize that we *are*.

In other words, we are in a state of being. This self-feeling is crude, raw or

unrefined. On the other hand, according to Cooley, the feeling we have that

allows us to say 'I' or 'my' or 'mine' comes from the looking-glass self, is

sophisticated and allows us to use words like 'I', 'me', 'mine', 'myself'. Cooley

explains:

Since 'I' is known to our experience primarily as a feeling, or as a

feeling-ingredient in our ideas, it cannot be described or defined

without suggesting that feeling. We are sometimes likely to fall into

a formal and empty way of talking regarding questions of emotion,

by attempting to define that which is in its nature primary and

indefinable. A formal definition of self-feeling, or indeed of any sort

of feeling, must be as hollow as a formal definition of the taste of

salt, or the color red; we can expect to know what it is only by

experiencing it. There can be no final test of the self except the way

we feel; it is that toward which we have the 'my' attitude. (p. 172)

According to Cooley, the self is so primary that it defies definition and should only

be referenced through our experiences in social interaction. Without social

interaction we would be devoid of feeling which consequently would deprive us of

self-feeling. The feeling we have that we are individuals is that which we label

'the self,' according to Cooley.

The social self needs the interaction of others and the imagination of the

individual person. One aspect of the looking-glass self is that we must imagine

what others think about us. Therefore, we must have the feeling of being

separate, yet that separateness is an illusion because without the imagined

others we would not be able to create our stories about our selves. Cooley sums

up this phenomenon of separateness-needing-the-social when he writes:

The social self is simply any idea, or system of ideas, drawn from

the communicative life, that the mind cherishes as its own. Self-

feeling has its chief scope *within* the general life, not outside of it;

the special endeavor or tendency of which it is the emotional aspect

finds its principal field of exercise in a world of personal forces,

reflected in the mind by a world of personal impressions. (p. 179,

emphasis in original)

It seems that Cooley is developing a developmental perspective of the self

when he describes the process of refining the self as we mature. As a child, we

start with the instinctive self-feeling, but as we become more and more social and

interact with a larger pool of people we then become aware of a better or higher self-feeling:

> Self-reverence, as I understand the matter, means reverence for a higher or ideal self; a real 'I,' because it is based on what the individual actually is, as only he himself can know and appropriate it, but a better 'I' of aspiration rather than attainment; it is simply the best he can make out of life. Reverence…implies…resistance to friends and counselors and to any influence that the mind honestly rejects as inconsistent with itself; a man must feel that the final arbiter is within him and not outside of him in some master, living or dead, as conventional religion, for instance, necessarily teaches. Nevertheless this highest self is a social self, in that it is a product of constructive imagination working with the materials which social experience supplies. (p. 241)

Social interaction and an active imagination combine to create greater and greater ideals of self-feeling; however, Cooley warns of the dangers of too much pride:

> If the man succeeds in becoming indifferent to the opinions of his neighbors he runs into another danger, that of a distorted and extravagant self of the pride sort, since by the very process of gaining independence and immunity from the stings of depreciation and misunderstanding, he has perhaps lost that wholesome deference to some social tribunal that a man cannot dispense with

and remain quite sane. The image lacks verification and correction

and becomes too much the reflection of an undisciplined self-

feeling. (p. 258)

Too much pride is a result of the detraction from social interaction. Without the

looking-glass effect of social interaction, a person might develop a distorted view

of his/her self. That distorted view might cause further isolation and possible

personal pain and suffering.

Reflections While Reading Cooley

Throughout the next section I will address some of Cooley's ideas through

a reflection process on two levels. The first part of the process is the result of

conversations I had while at the crossroad with Cooley, my Self and others as I

read and analyzed Cooley's book. When having these conversations I often took

a modernist stance that will be demonstrated in the language I used along with

the overall tone of the reflections. I was deeply engrossed with defending my

position of the Self from my framework of the Self and the Me rather than

allowing myself to be vulnerable to others' suggestions.

The second reflective process came while writing the Discussion chapter

for this dissertation. These thoughts are results of conversations at the crossroad

from a relational stance. The language and tone is softer and I am more open to

allowing my framework to take on flexibility.

You will also encounter imagined conversations I have had with you the

reader. As I grappled with Cooley's ideas and my own reflections upon those

ideas, I imagined you sitting on my shoulder whispering questions and offering

suggestions. To these imagined contributions I also present my reflective process on two levels that resemble the above description.

Significance of the 'other'.

1<u>st</u> <u>Reflective Process</u>:   I share some common ground with Cooley on the individual's place in society; yet I have some distinctly different perspectives. I propose that my individual being contains a Self that is autonomous and separate from the Me (Cooley's social self); however, the Self needs the social in order to react. For example, we cannot have the concept of light without the concept of dark. The other is needed in order for the one to exist (Sampson, 1993). Unless I had something telling me what to do, I would not have the opportunity to agree or disagree or negotiate with it. I would not have the opportunity to have a dialogue. I am proposing that I come into life with a Self that is unique. It has opinions of its own; it has a life of its own. It is able to discern. It distinguishes between what is good for me and what is not. I can distinguish between the societal (Me) world and the world of the Self. In this way society produces an 'other' of which I am aware in order to be aware that I have a Self that is separate from society.

Cooley's position on the individual reminds me of computers or robots because they are a result of someone else's input. They are physical manifestations of the creator. They do not think or decide for themselves. Instead, they go through mathematical equations depending upon the variables given to them in any situation and come up with a pre-

determined—or other-determined—set of results. The computer's code and the user co-create an end product. Both—the computer and the user—are affected by the act of co-creating. My Self and the Me co-create end products, but my Self, unlike Cooley's idea of the social self, remains unchanged while the Me is affected by the co-creation.

2nd Reflective Process: I am troubled by my words I initially chose, "unless I had something *telling* me what to do". The idea of something or someone telling a person to choose a certain path is not dialogic. My Self does not direct me; rather it offers suggestions just like the other conversation participants at the crossroad.

    I do not know if the Self remains unchanged. I do not know its world since I am not a part of its world. I only know its guidance. For me to acknowledge that I do not actually know if the Self remains unchanged is to put myself into a vulnerable position because I have to admit that perhaps my framework of the Self and the Me is not as rigid as I would have liked it to be.

Free will and choice.

1st RP: One particular postmodern critique of the self states that the self is diluted perhaps to the point of being indistinguishable (Gergen, K.J., 1991; Best & Kellner, 1991). This position has some merit. However, my experience tells me differently since my Self has become more and more apparent to me. This increasing awareness has repercussions on the concepts of free will and choice. Free will and free choice are two

separate entities. Unlike Cooley's suggestion, free will, in my experience, is still very much alive and its source is the Self that is unique, autonomous and immutable. It is free in that it is bound by no societal restraints. Yet, for me free choice is not a feature of the Self. Instead it resembles Cooley's idea of choice. The decision-making process for me is in my social self (the Me). I the human being is aware of the two separate worlds—the Self and the Me—and when faced with a choice the human being, who is a social entity, must decide between the myriad suggestions coming at me from society as well as the guidance from the Self.

As mentioned previously, Cooley's philosophy of the self is a radical break with former scholars in the field. He grounds the self in social interaction, a very intriguing notion that has added a whole new line of thinking about the self, but I offer a problem with taking this philosophy as *the* one and throwing all others away. If we all come to the table with others infused in us and we all derive decisions and actions from our multivariate selves, then where does that leave agency? If I argue that I am a combination of others and myself, then I am implying that there is a part of me that is separate from the others that make up me. So, what is that part? I say it is my Self, a piece of me that is not any other. My Self is outside, or transcends, the social. Now, I am not going backwards here. I am not saying that my Self is like the transcendental self from which Cooley broke away because that would imply that I am still thinking and operating in the world of the Me. The Self is not the mind, is not the

imagination, is not an objective part of the world in which we live. Rather it is outside of all the constructs we have created. It is in a world of its own. Since my Self is not a product of imagination and is not the mind itself, then where does it reside? It resides in a world of its own. The mind is where the negotiation between the Self and the Me happens. I agree with Cooley in that aspect. The imagination is where I stand at the crossroad of a decision. The negotiation must happen between the social part of the human being—the Me—and the unique agent that simultaneously is a part of and transcends the human being—the Self.

2nd RP: I viewed a philosopher's arguments as 'the one and only'. Where did I get the notion that that is what they are saying? I even thought that about people who ascribe to social construction theory and practice, thus my desire to defend the Self's place in social constructionism. My views came from my assumptions of them. I did not check with them to see if my theory about their argument was correct. I shut down dialogue. It also came from the stance I wore when entering into this project. I *needed* to salvage the Self in social construction theory. The theory needed to change yet I needed to remain the same. I realize that the either/or position I set up kept me from exploring other possibilities.

     I also seem to be very intent on establishing that I am somehow not anything else or anyone else—that some part of me is unique and mine alone. Why is that? Why is it important to me to underline

my 'specialness'? I had a dream one night after pondering these questions that seems prophetic now. I was presenting scholarly material to an audience, and I was standing near a little female child and an authoritative bully of a man. We were on a platform high above the audience and the edge of that platform was unguarded so that someone could easily fall off. I was facing the audience, behind the little girl who was sitting down playing. The little girl faced the audience and her back was to me. The authoritative man was in front of the little girl with his back to the audience. He stepped backwards, lost his balance and fell to his death. As he fell I put my arms around the little girl's waist so she would not fall or go after him. This dream affected me profoundly. This dream is a metaphor for my transformation throughout my project. The posture I initially took fiercely defending the existence and autonomy and power of my Self is no longer needed and has died—the authoritative bully falling to his death. The little girl—the epitome of vulnerability—is the one I saved. My notion of the Self is important to me but I do not have to shut down dialogue to protect it. Interacting in a relational way is not dangerous or detrimental to my Self or me as a human being.

There is a difference in *describing* what happens in my inner world at the crossroad having conversations with different participants and *claiming* that what is happening is the Truth. In other words, my crossroad

moments are quite real for me. They feel so real that it is easy for me to assume that everyone has the same experiences and understands the experiences using the same framework I use—the Self and the Me. A postmodernist stance would say that the crossroad moment is real for me and another framework used by another person to understand that person's inner dialogue is real for her/him. A modernist stance would claim universality of a particular experience through generalizing one person's experience to others.

Identity.

1<u>st</u> RP: Without a unique part of me the human being, I would become wrapped up in the concept of identity. 'Who am I?' becomes 'With whom do I identify?' The idea of identifying with someone else or, better yet, a group is very appealing because it is comforting to realize that we share common ground with others like us. If taken too far, the notion of identity can become problematic, as Roger Brubaker and Fredrick Cooper suggest in their 2000 article entitled "Beyond Identity". They suggest that the use of the word 'identity' has been overused to the point that it has no meaning at all. The word 'self' has done the same. The self means many things to many people. Could it be that people desire an identity because the social self has become so fluid and volatile that people feel ungrounded? They feel too controlled or feel too abnormal? Clinging to the identity(ies) of gender or race or class or ethnicity or nation or religion might be a salve to this discomfort. People might feel like they belong, that

their sense of self has a focal point and a reality to it, even though identity as a concept is so constructed and fluid in itself, which therein lays the irony.

I tried to identify with many groups throughout my life because of this feeling of not belonging. When I am barraged by the shoulds and should-nots of life I am essentially barraged with boundaries of inside and outside. If I do not have a certain look or car or job or relationship then I am outside. If I adhere to rituals or fashion or gender stereotypes then I am inside. I searched and searched for an identity (or identities) constructed outside my Self that I could whole heartedly fit into; one(s) that I could let my guard down in and completely accept. I have yet to find any. The reason is that I have a part of me that is outside the bounds of the social. And it does not necessarily agree with rules of the identity games played in our world. Therefore I cannot say that I identity with any one thing or group. I do not have an identity(ies).

2nd RP: After reading the above reflection I again clearly see that I ask those questions because *I* am the one who desires a sense of being unique and separate; *I* feel too controlled and abnormal. I experience my Self as not-of-this-world; if it is not a product of the Me then by definition it has to be unique and autonomous.

Responsibility/accountability.

1st RP: If we agree that a person is a conglomeration of social influences from the time that person is born, then what happens to personal

responsibility/accountability that is also a product of social influences as connected to learned values and truths? What happens to choice and decision-making processes? If I agree that I can take responsibility for decisions then there must be something unique within me that decides and chooses but does so outside of value systems. Any value I claim to have is something that has been created and agreed upon in the interaction of many forces within the society I live. Just going along with the agreed-upon value or moral because that is what is expected or is tradition or is comfortable then responsibility and accountability recedes into the background. For example, I identify with being a conservative, evangelical Christian (I actually do not, this is a thought experiment), therefore I must adhere to rules, doctrines, behaviors and ways of being that are necessary to being that type of Christian. There is no accountability or responsibility for my actions. If I do something that is considered good in the Christian value system, like volunteering at a soup kitchen, then my actions are understood as not my own. I am conforming to what I imagine a Christian should act like because Jesus guided me to serve those in need. However, if I do something that is considered bad within the Christian value system, like having pre-marital sex, then my actions are also understood as not my own. I am not conforming to what I imagine a Christian should act like because Satan has guided me to sin with my boyfriend. In both scenarios things outside my Self are doing the decision-making for me. Nowhere in these scenarios is there a

responsible and accountable agent. Because I have a Self that is not bound by custom, expectations, social norms etc., I have a part of me, the human being, that is uniquely my own. Thus, if in my decision-making process I decide to go with the Self's guidance, there is no one accountable for the consequences of that decision/choice but me.

What if I am at a crossroad moment needing to make a decision and I consult my Self and my Self guides me to go with the Me's value systems? What happens to personal accountability and responsibility then? Again, I am never *not* including my Self in decision making, at least not now anyway. I used to try to ignore my Self and found out time and time again that to make a choice without my Self's presence or to ignore my Self's guidance would result in very uncomfortable, painful and negative consequences. Therefore, whether or not my Self agrees with the value systems of the Me is moot. My accountability rests with the Self; if the Self agrees with the Me then I am still accountable for my decision.

2<u>nd</u> RP: Taking a second look at the above, you could rightly point out that I have entered into the realm of hypocrisy. I just argued that if I make decisions based upon rules and values that are outside of my Self then I am not acting as a rational agent and am not taking responsibility for my actions. Couldn't you say, based upon my descriptions of the world of the Self, that my Self is like Christianity in that I argue that the Self is of a world of its own and it has its own rules and values? I the human being is

adhering to its guidance—adhering to something outside of me—therefore, I could claim no accountability for my actions.

To be versus to feel.

1st RP: Cooley and I again agree on some concepts and then part ways on others. From my perspective, I have a Self that is outside the world we humans have created *and* I have a Me that is very much a part of that world. The job of the Me is exactly what Cooley describes in his looking-glass self concept. The human being that I am cannot be apart from others, as others cannot be apart from me. Cultural aspects of my life are not inanimate, separate entities. They are instead extensions of the people that make up my particular culture, including me. That is why culture and thus people continue to change as time goes by. Cooley is brilliant to put this phenomenon on paper and I wholeheartedly agree.

However, I cannot ignore the experience that I have been aware of for decades. There *is* something that is separate from the world of the Me. I intentionally use and italicize the verb 'to be' in the above sentence in order to delineate from the word Cooley uses which is *feel*. If I said I feel my Self then I would be describing something that is outside of the world of the Me but using a word that is of the world of the Me. The Self is an entity of its own. It is separate. It *is*. The world of the Me *creates, constructs, imagines, feels, ideates*, etc. These words imply completely different things, especially in light of the discussion above with Cooley.

2<u>nd</u> <u>RP:</u>   I must be careful with my word choice here. I should qualify that I am only describing my experience of my inner dialogue. To me, it feels like my Self *is*, yet I am willing to acknowledge that the experience is local rather than universal.

Self awareness.

1<u>st</u> <u>RP:</u>   So you might ask, how are you aware of your Self as opposed to the Me? My answer is difficult to describe in words because my choice of words could infer something I really do not mean. Using words is problematic because the world of the Me invents words and words invent the world of the Me. We cannot escape the symbiotic relationship we have with language (Wittgenstein, 1958). Since you cannot jump into my being and experience for yourself what I experience when I know the Self is 'speaking' to me, I will try my hardest to choose my words carefully. The Self appears as the absence of feeling and the absence of thought. (In that way alone, if not in any other manner, I part company with Cooley). You could call it an awareness or a knowing—in fact I have used those words in the past but they still do not sit right with me. Instead, the best way I have found to describe the experience is an absence. Imagine that there is busyness in you—a cacophony of emotions, thoughts, memories, feelings, voices, images—and then it all stops. The void that is left is my Self.

You might suggest to me practices such as meditation or philosophies of life, like Buddhism, say the same thing, but I would disagree. I have

tried all of them out there. They are products of the world of the Me with norms, rules, behaviors and at times even dogma.

2nd RP: When re-reading the above I am aware of the difference in tone from the other first reflective processes in previous sections. I try to describe something that happens within me rather than telling you that this *is* what happens no matter what you might suggest otherwise.

My tone reverts to a defensive one in the last few sentences of this section, however. I switch from trying to open a dialogue with you through offering a description of my experiences, to shutting down dialogue after imagining a suggestion you might offer in return by becoming defensive. I interpreted your suggestion as a 'corrected' version of my experience rather than imagining it as your attempt at finding common ground with me in order to continue the conversation.

Ignoring the Self.

1st RP: The 'void', if you will, happens and it has happened so frequently that I became consciously aware of the phenomenon. Once my awareness of the phenomenon grew, I realized the existence of the two separate worlds and their interaction with me whenever I am at a crossroad needing to make a decision. Cooley suggests that too much self-feeling that resists the interaction of the social will get the person in trouble with the social world in which s/he relates. The person may become a recluse or develop mental illness or be labeled a curmudgeon.

In my past, I experienced the opposite of Cooley's description. I developed depression and anxiety because I did not feel like I could accept my Self's guidance, and thus I would choose the world of the Me instead.

In the past I often chose the world of the Me because I thought I would disappoint or anger or be labeled abnormal or weird if I did not. In my choosing the world of the Me I became the problem to which Cooley refers. I became the curmudgeon, the recluse and developed depression, which in turn created rifts in my relationships with others. When I choose the guidance of my Self I *may,* as a result, hurt the people I love, but I am at peace. You might think, 'my, what a selfish person she is,' but which scenario is the more honest, authentic relationship with myself and others?

A)   acting as I imagine I should act through choosing the world of the Me (looking-glass perspective), and becoming anxious and depressed, and thereby straining a relationship.

B)   acting in the best interest of me through choosing my Self's guidance, and therefore being truthful with the person with whom I am relating.

Scenario B allows the person with whom I am relating to make a decision for him/herself without any knowledge withheld or manipulated. Scenario A does not. Which is more ethical to both myself and the other? From my perspective the latter, from Cooley's the former.

Let me give you an example from my life to ground the abstract. I am a heterosexual, American woman in her thirties. We American women are constantly barraged with the idea that children make women whole in our society. In the past few years, we could not pass a newsstand or flip channels on the television or surf the Internet without the appearance of pictures of famous women who are pregnant, thought to be pregnant or who have just given birth. The clichéd phrase 'over the moon' was used so often to describe the elation these women felt at being mothers that I never want to see or hear that particular order of words ever again. The not-so-subtle implication is that to be a woman you must be a mother, and if you choose not to be a mother then you are somehow not a woman.

Growing up I had no desire to be around children. Frankly, they annoyed me because I could not converse with them on the level I enjoyed. I never sought babysitting jobs and felt very uncomfortable if friends or family brought their small children to my house. Instead, I felt at ease, elated and at home with animals. I chose to work at animal hospitals throughout my high school, college and even some of my graduate career. I often said that if a baby or a kitten walked into a room, I would immediately go to the kitten and ignore the baby.

At age 35 I married a beautiful man. He shared the same feelings towards children, and we ultimately decided to live our lives together child-free. Even though I knew from a very young age that I did not want to have children, the moment I became engaged to my husband, I felt like

the 'right' thing to do was to get pregnant. I fell for the societal messages that were surrounding me. I thought that if I were a mother then I would finally find happiness because I would identify with a group, I would be normal…*finally*. But, something nagged at me. The nagging did not stop; in fact it grew worse as the days went by. I became very anxious, very depressed and a very difficult person to be around. I remembered that when I am anxious like this it is an indication that: a) I am in a poignant crossroad moment of my life, and b) I am ignoring the guidance of my Self. See, the world of the Me had a bullhorn to my head, screaming at me that I must fulfill the ultimate test of being a true woman—have children— or I would never be happy and I would forever be abnormal. My Self, however, said be true to what you have always known, children in your life are not for you.

I sought therapy, the wisdom of friends and family, and searched for people who felt the same as I do. I wanted to feel as if I belonged somewhere—that I fit in. I could not assuage my intense anxiety because I was searching the world of the Me for answers that my Self had all along. I almost pushed my husband to the brink of leaving me because I could not seem to make a decision. I thought that if my Self was wrong somehow in this case then I would miss my window of opportunity to be a true woman and be 'over the moon' with ultimate happiness. Eventually, I stepped back and allowed the Self to 'speak' to me and decided to go with its guidance, as I have learned to do. Once the decision was made, my

anxiety stopped (not because I made a decision, but because I chose my Self. Had I chosen the Me, a decision would have been made but my anxiety would have increased), and I am very happy with the life my husband and I are creating.

2nd RP: I notice now that I was more apt to establish an either/or scenario at every crossroad. In the past I would not make room for both/and. In the above paragraph I am not proposing that there could be a dialogue between the Self and Me, and as a result common ground could be agreed upon. In fact common ground was reached. The part I left out during my first reflection was that we adopted a kitten. We both wanted something to love and to love us back, to fawn over, to talk about with family and friends, to post pictures on Facebook. We just did not want to drastically change our lives as would be needed to care for a child. The either/or position I placed myself in created the anxiety—I gave myself only two choices, the Self or the Me. In this case they were trying to work together and I shut dialogue down between the two worlds at the crossroad. The way I feel about our cat Peanut can be described as 'over the moon', much to my chagrin.

Imagined Reader's Reflections While Reflecting Upon Cooley

While interacting with Cooley through reading his book, reflecting upon his theories and writing about them, I have experienced an imagined third person in the room observing the whole process. Every now and then, that imagined other

speaks up and asks a critical question or two. I have learned the value in listening to those questions because they help me reflect in a deeper way. Therefore, I would like to give them space at the end of each chapter. I will deal with them in separate sections in the same reflective manner as above.

Question of ontology.

1st RP: The ontology of the self is a concern that has stumped many authors past and present. Often, they will not address this question since it will drag them down into a quagmire that is worse than quicksand. Or, they will acknowledge that the ontological question is in the room like a huge pink elephant and then leave it at that, satisfied that at least they acknowledged its presence. I am acknowledging the elephant in the room and will try to address this question as best I can.

I claim, through data I have collected from my life, that the Self is transcendental in that it is not of this world. You might ask, "what world is it from?" Good question, my answer is, "I don't know." Without any empirical, observable proof to support my claim, I suggest that the Self never ceases to exist. Thus, it comes before the birth of the human being that I am, and will continue after my human being's death. The only reason I postulate such a claim is due to the wisdom my Self has. Whenever I am at a crossroad, my Self has wisdom/knowledge that I cannot access or do not know yet. I may have very good empirical, observable reasons for choosing the option produced from the world of the

Me, but do not because I know, from years of experience, that the Self has a perspective that my human being does not.

You might think to yourself, "she's talking about her soul, spirit, essence, and/or a deity." I would say a few things in response to that statement. First, my feathers ruffle at your choice of words because they are not just words. They connote concepts with which I heartily take issue. They are concepts the Me has constructed throughout human history. If we unpacked any of those concepts, like 'soul', I would not agree with the majority of the characteristics discussed. Words like 'soul' would be placing meaning upon my experience unintentionally since 'soul' means so many things to so many people.

You might now say, "well, if she can't *prove* that the Self transcends human life, or even *prove* her version of the Self exists, then how does this whole dissertation have any validity or reliability to it?" My answer to your astute observation is the subject of a whole separate criticism that I will engage below.

2nd RP: Again, the possibility of common ground is not even on my radar screen here. I allow you the reader to only go so far with the imagined conversation we are having. You asked about ontology and I gave my reflections, but when you asked whether or not my Self may be akin to the idea of a soul I responded with reasons why the Self and soul are not the same, rather than allowing myself to develop the possibility of a shared understanding between the two.

Question of validity and reliability.

1st RP: To answer your concern from above, yes, it is quite appropriate of you to ask me about my research methods. First let me say that this is not a modernist (positivist) research project in that I am trying to *prove* something by the scientific method. I make no claim that my experience is anything but my own. I make no claim that my understanding of what I call the Self and the Me is valid in the proper scientific use of the term. Therefore, I also make no claim to its reliability since it is not even scientifically valid. I am explaining and exploring a phenomenon that has and continues to occur in my life. For me and me alone is it valid; for me and me alone is it reliable.

However, if you the reader benefit from my exploration then I am humbled and happy that I could assist you. I am not in any way saying that my experience is or should be your experience. And I welcome whole-heartedly your critiques, concerns, questions, and downright dismissals. Your own experience is equally valid and reliable for you.

2nd RP: Is that true? Do I invite the reader in to see if s/he has similar experiences? Do I invite a dialogue? The answer is more often than not, no. The above suggests that I intellectually understood the theory behind postmodernism in general and social constructionism in particular; however, there existed a disconnect between knowing and doing. The above section shows me that I was not putting into practice a relational way of being.

Question of the chicken and the egg.

1<u>st</u> <u>RP:</u>   You might suggest that my Self could never introduce something

that has not already been known to me, and, therefore, the Self cannot

exist outside of the social. In other words, what comes first, the Self or

knowledge? My answer is both. In some instances, like the example I

gave above of to have children or not to have children, knowledge comes

first. But, there have been times in my life where my Self is guiding me to

choose something that is blind, if you will. I do not know what is behind the

Self door, but I am guided to choose it anyway. Let me give you an

example. I started to question religion at a very early age. I was raised

Catholic and went through the necessary training to receive sacraments

like First Communion, Penance and Confirmation. I went along with these

rituals and even tried to embrace the religion to the degree that I would

attend mass every Sunday and be the epitome of a Catholic. It did not

work; I became unhappy. I tried to fit myself into an identity/a group that

the world of the Me created and that my Self did not agree with. This

group supposedly held all the happiness for which I was searching. My

Self, on the other hand, said there is something else out there that is

better for you. It knew something my young being did not at the time. All I

knew was to remove my being from the religion and its community or I

would be very unhappy.

        I had never been exposed to and had no knowledge of any other

way of being—for example, any other religion or atheism or New Age

spirituality or philosophy like Daoism—but my Self did because it transcends the world of the Me.

2nd RP: This is an example of a time where I might have been so rigid with my framework that I set up an either/or choice for myself—choose to follow Catholicism to the letter or leave. Did I have to leave altogether? Could there have been a way of staying that allowed me to be a part of a community while understanding 'god' in my own way? I do not know if that is possible because I am unaware if the Catholic community would be open to allowing someone to be a part of their congregation who did not follow their doctrine. Perhaps leaving was the answer, but I left before opening a dialogue, not after.

Questioning if my Self is socially constructed.

1st RP: You might say that I am able to understand that I have a Self that is able to be autonomous and separate from society only because of the social construction of the self that has occurred in my culture. In other words, rather than the Self actually being separate, the Self is a product of the way in which my culture and I constructed the idea of self. Therefore, piggybacking on Cooley's and postmodern ideas, the self is fluid and ethereal rather than real and stable. For example, a psychologist might say that I created a refuge called the Self that is stable and powerful and in control because my life has often felt so out of my control and anxiety has been a constant as a result

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All of these critiques or opinions or expert analyses are not wrong. They are products of a point of view and are dialogic. It is however up to me whether or not I choose to accept these critiques as they are and go on from there, massage them and go on, or reject them and go on. The only way I can tell which one to choose is to check in with my Self. I get direction from it and then there is another choice to be made—do I agree with it and go on from there? In this way there is a dialogue between three entities—the person questioning me, the social or human Me, and the Self. When speaking with or communicating with me in any way, you are always in dialogue with two entities—the human Me and my Self. And, more important, I am always aware of that phenomenon at any given moment.

2nd RP: Here I feel as if I am more in a dialogic position than a monologic. I am less defensive and allowing for possibilities.

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In the next chapter I converse with Kenneth Gergen. After reflecting upon Cooley's ideas about the social nature of the self, I felt inclined to dialogue with Gergen about his suggestion that the self is constructed through dialogue while in relationship. Gergen is an internationally esteemed social construction scholar and professor at Swarthmore College.

Chapter Five
Kenneth Gergen: The Relational Self

Historical Context

In 1991 social psychologist Kenneth Gergen published *The Saturated*
Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life. Its publication coincides with
some major changes in geo-politics that has helped form our world for decades.
Within a crumbling of one wall, the Cold War is over. A dichotomous relationship
between good and evil, communism versus capitalism, tyranny versus
democracy, right versus wrong needs to shift. This modern way of understanding
our world is neat and tidy; it allows us to categorize, observe, and objectify just
about everything in life, or so we suppose. The increased interest in
postmodernism in academic circles messes this tidiness. That which we think is
true and good is called into question.

Add to the challenge of a paradigm an information technology boom
unprecedented in history. Through new technologies like computers, the Internet,
satellites, email, digital cameras, cell phones, fax machines, and cable television
we are constantly bombarded with suggestive images. These images present to
us ways of being in any conceivable scenario. In just one day, we could morph
through versions of ourselves one hundred times over. No longer is there the
illusion of a central, consistent, true self. Gergen summarizes the postmodern
self as once a center that now fails to hold:

> Social saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and
> unrelated languages of the self. For everything we 'know to be true'
> about ourselves, other voices within respond with doubt and even

derision. This fragmentation…corresponds to a multiplicity of

incoherent and disconnected relationships. These relationships pull

us in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles

that the very concept of an 'authentic self' with knowable

characteristics recedes from view. The full saturated self becomes

no self at all…Selves as possessors of real and identifiable

characteristics—such as rationality, emotion, inspiration, and will—

are dismantled…The center fails to hold. (pp. 6-7)

Without a center, many people become unhinged and uncomfortable. Gergen's

antidote is to reconceptualize the self as one that is relational rather than

individual.

The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life

Before Gergen gets into the heart of his thesis, he sets up for the reader a

dichotomy that the western world has established since Descartes declared, "I

think therefore I am." The dichotomy is the mind versus the heart, the knowable

versus the mystical. In historical terms it is the Enlightenment versus

Romanticism. He cautions that universal historical eras like these are impossible

and illusory since not everyone agrees upon the same premise. However, these

general categories are helpful in showing the ways in which a postmodern idea of

the self is so different than that which comes before.

Both poles of mind and heart have common ground; they both hinge on an

individual, autonomous, knowable self. However, the self is based on either the

realm of rationality located in the mind or intellect, or on deep internal emotion

situated in the body. Since the two concepts point to a true or real self that is consistent throughout our lives, the idea that we could study it, quantify it, observe it and categorize it becomes central to many academic disciplines at the turn-of-the-twentieth century. Using professionally established methodologies of the social sciences (psychology, sociology, history) we could create a map of the self.

Without a central self the multiple suggestive ways of being that bombard us daily creates a feeling Gergen calls "multiphrenia". When various outlets compete for our attention we feel as if we are being pulled in many different directions simultaneously. These different directions demand different versions of our selves, which creates exhaustion. When this scenario happens, Gergen suggests "the self is replaced by the reality of relatedness—or the transformation of 'you' and 'I' to 'us'" (p. 156). So we go from individual selves to a multitude of selves in relation with others:

> One's potentials are only realized because there are others to
> support and sustain them; one has an identity only because it is
> permitted by the social rituals of which one is part; one is allowed to
> be a certain kind of person because this sort of person is essential
> to the broader games of society. (p. 157)

In other words, without others we would cease to be. The self is not intrinsic to the individual; instead, it is created in the space between two or more individuals. The individuals and scenarios constantly change; therefore, our selves are constantly in flux. And, since the self does not reside in a person any concept

applied to the self, like moral or ethical intention, is also created in the space between, and, therefore, is also always in flux.

What happens when we find ourselves in a scenario like Gergen suggests:

> You go to a Moroccan restaurant and afterward take in the latest show at a country-and-western bar…Such experiences with variation and self-contradiction may be viewed as preliminary effects of social saturation. They may signal a *populating of the self*, the acquisition of multiple and disparate potentials for being.
>
> (p. 68-69, emphasis in original)

How does our modern notion of quantification and categorization of an authentic self understand that? Gergen, among others, suggests that modernism falls short and we need another paradigm called postmodernism:

> [Thomas] Kuhn concluded that what we view as great scientific advances cannot be credited to a modernist account of rational procedure. Rather, mainstream scientists of a given age are committed to a particular perspective of the world…a *paradigm*, in Kuhn's terms. At the same time, anomalous findings are generated by scientists outside this paradigm. These findings neither verify nor falsify the existing paradigm; they are simply irrelevant to it. At some point, when enough findings accumulate, the marginal group of scientists will develop an alternative way of thinking about the world, one in which their findings make sense. The new theory

cannot be compared with the old in terms of its empirical truth; it is

simply a different way of viewing the world, wedded to a different

realm of facts. (p. 90, emphasis in original)

The gradual shift from Enlightenment thinking to Romanticism and then to

modernism (which is an extension of Enlightenment ideas), is built upon the

paradigm of the self as a central figure that is real and universal. Postmodernism

creates a new paradigm rather than an improved version of the established

framework: the self is constructed moment to moment and is not real or

universal.

According to Gergen and other postmodernists everything in life seems so

fleeting and temporary, including the self. We could say that the self as we

thought we knew it is obsolete: "With the spread of postmodern consciousness,

we see the demise of personal definition, reason, authority, commitment, trust,

the sense of authenticity, sincerity, belief in leadership, depth of feeling, and faith

in progress" (p. 228). This notion might be scary to some individuals who need to

ground themselves in something that feels constant and tangible. However,

Gergen suggests that we stop fooling ourselves and realize that we are operating

in a brand new world and need to shed our old, outdated ideas of who we are.

Reflections While Reading Gergen

You will find the same structure going forward as you found when reading

the chapter on Charles Horton Cooley. There are two reflective process clearly

delineated below.

Postmodernism and the Self.

1st Reflective Process: Postmodernism is a vague concept. Much like the

Enlightenment or Romanticism or Modernism, Postmodernism is a

practical way of showing a change in the historical record and a break with

the accepted ways of thinking of the previous era. Since not everyone

agrees on one definition of postmodernism, for me, it is a freeing of

constraints of definition. We are not confined to the tenets of any one

theory or construct to explain the concept of the self. The choice is ours to

make. For example, it is not the self that is in danger of being fractured,

unreal or ungrounded, instead we have the choice to define or construct

the self the way we feel is right for us. Let me refer to the above example

Gergen gives of the Moroccan restaurant and country-western bar: In his

framework, the self is being fractured and losing its centrality. Thus, he

sees this multicultural experience as self-contradiction, for if the self were

constant, he would not jump from one cultural style to the next. From my

framework of the Self and the Me, I would say that the world of the Me is

creating the contradiction. The word 'contradiction' itself is value-laden,

and those values come from the world of the Me. Enjoying Moroccan food

and country-western music is a statement without values. Calling the

enjoyment of two different cultures a contradiction is a statement with

values. Rather than viewing this scenario as contradicting a self that is

supposedly constant, my definition of postmodernism allows me to say

that this person has transcended definitional constraints placed upon him

(from the world of the Me) and made choices that were right for him (from the world of the Self).

2nd Reflective Process: Here I try to engage Gergen in a conversation by offering my perspective of postmodernism and how it applies to the idea of a self. I do not try to tell him he is wrong.

Understanding the Self.

1st RP: Postmodernism, in part, is about the ability to choose for our selves rather than being confined to one definition. Postmodernism also allows a mixing of paradigms rather than needing to stay true to just one.

In fact, throughout my life I have used a variety of perspectives to help me understand how my Self works. You could say that I have used a modernist, scientific paradigm in the past. I have observed that when anxiety grips me it is an indication that a decision needs to be made: do I choose the Self or the Me? I have tested each choice and seem to get consistent results: I could ignore my Self and allow the anxiety to continue, or I could consult my Self and assuage my discomfort. Every time I choose the latter my anxiety stops. If I turn away from the guidance of my Self to choose the Me, my anxiety strengthens. Through this scientific method of testing and observing, I have results that are constant and predictive

You could also say that I look at this whole process from a postmodern perspective in that my framework helps me and it may not be helpful to you. I have no right to tell you that mine is better and yours is

worse, or that mine is the one and only perspective. Each person has his/her perspective, neither of which, from a postmodern stance, is more or less valid than others.

2<u>nd</u> <u>RP</u>:   Each perspective comes from a philosophical stance. Each stance has its values, methodologies and ways of knowing. The stance that I choose will help create a reality for me. If I do not feel comfortable in a specific reality all I need to do is change the stance. The transformation happens within me; when I shift my values shift, as well as the ways in which I relate with others. From a postmodern philosophy, I do not have the power to change anyone else. I cannot reach into their inner world and make them turn on or off a switch. I also realize that no one can reach into my inner world and turn on or off a switch either. Therefore, I do not need to utilize a defensive, either/or posture when discussing my framework of the Self and the Me. The only time I need to be on the defensive is when I take the perspective that I have the power and the right to change others and others have the power and the right to change me.

I seem to 'get it' when scholarly discussing theory and the abstract. Putting the ideas into action has been the tough part. There seems to be a disconnect between thinking and doing. This journey has been the link I needed to 'do' the abstract. Not even my internship in psychology using postmodern modalities provided the

transformation for me. I wonder why? That line of inquiry could be a whole other book.

Relational self.

1st RP: *Author's Note: the following reflection was the 'aha' moment of my transformation. When reading Gergen's idea of the relational self, I became fiercely defensive and at times furious (please forgive the, at times, inflammatory verbiage). Here are my reflections:*

Gergen and I agree and disagree. I vigorously oppose some of his ideas about the relational self. The idea of the relational self in its purest form is part of the problems of our world today. To give up the notion that we have a unique, autonomous compass that we alone can access and communicate with is giving up our power to another. If you remove the Self (as defined in my paradigm) then Gergen is correct, the individual would cease to exist without relationship. But, the existence of the Self puts the importance of relationship in a different perspective—the Self and the Me are in relationship. Without the world of the Me the world of the Self has nothing with which to relate. When asking for guidance at a crossroad for example, without the myriad voices of the Me, the Self has nothing to agree with, oppose or negotiate with. In that way I agree with Gergen, there is a relationship between the Me and the Self. The human being I am is created in that space and is constantly recreated since the details of that relationship always changes. However, the Self is unique, autonomous and outside the world of the Me. It is not created in

relationship. It is a necessary component of relationship but not a result of relationship. Without the unique, autonomous Self, Gergen's theory does not fit with my experience and has, in my opinion, the potential of being very dangerous.

2nd RP: The danger I allude to is actually my ultimate fear of losing my Self—the most precious part of me and my life. This above reflection is a turning point for me. I was really angry. My emotional discomfort indicated that I was not listening to my Self even though I thought I was listening to my Self all along. My Self wanted me to integrate social constructionist ideas into my life, not just my scholarship. My Self wanted me to become relational rather than monologic. However I argued with my Self saying that if I became relational I would lose my Self. I now know that is not true.

Over the course of this dissertation process I found the courage to 'be' relational rather than just talk about it. I deliberately tried it with my husband, which took enormous courage because I thought that if I were correct, being relational would cause me to lose my Self and lead to the loss of relationship with my husband. After tentatively but consciously putting these ideas into practice my relationship with my husband has become stronger and he even said to me the other day, "Kara, please don't get defensive when I say this, but you seem in the last few weeks to be lighter." I said, "yes, you are correct, read my dissertation and it will explain why." His words 'please don't get defensive' indicate how often I would take on that posture.

I realize now that a relational self is not something I should fear, and that being relational does not require me to abandon my framework of the Self and the Me. However, the relational self does require adopting a postmodernist stance from which dialogue and flexibility may be developed.

Morality.

1st RP: According to Gergen, morality is also created through relationships rather than being attached to a constant individualistic truth. In Gergen's framework, attending a funeral even though you dislike the deceased may be acting in a socially accepted manner because our morality states that we should respect the dead no matter what he/she did in life. Yet, in my framework, attending the funeral would be an outright lie since I would be ignoring a truth that stems from my Self. I may still choose to attend the funeral for the benefit of others, but I would consider my actions to be unethical. That is why I usually privilege my Self above the world of the Me, thus I do not lie (or be gracious) often. I would rather take myself out of a situation than have to lie to my Self or others.

2nd RP: I am not allowing for others' feelings or perspectives here. A funeral is not just about the deceased. It is also about the living. Attending the funeral does not mean I have to give up my position on the deceased. I do not have to abandon my feelings. I am able to hold my feelings and attend to the needs of the living who are in pain over the death of a loved one. In this sense I am being dialogic

and relational. No perspective is true or privileged; instead they are both valid and real.

Imagined Reader's Reflections While Reflecting Upon Gergen

Aren't you being just a little selfish?

1st RP: You might suggest my framework is individualistic and selfish to the extreme. You might be right if you are looking at this from Gergen's standpoint. I challenge you to look at it from the standpoint of something outside what we are taught. Many of our relationships have been maintained because of the relentless 'shoulds' out there. Is that a relationship that contributes anything positive to either party? Should the idea of a relationship be a privileged position? Gergen, as I understand his position, is in a precarious situation here. To me, he seems to be privileging relationship over individualism. In essence he is doing the inverse of what western society has done for centuries—privileged individualism over relationship. Either perspective can be thought of as black and white. Why cannot relationship and individualism both have places of worth? I would rather take an individualist stance than have a shallow, unwanted relationship based on the norms established by society at large (the world of the Me).

2nd RP   Again, in the above reflection I am assuming that I must acquiesce in relationship, and I assumed that to acquiesce means that someone or something has power over me. I am also assuming that to be relational means to give up my framework of

the Self and the Me. That is not the case at all and is not what

social construction theory suggests. In fact, coming together with

differing opinions might be the desired scenario since something

completely new could come from the discord. If something is to be

created through searching for common ground amongst the

discord, then I need to approach the conversation with a flexibility

that allows the other's framework to have as much validity as mine.

In other words, Gergen and I might not totally agree on the notion

of the self, but we can approach our conversation about the self

through a postmodern stance. This stance opens up room for

negotiation and shared understanding rather than ultimatums or

defensive polemics.

~   ~   ~

The following chapter is devoted to Plato. Gergen's understanding

that the self is relational caused me to wonder about the polar opposite

theory that the self is universal and fixed. I decided that I would start 'at

the beginning' so to speak and chose to converse with Plato. Plato, a

Greek philosopher who lived 2400 years ago, is famous for suggesting

that there is the world of the senses that is unpredictable and deceptive,

and there is a world of forms or ideas that are universal and immutable.

This dichotomy has influenced much of western ideological tradition

including the notion of the self.

Chapter Six
Plato: The A Priori Self

Historical Context

Many scholars agree that the ancient Greek philosophers are the founding fathers of western culture. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras are all examples of men who helped form the basis of our current thinking. These men question aspects of life, but do not necessarily follow in their tradition and look toward the Greek gods and goddesses for their answers. Philosophy becomes the intellectuals' way of understanding their world and their place in it, whereas the cults of the gods and goddesses appeal to the masses. Either way, ancient Greeks need something to which to turn for assistance in figuring out what it means to be Greek and what it means to be part of an ever-expanding world.

Plato concerns himself with questions regarding justice, virtue, truth, beauty and courage, to name a few in his famous book *Republic*. Plato reveals his philosophy through a Socratic dialogue that the main character, Socrates, has with prominent men of the city. One of his main arguments is that certain ideas like truth and justice are immutable and transcends the human experience. This perspective affects Plato's notion of the self and its purpose in Greek society.

Republic

The main idea of Plato's book rests on the two separate worlds that the human can turn toward—the world of the immutable that is beyond our material existence, and the world of the changeable that constitutes the everyday lives we lead. These two worlds are not equal; in fact, he suggests that everyone should strive to turn toward the immutable world, which he calls the ideas or forms, and

away from the changeable, which he calls vice. Using the above concepts, Plato outlines a hierarchical system of people and positions they occupy according to their abilities. This system creates an ideal society and everyone, in their proper places, contributes to the society according to their ability and the society will flourish and advance like no other.

At the head of this society are the rulers. Only the rulers have the necessary education and ability to understand the world of ideas. Since philosophers—people who have the appropriate knowledge of the ideas—are the experts, Plato suggests that the philosophers should be the rulers. Their knowledge of ideas like truth, beauty, justice and the overall good would allow them to teach their subordinates how to be the best they can be no matter what position they occupy in society. For example, the warrior would need courage and justice, but more important, he would need to know how to find *true* courage and justice. The rulers called philosopher/kings would be able to show the warriors that true courage is a virtue, something that exists in and of itself and cannot be found in the material world. Therefore, if the warrior turns towards something of the material world to find courage then he is actually turning away from the virtue of courage and towards vice.

Plato argues that there is an a priori (before-the-fact) world out there that contains an unchangeable, objective, and universal truth upon which people should focus. This universal truth is called the good. The people who turn toward the good through the capability of knowing the truth are the philosophers: "And who are the true philosophers?…Those who love the sight of the truth" (§ 475e).

He sets up a dichotomy of truth versus falsehood in the abstract and then grounds the dichotomy in human society all in one sentence:

> As for those who study the many beautiful things but do not see the beautiful itself and are incapable of following another who leads them to it, who see many just things but not the just itself, and so with everything—these people, we shall say, opine everything but have no knowledge of anything they opine. (§ 479e)

In other words, Plato is differentiating between the truth and a thing that contains the truth, and he is differentiating between people who see the truth and people who see an object that contains the truth. People who see the truth are people who have knowledge, and people who see objects that contain the truth are people who have opinions. Those who have knowledge are better than those who have opinions because the former are closer to the realm of the ideas (that contain the good) than the latter.

The following quote best exemplifies Plato's philosophy. Even though it is a lengthy passage it summarizes concepts that can be difficult to grasp:

> What the good itself is in the intelligible realm, in relation to understanding and intelligible things, the sun is in the visible realm, in relation to sight and visible things…You know that, when we turn our eyes to things whose colors are no longer in the light of day but in the gloom of night, the eyes are dimmed and seem nearly blind, as if clear vision were no longer in them…Yet whenever one turns them on things illuminated by the sun, they see clearly and vision

appears in those very same eyes…Well, understand the soul in the

same way: When it focuses on something illuminated by truth and

what is, it understands, knows, and apparently possesses

understanding, but when it focuses on what is mixed with obscurity,

on what comes to be and passes away, it opines and is dimmed,

changes its opinions this way and that, and seems bereft of

understanding…So that what gives truth to the things known and

the power to know to the knower is the form of the good. And

though it is the cause of knowledge and truth, it is also an object of

knowledge. Both knowledge and truth are beautiful things, but the

good is other and more beautiful then they. In the visible realm,

light and sight are rightly considered sunlike, but it is wrong to think

that they are the sun, so here it is right to think of knowledge and

truth as goodlike but wrong to think that either of them is the

good—for the good is yet more prized…Therefore, you should also

say that not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being

known to the good, but their being is also due to it, although the

good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power. (§ 508b/c)

We cannot see beauty because it is a form. However, we can see images that

beauty reflects or projects like a flower and call it beautiful. This is both a form

and an object simultaneously. To know beauty takes knowledge, also a form.

Knowledge knows truth, also a form. Knowledge knows the truth because of the

good, the ultimate form.

How do we know? That is another question Plato answers. He suggests that reason or rationality is the vehicle by which truth is known. Desire, on the other hand, will lead us to the opposite of the forms called vice. "We'll call the part of the soul with which it calculates the rational part and the part with which it lusts, hungers, thirsts, and gets excited by other appetites the irrational part, companion of certain indulgences and pleasures" (§ 439d/e). Be careful in assuming Plato is prefiguring Descartes in the duality of the Cartesian mind/body model. He is not; Plato is not suggesting that reason resides in the mind and desire in the body. However, he does posit that reason will lead us to the realm of the good and thus we will find peace. Whereas, desire will lead us to the material world of vice, and thus we will find chaos.

Are all people meant to have the same capacity to know the truth? Plato suggests two things in answer to this question: a) education is the means to the end of knowing, and b) not everyone has the capacity to acquire the ultimate in knowledge no matter how much education we receive. The ultimate knowers of knowledge—the philosopher/kings—use their rational abilities to educate their subordinates on how to be the most virtuous his or her level allows him/her to be. The following illustrates the above through an exposition on justice and what it means to be a just person:

And in truth justice is, it seems, something of this sort. However, it isn't concerned with someone's doing his own externally, but with what is inside him, with what is truly himself and his own. One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another

part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each

other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He

puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three

parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale—high,

low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others

there may be in between, and from having been many things he

becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious. Only then does

he act. And when he does anything, whether acquiring wealth,

taking care of his body, engaging in politics, or in private

contracts—in all of these, he believes that the action is just and fine

that preserves this inner harmony and helps achieve it, and calls it

so, and regards as wisdom the knowledge that oversees such

actions. And he believes that the action that destroys this harmony

is unjust, and calls it so, and regards the belief that oversees it as

ignorance. (§ 443d/e and 444a)

To exemplify Plato's point, if a person were a master craftsman, then he would

be guided by the philosopher/kings to see the form of beauty in his craft rather

than just an object that is beautiful. The master craftsman has within himself the

nature to be the best craftsman he can be. If he goes against this nature and

tries to be a warrior, for instance, he would not be focusing on that which is most

virtuous or true for himself. Instead he might be focusing on the lower aspects of

his soul that might desire the pleasure gained through fame. Depending on which

way he turns, he will experience harmony or chaos.

Reflections While Reading Plato

As with the last few chapters, you will find two levels of a reflective process for the rest of this discussion on Plato. The first occurred while I analyzed Plato's *Republic* and the second occurred after my transformative experience while composing my final chapter.

Is the truth out there?

1st Reflective Process: If you are a being then what makes you, you? That which makes you unique is not anything outside of you. By definition, nothing outside you can make you, you. The world of the Me is you interacting with the external and that helps shape your behavior and emotions and decisions, but the you that is yours alone—the 'thing' that makes you unique—cannot come from any outside source: not from the good, not from God, not from the media or social interaction, only from the Self.

Plato suggests that we cannot be our true nature unless we are full of the virtues that go along with our nature. So, if we are going to be guardians then we are virtuous in that we have the forms of courage or strength. However, ontologically speaking, the virtues are not part of us. They are a priori and we must look outside ourselves to attain them. Humans do not create the virtues, but we must strive to know them to be better humans. I disagree with Plato and suggest that humans create the virtues; they are social constructions. Since we construct virtue, I have the power to construct my own form of virtue based on the Me or the Self or a

combination of the two. I also have the power to say that I want nothing to do with the current construction of a particular virtue. Plato does not give his humans that ability. His humans are autonomous only to an extent.

2nd Reflective Process: As I read again the above reflection, I realize that to feel autonomous is paramount for me. The Self in my framework seems to be controlled by no one and is like Plato's forms in that my Self and the forms are immutable, not of this world and constant. As stated in the discussion of the *Republic*, there is a hierarchy established by Plato based on the proximity to the forms. Those who understand the forms the best due to their innate abilities are the philosopher/kings. The philosopher/kings become the rulers of society based on their knowledge of the forms. Plato has established a strict hierarchy that is virtually impossible to challenge because the forms are a priori and out of human control. I have understood my Self as outside of human control and a priori. The only person who can know my Self best is me; therefore, I am in control of me. Since this is the stance I have worn for so long, whenever I am confronted with a challenge to my framework or even a suggestion that I view it from another perspective fear takes over me and I position myself to defend, attack or run so that my Self and my control is not destroyed.

Social construction theory/practice and postmodern philosophy has taught me that my rigid framework and defense of that framework is not necessary because the framework is not 'real' in the way that Plato has

framed the forms. In other words, my framework is something that I have created to help me navigate through life. If I shift my framework so that it is less rigid I don't lose my Self because it was not there to lose in the first place. Instead, shifting the framework causes a shifting in perspective, which causes a shifting in relationship with others. The understanding that my Self as a unique part of me that is a priori and agentic does not have to change. I still think of it that way because it makes sense for me. However, I do not have to entrench myself for battle any longer because my shift in perspective states that I cannot lose my Self because there has been nothing to defend all along.

Education as a means to know the Self.

1st RP: Plato's philosophy influences his approach to education. Education is a means to know the forms as best as possible, and is the job of a select few in Plato's world. Those few supposedly have the 'nature' to do such things. They must direct others to see the 'right' things that exist as universal, immutable truth.

Like Plato, my philosophy also influences the pedagogy I apply in the classroom. I see my students as people who have Selfs. They have guidance and knowledge that pertain to them for them. If I were to dictate that each person must grasp information uniformly then I would be ignoring the presence and importance of each student's Self. I would effectively demonstrate that my perspective on any given historical event is the truth in Plato's terms and that truth must be everyone's truth.

Instead, I ask my students to decide for themselves which perspective is important to them and why. For example, I ask them to analyze readings based upon their observations and their decisions about the content rather than upon mine. I am only one person; I cannot know every perspective out there on one reading. The perspectives are infinite. Thus, I am always learning from my students.

Plato might say that I learn new perspectives from my students because I am reaching beyond my nature into the philosopher/king realm where I do not belong. From that point of view, I do not have enough information or ability or intelligence on the subjects I teach, and I am actually doing the students a disservice and should be fired. From my perspective, I emphasize a skill they already possess: they have the ability to decide for themselves which information is important and why, and which is not and why. They each equally have relevant, useful perspectives and ideas within themselves, they just need to retrieve it and apply it.

2nd RP: Reading this reflection from a relational point of view, I see my pedagogy in a different light. I see it as a combination of the Self and the Me. I encourage students to decide for themselves, helping them become aware of their personal thoughts, decisions, guidance—their respective Selfs. But I also want to learn from my students. The desire to learn from others is privileging the Me over the Self. In this instance I realize that the Self is not always the

better choice. Prior to working on this dissertation, I could not allow

myself to be open to that possibility because of the fear of losing

my Self completely. However, the fear has dissipated because I am

not losing anything; I am just shifting perspective.

Imagined Reader's Reflections While Reflecting Upon Plato

Aren't you being hypocritical?

1st RP: I realized something important when reading the *Republic*—

anything anyone writes has the potential to become a problem for the

person who chooses to listen to the Self. If we are at a crossroad then

there are many places we can go for advice, some of which may be

authors, doctors, psychologists, friends, family, philosophers etc. The act

of me writing me ideas down becomes problematic because I

instantaneously put myself in the Me world for someone else who might

have picked up my book, especially if that person is in the midst of trying

to make a decision. The ideas this dissertation describes are concepts

that explain my experiences and that have worked for me. If I try to offer

advice to anyone then I am shifting my stance from 'here's what happens

with me' to 'here's what happens with me, you should adapt to my way.' I

would be privileging my ideas over yours. But how can I do that for

another person? I would be the external voice suggesting that a) the

reader must realize that he/she has a Self, and b) the reader must listen to

it. This external voice could be taken the same way as Plato's forms—the

voice and the forms are universal, true, good and unchangeable.

The reason I thought of this while reading Plato is the style in which he writes his story. Socrates, surrounded by men listening to his philosophical ideas, asks questions in order to lead the men to Socrates' points of view. It is a bit manipulative because the men do not follow their own paths or thoughts; they are always led back upon the path Socrates wants no matter what. They are listening to a man explain to them why he, a philosopher, has the knowledge of the good and thus should be educating the lesser people. Socrates justifies his own actions while doing them. These men do not have the liberty to think for themselves for two reasons: a) because there is the notion of the truth and the good out there, and b) because they are not philosophers and should be guided by those who know the truth and the good. The *Republic* is a great example of the world of the Me, and shows exactly how to play in that world through its characters.

Rather than presenting my experiences and my ideas in an authoritative way, I would rather discuss them through dialogue. In fact, there are many layers of dialogue that run through my dissertation: I am conversing with my five philosophers who have grappled with these ideas throughout history, I am talking with my Self along with my family, friends and colleagues, I have discussions with my advisor periodically, and I am dialoguing with you. All of these conversations are happening constantly. In other words they do not occur in a linear fashion. I might speak with my

Self, then with my advisor, then back to my Self. A few minutes later my Self and my advisor will join in a continued dialogue with Plato.

2<u>nd</u> RP: The above reflection was written before my transformation and almost acts as a foretelling of the person I wanted to become. I desired to release the defensive, authoritative stance and embrace a dialogic one. The following is a real-life example of the results of shifting my stance from a position akin to Plato's to one that embraces a not-knowing perspective: my husband chooses to deal with dirty dishes one way and I choose to deal with them another way, and I used to become angry with him for not doing them according to my rules. My anger stemmed from a monologic stance. I assumed I knew what was really behind his dishwashing method. I did not check to see if my assumptions were correct and I would defensively, angrily confront him with my assumptions as 'evidence'. He would respond defensively as well because he would respond to an attack rather than responding to an inquiry into my assumptions.

Both my husband and I were tired of arguing about the same issue over and over again; neither one of us felt like we could 'give in' to the other. After intellectually understanding the difference a relational perspective could bring to a conversation via my studies for this dissertation, I decided to apply the ideas to the dishes dilemma between my husband and me. The next time the issue

presented itself to us, I consciously decided to put my assumptions aside and I opened the conversation calmly with a statement and a question: "Rich, I really want to understand why you choose to do the dishes the way that you do. Could you help me with this because I am tired of assuming and then getting angry with you based on faulty assumptions? It's not fair to you." Unlike the character Socrates in Plato's *Republic,* I chose to wear the not-knowing perspective before the conversation even began. This stance allowed Rich to be my equal rather than setting up a right/wrong dichotomy. After that conversation we both gained an understanding toward each other's choices and have not argued over the dishes since.

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Plato's dichotomous universe led me to Rene Descartes because it seemed like Descartes' notion of the self coincided with Plato's world of forms. However, prior to reading Descartes I decided to find a philosopher who fell chronologically between Plato and Descartes. I found St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. Augustine, like Plato, directs his attention to a world superior to and outside the material; yet, on his way to that world he needs to turn inward first. Augustine's self becomes a means to the ultimate end of the immaterial world. St. Augustine is credited with marrying two traditions—Greek philosophy and Judeo-Christian theology.

Chapter Seven
St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo: The Self as Means to an End

Historical Context

Saint Augustine held the office of Bishop of Hippo in the North African region of the Roman Empire as it declines. The year after Augustine's death, 431 ce, is the year the Roman Empire fell. During the last century and a half of Roman rule, Catholicism organizes around common doctrine and dogma, and its leadership forms into the hierarchy we are familiar with today. Augustine becomes one of the most influential Catholic theologians during this crucial time in the formation of the Church.

The modern philosopher Charles Taylor, in his 1989 book *Sources of the Self,* situates Augustine in Western philosophical discourse on the self: "On the way from Plato to Descartes stands Augustine. Augustine was influenced by Plato's doctrines…[T]he Christian opposition between spirit and flesh was to be understood with the aid of Platonic distinction between the bodily and the non-bodily" (p. 127). Taylor also distinguishes between Plato and Augustine in that Augustine sees the need for the individual as a reflexive tool:

Augustine shifts the focus from the field of objects known to the activity itself of knowing; God is to be found there…For in contrast to the domain of objects, which is public and common, the activity of knowing is particularized; each of us is engaged in ours. To look toward this activity is to look to the self, to take up a reflexive stance. (p. 130)

In other words, the main shift that occurs from Plato to Augustine is the act of turning inward. For Plato, our attention has to be focused on the forms that are not of this world and immutable rather than on ourselves. For Augustine, we first go inward to our individual selves in order to turn toward the good and the infinite. Augustine's shift allows for private, individual reflection that leads each person toward the ultimate goal of universal truth, which he labels God.

On Free Choice of the Will

Saint Augustine's book is structured similarly to Plato's *Republic* in that it is a dialogue broken up into three books. Within the conversation, Augustine touches on the themes of truth, knowledge, reason, freedom and the will. I will first outline his main points, and in then I will offer my reflexive analyses.

According to Augustine, God is the source for truth: "Then it will be enough for me to show that something of this sort exists, which you can admit to be God; or if something yet higher exists, you will concede that *it* is God" (Book Two, § 6). Thus, truth is superior to humans: "God will, I hope, enable me to reply to you—or rather, he will enable you to reply to yourself, as Truth, the greatest teacher of all, teaches you within" (Book Two, § 2). Although the truth is above humans, we get to the truth through inward reflection. Once we attain truth, that understanding, or knowledge, is no longer our individual, separate domain. Instead, it is common knowledge to all, thus superior to individuality:

So this one truth, which each of us sees with his own mind, is common to both of us…Can anyone say that this truth is his own private possession, given that it is unchangeably present to be

contemplated by all who are able to contemplate it? (Book Two, §

10)

Augustine suggests that since humans are equipped with an inner sense that is able to perceive the truth, we must use the tools that are within us to realize that we, in fact, have knowledge of the truth. The tool to which Augustine refers is reason:

> This inner sense is itself neither sight nor hearing nor smell nor taste nor touch; it is some other thing that presides over all of them. Although we understand this sense by means of reason, as I said, we cannot identify it with reason itself…So whatever this thing is by which we perceive everything we know, it is an agent of reason. It takes whatever it comes into contact with and presents that to reason so that reason can delimit the things that are perceived and grasp them by knowledge and not merely by sense. (Book Two, § 3)

Humans have five senses and reason through which we process information. However, reason produces a type of understanding—knowledge—that is superior to the senses and that leads us to the truth. The senses are a lower form of understanding and are inferior to reason. However, there is a higher form of 'inner sense' (not to be confused with the lower five senses) that is even superior to reason, and allows humans to perceive that there is such a thing as the truth.

God is superior to any lower form of being including humans; therefore, he cannot contain or direct us toward anything but the ultimate good—the truth.

However, the world is not made up of just the good, there is the bad or evil as well. The question remains, how/why do humans turn away from the truth and toward the bad? The answer for Augustine is that humans are born with a will that has agency. The translator of the 1993 edition of *On Free Choice of the Will*, Thomas Williams, succinctly summarizes Augustine's ideas:

> An apple falling from a tree has no choice about whether to obey the law of gravity. It has no option to frustrate its own nature. But since the will is free, it has a choice about whether to obey the eternal law. Human beings can voluntarily wreck their lives by running afoul of the laws that govern their nature. This is indeed a sort of freedom, but it can hardly be the best sort. That very will by which human beings fight against the law of their own nature, a law that they did not make and from which they cannot escape, can be used to love that law and live up to that nature. A soul that has such a will is genuinely free: free from a hopeless struggle against itself, free to become what it truly is. (p. xix)

Humans have a will that is free from command, but they need to turn towards the truth in order to be truly free—free from struggle, temptation, angst and the like.

Augustine therefore views the self as a means to an end. The end is the ultimate truth or God and the means to get to that truth must come from turning inwards to your self. The self houses the tools that are needed to process information that will lead us toward the truth. Reason and the 'inner sense' help the person to grasp that there is such a thing as the ultimate truth and lead the

person on the path to knowing it. However, the self also has free will. The will has

the ability to lead the self away from truth and towards its opposite. The will, and

therefore the self, only know limited freedom since the ultimate truth is outside of

the self and therefore its will. Eventually, the self will realize that to be totally free

it must willfully give into the ultimate truth.

Reflections While Reading St. Augustine

The following structure will follow the same pattern as previous chapters:

two reflective processes will be delineated for you in each subsection.

Either/or versus both/and.

1st Reflective Process: I agree with Augustine that we both turn toward a self,

but Augustine's self is a middle road between the material and the

immaterial. Augustine says that there is a right direction, a right morality

and a right form of good that everyone should follow that is governed,

owned and operated by God. The individual needs the self to lead to the

road to God, but God does not need the self; he is transcendent and

better than the self. Thus, the self needs God. Since the self has a definite

location, a person must focus on the self by going inward in order to then

come outward again toward God, the ultimate truth.

My Self does not reside inside or outside. It is not of that dialectic

since the dialectical does not allow for openness. It shuts down

conversations. Take for example the African-American history of the

United States. The tradition states that as long as you have one drop of

African blood in you, you are considered black even if you look like you

are a member of Hitler's Aryan ideal. Thus, President Barack Obama is considered black even though half of his family is white. What if Obama's perception about himself does not fit within the choices of either black or white? Where would that leave him and his concept of how he fits within American society? I estimate that it would leave Obama in a conundrum.

The answer is not to fit ourselves into the confines of a binary construct; rather the answer is to change the construct completely. My Self is located neither in nor out. I cannot point to it; I cannot locate it. I just know that it is uniquely me and mine. I am my body, *and* I am also not my body. I am my consciousness, *and* I am also not my consciousness. I am rational *and* I am not. The 'and' is the key rather than the 'or'.

2nd Reflective Process: The 'and' is the key, but I did not take my own advice for a long time. I argued for the benefit of stepping outside a dialectic all the while operating within one. For example, I shunned anything that I perceived coming from the world of the Me rather than inviting it into dialogue with the Self or allowing it significance. When I took that stance my crossroad experiences became monologic. The only voice I was listening to was the one from the Self. I effectively shut out everyone else in my inner world. That myopic perspective translated to my relationships with the outside world—I was right and everyone else was wrong before a conversation even took place.

The a priori problem.

1st RP: The idea that there is good or bad, right or wrong leads me to an a

prior problem. Augustine already knows that there is something that is

superior to all. How can this be? How can I know what to point my will

towards before the situation even occurs? A priori knowing is like having a

recipe to apply to all scenarios. I know my Self's guidance is what I need

to follow, but I certainly do not know what that guidance is going to be

before the situation occurs.[4]

I cannot predict what my Self is going to direct me towards before-

the-fact for another reason: the Self does not operate within the morality

constructed by the world of the Me. The Self gives me guidance and the

Me part of my being judges it to be good or bad based on what the world

of the Me has already established as good or bad to begin with. There is a

before-the-fact quality to my process, but it does not reside in the Self,

instead it resides in the Me. For Augustine, he locates the a priori in the

truth not in himself.

2nd RP: I seem to contradict myself in the above reflection. I state

that I know that I will need to follow my Self's guidance before a

situation occurs. That stance is a priori thinking and it closes off

other possibilities that might be helpful.

Are we really free?

1st RP: The above reflection on a priori knowing leads me to question if we

are indeed actually free. According to Augustine we are and we are not.

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[4] When I wrote this sentence I made a note to myself that reads: "I think I just figured out what it means to let go." The idea of 'letting go' has been a difficult concept for me to grasp and put into practice up until my work on this dissertation.

We have a will that is free to choose, but we are not truly free because there is a truth that exists that we are *supposed* to choose. At first I thought I had the total freedom of choosing the Me or the Self if they did not agree with one another. But now, after conversing with these philosophers, I realize more of the details of the process. I am only free to a certain extent; I only have agency to a certain extent. I am a slave to my Self because if I choose something that is not of my Self's guidance then I am very agitated until I do or until I try to mute the feelings by engaging in whatever pleasurable activity there is to distract me. Sometimes I just want to go along with the world of the Me because it might seem easier or less confrontational, or less scary since I would not lose something or someone. Sometimes I just want others to guide me and I follow blindly without the awareness of the two worlds and without the troubled feelings I get for not following my Self.

The above desire has happened to me often regarding organized religion. I live a few houses from a well-attended Catholic church with a large congregation. Next to it is an Armenian church. Up the street from it is a Congregational church, and an Episcopalian church is near—all within a few hundred yards from my house. I grew up Catholic and attended catechism classes. I found that I could not tolerate Catholicism because the doctrines and beliefs were so far from my Self. For example, the Church prohibits women from positions of power like priests, cardinals and Pope. The Church also strictly prohibits pre-marital sex, the use of

contraception and abortion. As I became aware of these doctrines I also became aware of the confrontation of the two worlds—the Self and the Me. The Self wholeheartedly disagreed with them, but the Me said that I must agree with or at least tolerate the rules in order to be a 'good' Catholic. Because I wanted to belong, to fit in, to have a community around me, I tried to ignore my Self and believe in Catholic doctrine. The more I tolerated the doctrines the more I turned away from my Self which resulted in anger and angst.

Whenever I walk by the Catholic church now I look in the windows and usually think to myself how nice it must be to follow the Church's teachings without question. I know that is simplistic thinking, but what I am really saying is that I feel so outside, so abnormal because there is not a line of thinking that I wholeheartedly agree with, whether it is politics, religion, academic disciplines, beliefs, cultural norms etc. Constantly seeing through the surface and my Self reacting to all these Me constructions can get lonely and tiring and frustrating.

However, I also realize through past experiences, that I am more at peace because of my awareness and my ability to choose. Thus, much like Augustine's notion of the universal truth towards which humans should strive to direct their will, I strive to direct my being toward the guidance of my Self. The difference is that Augustine's truth is not of himself, yet mine is.

2<u>nd</u> <u>RP</u>:   The above reflection suggests that my framework had

established only two paths that my will could choose—the Me or

the Self. My will only has so much room to be free in this structure. I

did not make room for a third option: the Self and the Me to find

shared ideas and reach common ground. There is a difference

between following my Self's guidance after being in dialogue with

the Me versus following my Self's guidance without ever inviting the

Me into the decision-making process.

The loneliness and frustration mentioned in the above

reflection is created by my stance towards the Me constructions,

not the Me constructions themselves. If I assume I have to embrace

the doctrine and rules of Catholicism in its entirety then I am setting

myself up for frustration and eventually loneliness because I know I

would not be able to adhere to such strict rules (nor would I want

to), and I would feel my only option would be to leave it altogether.

This is an either/or and right/wrong dichotomy. It is all or nothing

rather than compromise and negotiation. Yet, if I take a dialogic

stance and allow for a range of opinions on Church doctrine then I

might feel more at ease. I might be able to go to church and

experience a sense of community while taking away that which is

meaningful to me and allowing others to take away that which is

meaningful to them.

Reason.

1st RP: Many philosophers take the stance that reason is the highest form for humans and emotions and/or the body is the lower form. Is that true? For me, based on my experience, emotions have a greater pull on me than reason. Emotions are situated in my body through physical feeling. When I am sad I can feel it in my physical being. When I am happy I can also feel it in my body. I know I am at peace because there is a lack of a physical presence, almost like I am not feeling my body at all. In contrast, reason does not have an effect on my body since it is not an emotion. Reason is rather a tool that my mind utilizes; the more my mind uses reason the better, more analytical my mind becomes. My mind is firmly rooted in the world of the Me; therefore, reason is also of the world of the Me.

I can reason myself out of anything, including heeding my Self's guidance. However, it is extremely difficult to ignore emotions that tell me/remind me that I am reasoning myself out of my Self. I have to mute my emotions through what we call addictive behaviors in order to survive when I ignore my Self for too long. Reason then, is a tool of the Me and emotions are tools of the Self.

2nd RP: There are a few phrases in the above reflection that indicate I am in a monologic stance. The first is, "Is that true?" That question implies that there is a right answer and a wrong answer in a universal way. I should have written, "Is that true for me?"

Another phrase is: "I can reason myself out of anything, including heeding my Self's guidance." This sentence assumes that my Self's guidance is always the best guidance and should always be heeded. The implication is that the Self is better than the Me; they are not operating on equal ground. I should have written, "I can reason myself out of anything, especially that which is best for me." 'That which is best for me' can come from a multitude of sources rather than just one predetermined source.

Imagined Reader's Reflections While Reflecting Upon St. Augustine

The wolf in sheep's clothing.

1st RP: The aforementioned philosopher Charles Taylor positions Augustine and Wittgenstein as polar opposites in his book *Sources of the Self*:

> Someone today…might argue for the existence of binding inter-subjective standards on the grounds of what we actually accept in argument. The proof would point to our habits of discourse and the standards we appealed to and accepted there. This kind of argument is common among the followers of Wittgenstein. Augustine, however…starts by showing his interlocutor that he does know something, that he does grasp some truth. Augustine feels he must answer the sceptic [sic], because the pivotal argument that our judgements [sic] of truth repose on standards binding on all

reasoners [sic] would be unhinged if the sceptic [sic] could

prove that we really know nothing. (Taylor, 1989, p. 132)

You might suggest I am formulating my ideas through Wittgensteinian means: I have entered into a discourse with the Western traditions and postmodern ideas through academic means, and my ideas produced in this dissertation are the results of such discourse and are thus socially constructed. All I can ask is that the reader take me for my word: the above position is not exactly accurate. I had read all this philosophy for my dissertation *after* I experienced and become aware of the worlds of the Self and the Me. I entered into a dialogue after 38 years of experience in order to find a way to articulate that which is beyond words. In fact, I became interested in the study of postmodern philosophy and social construction theory because I could not find an accurate explanation for why I am the way I am.

2nd RP: A sentence in the above reflection indicates that this reflection is written from a modernist position: '…I could not find an accurate explanation for why I am the way that I am'. This sentence suggests a rigid structure that never changes from birth to death. If I am definitive, immutable, and explicable then it would make sense to search for a definition that accurately explains me to me. My frustration lies in the perspective I place on my search. Since I am not immutable and definite I will not be able to find an adequate definition of me anywhere. This realization led me toward social construction theory. At first I thought it

was another avenue to find a suitable explanation for me. I did not find a perfect fit because I had not shifted my inquiry.

What social construction theory did for me was shift my inquiry from 'explain me' to 'help me find ways of understanding myself through interaction with others'. For me the significant part of social construction theory is perspective. We need to understand perspective in order to comprehend how we create our own reality. A conversation between two people will produce results based on the stance or perspective each person brings to it. Rather than *knowing* who I am through searching for a definitive, immutable explanation, I am *creating* who I am through perspective while in dialogue with another. Change the perspective and I alter who I am *being* at that moment, which will in turn affect the other with whom I am in conversation, and thus affect our shared reality.

~   ~   ~

The last chapter is devoted to Rene Descartes, who seems to be the quintessential modernist philosopher. Descartes suggests that the self is universal, fixed and separate from one's body. It is this concept that the first of our philosophers in this section—Charles Horton Cooley—questions when he coins 'the looking-glass self'.

Chapter Eight
Rene Descartes: The Separate Self

Historical Context

Rene Descartes publishes *Meditations on First Philosophy* in 1641 while living in The Netherlands. During this time period Europe experiences massive change through the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. Both intellectual movements cause wars, witch-hunts, unimaginable torture, vast migrations and political and religious reform. These paradigm shifts seem to have influenced Descartes. Even though he is known as 'The Father of Modern Philosophy' his interests include mathematics, physics, and theology as well. (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2009)

The new modern form of gaining knowledge through reason, logic and evidence inspires Descartes and is apparent in his philosophy. Descartes' famous dictum, 'I think therefore I am' essentially is the result of a mathematical-like proof applied to philosophy. Mathematical theory builds upon itself; once a solid foundation is proven other theories may be created from the original. Descartes systematically doubts all that he has ever known in order to establish the most basic of foundations upon which to build knowledge that is scientifically validated. He establishes that reason is more reliable than sensation, and that the mind utilizes reason while the body employs the senses. Therefore, the mind is more trustworthy than the body.

Descartes also uses the scientific method to logically map out the existence of God. His logic becomes circular in that he uses reason to prove the existence of God, yet without God reason would not be available to him. He

establishes that God is perfect and humans are imperfect. And due to Descartes'

imperfection, he acknowledges that his musings could be wrong. This confession

demonstrates the integrity of his methods since he, to the end, doubts the

existence of God and the validity of his philosophy.

Meditations on First Philosophy, With Selections from the Objections and

Replies

Descartes proves that he is first and foremost a thinking thing, and

therefore exists—cogito ergo sum (I think therefore I am):

> …if I convinced myself of something then I certainly exist. But there
>
> is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately
>
> and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if
>
> he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he
>
> will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am
>
> something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must
>
> finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily
>
> true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. (§
>
> 25, emphasis in original)

He proves his case by doubting all he knows to be true: "Once the foundations of

a building are undermined, anything built on them collapses of its own accord; so

I will go straight for the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested" (p.

18). He uses doubt to destroy all previous beliefs that may or may not be true,

and then builds his foundation from scratch using his mind.

Descartes suggests that his body and his senses deceive him, and that any information coming from his senses could be deceptive and he should not take that information as truth. For example, when observing the sky he notices that the sun might not be as it appears at first glance:

> …and reason persuades me that the idea which seems to have emanated most directly from the sun itself has in fact no resemblance to it at all…For example, there are two different ideas of the sun which I find within me. One of them, which is acquired as it were from the senses and which is a prime example of an idea which I reckon to come from an external source, makes the sun appear very small. The other idea is based on astronomical reasoning, that is, it is derived from certain notions which are innate in me…and this idea shows the sun to be several times larger than the earth. (§ 39)

His eyes tell him that the sun is small. If he accepts that information coming from his body as the truth he would be deceived, and any information built upon that tainted foundation would be false. He knows, through scientific study using his mind, that the sun is much larger than it appears to be in the sky. He knows that information to be true because it comes from the mind. His mind is himself whereas the body is separate. He is establishing that he would exist even if he did not have a body. In fact, he might be better off without his body since a vehicle of deception would be removed. Thus, in the opening quote that establishes that he exists, the important part is the last—"put forward by me or

conceived in my mind." Anything coming from outside himself may be false; yet anything established within himself (his mind) is true. There is an objective, external reality but it is established through understanding that external reality using the mind within.

Here, the importance of God comes into play, according to Descartes. Without God, his whole philosophy would crumble; therefore, he must prove the existence of God:

Altogether then, it must be concluded that the mere fact that I exist and have within me an idea of a most perfect being, that is God, provides a very clear proof that God indeed exists. It only remains for me to examine how I received this idea from God. For I did not acquire it from the senses; it has never come to me unexpectedly, as usually happens with the ideas of things that are perceivable by the senses…And it was not invented by me either; for I am plainly unable either to take away anything from it or to add anything to it. The only remaining alternative is that it is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me. (§ 51)

Descartes has an idea of a perfect being and this idea could not have originated from the senses or from logical reasoning from his mind because he himself is not perfect. If he were a perfect being then he would not be deceived and would not lack anything:

Yet if I derived my existence from myself, then I should neither doubt nor want, nor lack anything at all; for I should have given

myself all the perfections of which I have any idea, and thus I

should myself be God. (§ 48)

Said another way; "…when I turn my mind's eye upon myself, I understand that I am a thing which is incomplete and dependent on another and which aspires without limit to ever greater and better things…" (§ 51). An understanding coming from his mind makes him realize that he is not perfect, that he strives for more understanding; therefore, he is not a perfect being. But, he has an understanding that there is perfection, so this idea of perfection must have originated from a perfect being outside of himself—God. This information could not come from anything that is not perfect; it must be an innate idea placed within him by God.

This proof of the existence of God is pivotal to the rest of his philosophy because of the original concept of doubt. Descartes is approaching his philosophy from a scientific perspective. He must break down all falsity to its lowest point and then build from a foundation of truth. If he cannot find the foundation of truth the rest would be moot. He is using doubt to get to the truth. Once he reaches a foundation of truth he cannot use doubt any longer because that would negate the veracity of the foundation. Thus, the lowest point must be a perfect being incapable of deceiving:

To begin with, I recognize that it is impossible that God should ever

deceive me. For in every case of trickery or deception some

imperfection is to be found; and although the ability to deceive

appears to be an indication of cleverness or power, the will to

deceive I undoubtedly evidence of malice or weakness, and so

cannot apply to God. (§ 53)

God can never deceive Descartes, but Descartes, in his imperfection, is able to

be deceived. So, how can Descartes ever trust that he has received information

that supposedly comes from God (is innate)? He suggests that information

coming from the body can never originate from God because the senses deceive

(the sun is small). According to Descartes, the mind (where thinking occurs) has

the ability to achieve perfect understanding (the sun is actually enormous). Thus,

God is connected to Descartes via the mind, and Descartes ultimately

establishes himself as a thinking thing that can exist without an imperfect body.

Reflections While Reading Descartes

As before, the reflections come in two parts for the rest of this chapter.

>**"I am my Self, therefore I am".**

1st Reflective Process: Of all the philosophers I have read for this project, I

>feel the most kinship with Descartes. I finally feel like someone

>understands me, that I am not alone. I did not read the philosophers'

>works in chronological order; instead I allowed conversations to direct me.

>Descartes was last. Descartes seems to be labeled the quintessential

>spokesperson for modernism in that many postmodernists juxtapose their

>thoughts with Descartes. Ironically, my process throughout my project has

>been postmodern and I seem to feel most at home with supposedly the

>most modern of philosophers. (See the Theoretical Foundations section

>for a discussion of postmodern versus modern methodologies.)

When pondering and writing about Descartes' philosophy I answered the question: who am I? The answer to that query is: I am my Self. The most important word in the statement "I am my Self" is the verb to be—'am.' Who is 'being'? The Self is 'being'. Kara, the human being, *creates* in a world (the Me) that is mutable and constantly reconstructing itself. The human being that is Kara *plays* around with the myriad of social constructions, wading through those that feel comfortable and those that do not. But that is not who I *am*. I *am* a constant; I have a Self that is not participating in the games. You could say, I am my Self, therefore I am.

2nd Reflective Process: I feel a kinship with Descartes because his explanation of the self fit closely (yet not perfectly) with my explanation of me from a modernist perspective. That is/was comforting. However, I have experienced the harm, frustration and loneliness that often result from taking that perspective out of the intellectual realm and putting it into practice. As I have mentioned before, I have not abandoned the concept of the Self as I experience it. It feels outside of this world, it guides me at the crossroad, and it feels constant because it is always there for me to consult. What I have abandoned is the stance that I must defend it or lose it, and that my Self is always right and others are always wrong.

Doubt.

1st RP: Descartes suggests that we must reconsider all of our beliefs we hold through the use of doubt in order to get to the lowest foundation of truth. I have been doing just that throughout my life. There are competing

notions of the source of truth; there are multiple constructions that are fighting with or collaborating with each other for their claim to the truth. For example, theology and science are two constructions that often do not see eye to eye and have a difficult time finding common ground. Whenever I encounter a claim to truth I have systematically doubted it in the way Descartes has suggested. So far, I continually return to the one true thing for me which is outside of any construction this world creates and that is my Self.

2nd RP: In the above reflection I situate my Self as another claim to ultimate truth. If I do that then I must follow Descartes' advice and doubt it as well. Doubting the existence of my Self was the one thing I adamantly refused to do; what if I lost it? Once I shifted my perspective I realized that I did not doubt the existence of my Self, I just doubted the claim to truth I placed upon it. The Self as I experience it is still there with me, but I am willing to doubt its proprietary hold on any claims to truth. When I do that I invite others to the crossroad and open myself up to all kinds of possibilities.

Body.

1st RP: Descartes and I are of like minds, but that does not mean I agree with him on everything. The body and the senses is a subject where we somewhat part ways. For Descartes, the body is a deceiver and the information coming from the body through the senses has the possibility of being false. Through his experience, he realizes that when he ponders

information through his mind he is less apt to be deceived because the mind is connected to the ultimate perfect being, God.

Unlike Descartes, my mind has the capability of deceiving me because I associate the mind with the world of the Me. My thoughts produced by my mind are a product of the world of the Me. I can deceive myself very easily through thinking gymnastics. I will be at a crossroad, my Self guides me one way and a Me construction guides me another way. In my mind, I perceive that the Me choice will be better or easier than the Self choice. I know that the Self choice, in the long run, will be best, but in the short run it might feel like I am going through the depths of hell. My mind has become very adept at deceiving me; my thoughts become very loud and persistent and they muffle any other information that may be there. When this occurs, it is my body that ultimately gets my attention. My body becomes agitated, uncomfortable, and at times in pain. Once I am unable to stand my discomfort any longer I am able to 'hear' my Self again. In this way, my body and emotions do not deceive me; however, my thoughts do.

2nd RP: The above is an explanation using my framework of the Self and the Me to explain to you the reader how I understand depression and anxiety. I would alter the above description so that I do not position the Me as less than the Self. I should have written that when I decide to shun the decision that is best for me because I think it will be too hard, my body produces pain in order to signal to my mind that I should rethink my

choice. The important point is not whether the decision that is best for me comes from the Me or the Self, the significance is that I shunned that decision based on faulty reasoning.

God.

1st RP: It occurred to me while reading Descartes' book that the philosophers I have engaged discuss the existence or non-existence of God (or the equivalent) in their ideas about the self. What makes us think about God when reflecting on the self? For me, God is a product of the world of the Me.

My Self is like Descartes' God; both are constant, immutable and external yet connected at the same time. I am perfect when I listen to my Self. I am imperfect when I listen to the Me. I cannot listen to 'God's' will or word or rules/laws because they come from the world of the Me. They do not come from God; instead humans are the ones who created God and his subsequent will. Since God is a product of the world of the Me, to listen to him is to follow a human-constructed entity. Since he is constructed, he is not outside of us, not immutable, not perfect, not universal. The Self, however, is not constructed; it is not in flux. It does not participate in co-creation with others. For me to listen to anything outside my Self is therefore potentially destructive to me.

2nd RP: When re-reflecting upon this section, the word 'trust' entered my mind. Like Descartes, I feel that I can be deceived at any time by anyone. Even those closest to me have the ability to deceive me

since I am unable to know their thoughts, feelings, motivations and

the like. This fear of deception is probably why I experience the Self

as not of this world and always there. If I have something to always

and absolutely count on I can feel more comfortable opening up

and being vulnerable with another. I can become more relational

rather than defensive. I can relax and trust rather than question and

be on guard.

Imagined Reader's Reflections While Reflecting Upon Descartes

Where is your evidence?

1<u>st</u> <u>RP</u>:   While involved with my project, I have been extremely interested in

reading books from various scholars who call into question religion and

the belief in God (Dawkins, 2008; Dennett, 2006; Harris, 2004; Harris,

2008; and Hitchens, 2007). They are all atheists and present sound

evidence for humans to end their belief and dependence upon an elusive

omnipotent, omniscient being called God.

In Sam Harris' *A Letter to a Christian Nation*, he suggests that in

the end there will be a winner and a loser—either devout Christians are

correct and there is a God, or Harris is correct and there is no such thing.

Yet, Harris notes that even though there is overwhelming evidence to

suggest that he is correct, he has no tangible proof that no God exists.

Descartes suggests the same possibility:

…it certainly does not follow from the fact that I think of a

mountain with a valley that there is any mountain in the

world; and similarly, it does not seem to follow from the fact

that I think of God as existing that he does exist. For my

thought does not impose any necessity on things; and just

as I may imagine a winged horse even though no horse has

wings, so I may be able to attach existence to God even

though no God exists. (Descartes, 1996/1641, § 66)

This vulnerable, open-minded confession is the epitome of integrity, in my

opinion. I, too, must have the courage, intellectual honesty, and integrity to

say that I may be incorrect. I cannot take a picture of my Self; I cannot

interview my Self on video; I cannot mathematically prove or tangibly

present my Self.

Let us say I have completely constructed my reality and that my

Self does not exist in a modernist way, and there is no such thing as the

world of the Self and the world of the Me. Within my construction I have

created an essential immutable thing called the Self, which guides me

because I cannot abide by most other authoritarian structures created in

our society thus far. In order for my Self to exist, there must be a

constructed 'other' juxtaposed to it. This other is the world of the Me. It is

mutable, unstable and dependent upon others.

This world usually presents options that are not in my best interest.

I have constructed a place that I go called a crossroad whenever I feel

anxious or have a decision to make, or need to understand why I feel a

certain way. At the crossroad, the two worlds converse with me, and it is

my decision to go with one or the other. The human being making the decision is composed of this essential, eternal thing and this mutable, unstable thing.

What is the difference between the above scenario actually existing versus it being a construct? The answer lies within me. Whenever anyone speaks or writes about social constructionism I feel uneasy. It feels unreal. It feels as if there is no such thing as the thing that makes Kara uniquely Kara. I get anxious and my body starts to become uncomfortable. My thoughts, however, grow louder and louder saying to me that what I think exists really does not. I find myself at the crossroad trying to make sense of it all.

I clearly remember a conversation with psychologists and students of psychology while completing an internship for my master's degree in counseling. We were debating the issue of the self. The main question was: do we have a core self or not? I was the only person who argued that I absolutely have a Self and it is constant. Everyone nicely tried to show me that my Self did not exist; instead we co-create and co-construct our selves in relationship with others. I did not have the words to adequately express myself at that meeting, which frustrated me so I eventually stopped talking. Now I have the words. If I were to go back to that evening I would say that you are correct. However, you are describing the world of the Me, not the world of the Self. I am confident in my reality even though I

cannot prove it to you. The important point here is that it is my reality; it may not be yours.

2nd RP: The above reflection is the epitome of the modernist stance of either/or. It is also a quintessential example of my explaining my understanding of my reality through a modernist lens. I argue very clearly in the above that my Self is real in the objective sense even though I cannot prove it to you by taking its picture. I also show you clearly what had been until recently my ultimate fear: that my framework is *just* a construction. The fear assumes that if my framework is just a construction then it would cease to exist because it would not be objectively real.

I understand now that my entire framework is a construction; however, that does not make it any less real. The perspective has shifted, not my framework. My framework of the Self and the Me has been extremely helpful to me in the last 39 years, in fact it has been quite literally a lifesaver. Throughout my life I have constructed a framework that helps me understand me and the world around me, and it helps me do something that is often difficult for me to do—make decisions. I have constructed my inner world and it is real for me. If other people have frameworks that help them navigate life that are different from mine, then that does not mean my framework is threatened in any way. In fact, since my framework is only one of infinite amounts of constructions that could be created to understand me and my life, I should feel more secure. If there was only one, real, objective Truth out there and I did not fit into it,

then I really would lose something that is precious to me. Since there are

infinite possibilities, mine is equally valid and real as any other.

~   ~   ~

The last section of this dissertation contains one chapter that discusses

the significance of perspective in relationship. The philosophical stance one

chooses to wear will influence the reality constructed within oneself and between

relationship partners.

Section Three

Chapter Nine: Discussion

I have been a professor since 2002 and I have learned that to fully grasp something I must apply it in real life. I may think I know the history for which I have written lectures, but until I stand up there in the classroom and teach it, I realize that I only have a tenuous hold on that knowledge as it transforms as I teach it. Transforming knowledge is a shift in perspective.

This dissertation is a transformation of knowledge: I put abstract theory into practice through shifting my philosophical stances while in conversation with my Self at the crossroad. And as the philosophical stance transformed so did my perspective of myself and my relationship/conversational partner. I have learned what it feels like to approach a problem from a modernist stance and what it feels like to approach a problem from a postmodernist stance through applying theory to everyday life. In this sense, I lived my dissertation in a way I did not expect to at the start; I thought this project would be an intellectual exercise and I was pleasantly surprised that it was so much more.

This chapter has four subsections: a) the first will discuss perspective in the realm of the intellectual; b) the second will discuss its application; c) in the third section I will offer an alternative meaning to the word 'individual; and d) in the last, I will discuss a question that this project has led me to ask: how does the knowledge I gained from my dissertation process apply to the study and teaching of history?

Perspective in Scholarship

The notion of the self has been a constant subject of inquiry for philosophers in western culture for hundreds of years. The perspective with which you approach this subject will underlie your scholarship. One perspective (or in Wittgensteinian terms one 'language-game') through which to view it would be a modernist or traditional point of view. Prior to this project, my scholarship was influenced through the traditional culture and discourse of the Academy with a certain set of values and ways of being. For example, I was taught that there is a right way and a wrong way to approach scholarship. Had I stayed in that either/or perspective, I would have seen the inquiry into the notion of the self as a search for *the* correct definition of the self. I would have placed some philosophers in a category labeled 'right' and others in a category labeled 'wrong'. From this point of view, the philosophers would not have been conversing with each other, building upon prior perspectives, respectfully engaging each other in search for common ground. In my research I would have taken a firm position through making an argument, and defended my position with supporting evidence. I also would have reviewed my contemporary colleagues who have already written on this subject and demonstrated my unique interpretation of the material through criticism of theirs.

Not only would I have structured my dissertation in this either/or perspective, I also would have brought the traditional Academic voice into practice. I would have presented chapters to my colleagues at academic conferences, and defended my position from their criticisms. My colleagues and I

would not have engaged each other in conversation; we would have created (what felt like to me) intellectual war. Isolation, loneliness, defensiveness, and fear would be my companions throughout the production of the dissertation.

The voice of the traditional Academy was strong and loud at times, telling me I should produce this project in the typical fashion. For example, the voice practically screamed at me to complete a comprehensive literature review in order to tease out the debates within social construction theory, and then place myself in the debate through creating a thesis to argue and defend. Even though that voice was present I felt I had to listen to another voice. This voice suggested taking a new approach to research since I was unable to figure out where I stood in the debates within social construction theory prior to writing my dissertation. I could not make a coherent argument and then defend my position because I could not know where I fit until I determined what I a) thought of social construction theory and b) how I understood the self through the most fundamental questions like agency, ontology, will, choice, truth, perspective etc. Had I chosen to listen to the traditional Academic voice, my understanding of the subjects I engaged would have felt shallow and tenuous. Listening to the traditional voice would have been like asking someone to understand the question: what is 2 plus 2? and be able to answer that question correctly/accurately when that person does not comprehend the fundamentals of the actual question--numbers, mathematics, addition, values assigned to symbols etc. This dissertation is not about where I stand within a debate and then posing my own thesis supported with evidence. Rather it is a dissertation of

comprehending the foundations of the philosophy of the self, social construction theory, and the interplay between modernism and postmodernism using my own experience in my life thus far. Thus it is an ongoing project that has an artificial end.

After producing the majority of this dissertation I have engaged the traditional Academic voice and jumped into the debates. I am reading with an understanding I did not and could not have had before. I am now able to respond to authors while reading--literally have conversations with them out loud--and know where others might agree or disagree and, more important, where I fit as well. Had I listened to the traditional voice of the Academy and stopped my progress to complete a typical literature review and create an argument to defend I would have produced a very different project and I would have been in a very different (and not necessarily better) place personally and professionally than I am now. It was difficult to follow a voice that opposed the Academy's voice, but I feel more legitimate for having done so.

Having decided to listen to an alternative Academic voice, I had to learn a whole new language-game. The culture of the traditional Academy left me unfulfilled, exhausted and feeling less-than; this alternative language-game energized me and filled me with a feeling of confidence and endless curiosity. It allowed me to try new ways of producing scholarship and being in relationship with my colleagues and others. Through this alternative I could choose to view the question of the notion of the self through a postmodernist perspective. From this new point of view, I engaged in a multi-faceted, on-going dialogue around a

common line of inquiry with scholars from various disciplines. My change in perspective helped me see the scholars as dialogic partners rather than opponents. They conversed with one another, dialogued with themselves, and allowed me, the reader, access to their inner conversations. For example, each philosopher with whom I engaged in Section Two grappled with the idea of 'truth'. They asked: what is truth; where does it reside; who produces truth; is it stable; is it external; is it in flux; should the world 'truth' be pluralized? Each philosopher also questioned the utility of emotions, feelings and the body: does the body deceive the mind; can the body be a vehicle to truth(s); does the body have knowledge that the mind does not; is the body even separate from the mind; are the senses inferior to reason? And they also dealt with agency. What is agency, is it an ontological given or is it produced in social interaction or both, does it exist at all? Choosing to see the philosophers as dialoguing about common inquiries, I approached their works through a social constructionist lens. I took a philosophical stance that allowed me to insert myself into their conversations and to engage with them in their on-going dialogue and play with them rather than taking a defensive, oppositional or critical position.

It took three years for me to begin shedding the traditional stance in which I approached scholarship and embrace the relational (social constructionist) stance. The process still continues. I remember having conversations with my advisor that reflected my desire to embrace the relational, yet the fear of doing so came through. I would call her in a state of panic because I wanted to wear a postmodernist stance and put social construction theory into practice, but the

traditional stance I held onto through fear caused me to imagine awful professional and personal repercussions to that decision. The fear haunted me through whispered questions into my ear: would my peers judge me as academically less-than; would I be allowed to continue to teach; would my degree be recognized? She would assure me that one academic stance is no more valid than another. Each is a different way of approaching scholarship because it produces different perspectives. Many choices allow the scholar to replace a monologic position with a dialogic one, and may lead to the development of new and exciting ideas.

The modernist or traditional stance is neither better nor less than the postmodernist stance due to some essential quality it holds. Rather, the scholar chooses to wear one stance over another, and that choice emphasizes one perspective or the other. Think of clothing. Clothing on a hanger or in a drawer has no life to it. It does not move, it does not keep warm, brighten a complexion or provide cover. When a person places the clothing on herself the clothing's purpose comes to life. The person is the key in this equation. The modernist and the postmodernist stance are like clothing. Unless someone chooses to utilize one or the other they are static and just hang there like unworn clothing, waiting. Seeing this process from this metaphor takes a lot of the fear away. The realization that I have a choice and that my choice of the postmodern is just as valid as the modern fortifies me in my position against attacks that might say things like, 'you are not good enough', 'your dissertation lacks academic legitimacy, 'this is not scholarly enough' and the like.

The phrase 'fortifies me in my position' can look very different depending upon the metaphorical clothing I prefer to wear. I can wear the modernist clothing and fortify myself in a way that says 'do it my way' if the person I am addressing says, 'no, do it *my* way'. Or, I can wear my relational clothing and fortify myself in a way that says, 'our approaches are different, but our common ground is similar; let us work together because our disparate methods round out the whole very nicely.' In other words, we can maintain our individual positions on an issue, and at the same time be open to the other person's perspective. I do not have to abandon my position on an issue because someone disagrees with me. And, the person who disagrees with me does not have to abandon his/her perspective either nor agree with me.

Perspective Comes to Life

My view and approach to scholarship is only one of other things that this dissertation has influenced; this approach has also influenced the relationships I have with myself and others in that I am transforming from a modernist or traditional way of being to a postmodernist (relational) way of being. This transformation is the most valuable to me because it affects my relationships with people rather than just influencing the scholarship I produce.

The transformation began when I read about a particular social construction assertion that the individual was dead (Burr, 2003 p. 23). This suggestion made a great impact on me because I felt as if it were false; my experience told me that there was an essential part of me that was alive, unchanging and unique. I felt very distant from the social construction community

even though I liked both the theory and practice. Would I have to abandon this philosophy as well because I could not adopt the ideas? Would I again find myself outside of a group, not fitting in, alone and wandering the wilderness searching for a group that was like me? Would I essentially 'other' myself so that one of us was right and the other was wrong? The answer is no, I would not have to do that. However I did not come to that understanding until the end of this project while reflecting on the process of my project and writing this section.

I spent almost three years trying to bridge the gap between social constructionism and my supposed modern experience of a real Self. I did not think it was possible until I returned to and reread the literature on social constructionism after writing the chapters on the separate philosophers' ideas of the self. When I reviewed the literature again I saw it with new eyes. Most of the social construction scholars I have read, worked with, and learned from thus far—Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, Mary Gergen, Dian Marie Hosking and Sheila McNamee—focus on the relational aspect of social constructionism. They inquire: how do we together create community and common ground, develop relationships that work together with respect for each other, and go forward even when we completely disagree with one another? I very much like that question, but again I could not agree on what I *thought* was one of the main foundations: that the individual self was dead.

A key component to social construction theory and practice is community. The individuals that make up a group create and maintain shared understandings, values and knowledge through dialogue: "Central to the

community is obviously a shared language and that language serves to 'make real' the objects or events within that community" (Gergen, K.J and Gergen, M., 2007, p. 4). "…*Nothing* is real unless people agree that it is" (Gergen, K.J and Gergen, M., 2007, p. 10, emphasis in original). This central notion to social constructionism created anxiety for me because it led to the following questions and reflections: can my philosophy of the self be real if a community does not share the language I use? If the community rejects the language I use, (and it is not just the words, it is the whole constructed 'reality' behind the words that is important—the 'language-games' in Wittgensteinian terms)--then is my experience not real? Does it take more than one person to make something real? If something is real to only one person and no one agrees then we as a society traditionally ostracize that person as insane, delusional, weird, abnormal etc. If I cannot find another person to agree with my language-game then I feel ostracized and weird and alone. I have been struggling with this conundrum all my life: my experiences are genuine and true and valid for me, but my searching never led to a compatible fit in the form of person, a philosophy, a religion that would validate my experiences for me.

Through reading and reflecting with the various philosophers for this project, I have learned that my reality is real for me and does not have to be confirmed, affirmed or understood by others. I do not need validation to make it real or useful. However, if people in my community do not agree with me I also do not have to leave that community to search for one that does agree with me.

Our language-games, our realities, can exist side-by-side, one not privileged over another, each respecting the other.

I was ostracizing myself; no one else was doing it. I was the one who wanted them to see it my way. I agreed with social construction theory, but I was not practicing it. I was so concerned that if I accepted and practiced social constructionism I would have to let my individual Self fade away into nothing. I would lose the most important thing in my life—my Self. That was my greatest fear, to lose something that is precious to me. My ultimate fear has just been revealed: I was most afraid of losing my Self. I now understand that *my* choice has nothing to do with following or abandoning the Self. Rather it has to do with choice of philosophy: which philosophical stance do I want to bring to the crossroad?

How would I like to approach and respond to my conversational partner at the crossroad—whether the partner is my husband, my advisor, a theory, my student or my Self? Shall I wear a modernist stance that might invite a defensive, either/or posture, or shall I wear a postmodernist stance that will create an open, dialogic posture? The responsibility is mine. I used to think that the crossroad had two paths to choose from—the Self or the Me. That perspective is either/or and results from my interpretation and performance of a modernist philosophy. Now I realize that there are infinite possibilities before me if I choose to wear a postmodern philosophy. I still experience my construction of the world of the Me and the world of the Self at the crossroad, but they can work together. I do not have to abandon or privilege one over the other.

Through my fear of losing my Self, I used to choose to walk away because the other person/thing did not wholeheartedly agree with me. I did not allow for openness to the other through respect, humility and a search for common ground. I was so concerned with losing my Self in a relational dialogue that I was unwilling to even have the dialogue. I caused my own loneliness. With my shift to a relational perspective , I no longer have to fear the loss of precious people/things, and I especially no longer have to fear the loss of my Self. My defensiveness has faded away.

If I no longer have to leave when others disagree with me, then I have stepped into a key component of applied relational theory: *create* community. I do not have to look for a community that agrees with me completely, or one that I agree with totally. Community implies unity and the communal; standing next to each other for a common purpose. Total agreement on the methods or language-games on how to get to a common purpose or achieve that purpose is not absolutely necessary. Look at political discourse on torture as a hypothetical example. Countries participating in the Geneva Conventions agree on the shared value that torture is immoral and should be stopped. The United States (U.S.) as a political entity is one of those countries. Since the U.S. participates in the Conventions, in theory no matter which American political party you belong to, the agreed-upon value that states 'torture is wrong' should be shared. If the political parties shift their stance from being relational to pouring their energies into an 'I'm right and you're wrong' language-game that politicians create called 'Democrat versus Republican', then the common denominator affirmed in the

Geneva Conventions—torture is immoral—falls into the shadows. A sense of community then breaks down into defensive individuals closed to others' ideas and torture has an opportunity to continue.

In contrast, current U.S. President Barack Obama is constantly seeking differing opinions; he privileges multiplicity over dogma. If we continue to play the language-game that states we need only seek out people who agree with us and make those who do not the demonized 'other', then our common purpose will be delayed, diluted or forgotten because our focus will be on the 'other' and why that 'other' is not like us.

Some argue that the relational, inviting perspective can actually lead to dogmatism: "If there is not truth, then no one can be wrong—we can all be smugly confident in our own belief…" (Burr, 2003, p. 97). This criticism is only one point of view. We would be smug to believe that our individual beliefs are the only and true beliefs to have. This mindset would lead to individuality in the traditional sense, which brings me to my next section.

Individual: An Alternative Meaning

In the spirit of being relational through dialogue, I would like to offer my understanding of the word 'individual' that I have gleaned through my journey without expecting that my view should be or will be your view. Rather than getting stuck in the language-game that says we need to universally accept a definition of individual, I would like to respectfully point out that to suggest that 'the individual is dead' is playing within the confines of modernism. The individual does not have to be used in the traditional sense of the word. I see us as

individuals, unique and contained, but at the same time not so. Through my experience of my Self I cannot authentically say that I agree that the traditional individual is dead. However, even though the traditional notion of the individual for me is very much alive, that does not mean that I cannot be relational and/or dialogic.

Awareness of the world of the Self and the world of the Me is the key that allows me to open up dialogue. I am constantly aware that there are two worlds in which I exist and that exist within me simultaneously. I can talk with my Self and then apply that conversation to the Me. I can talk with others in the Me and turn to have a conversation with my Self. My awareness of the two worlds leads me to inquire: how do I position myself in conversation with someone else? Do I place myself in the position that I am right and the other is wrong and the two shall never meet nor collaborate? If I choose that position the result will most likely be a monologue—I will most likely become defensive, only see through an either/or lens, and be closed to the other. Or do I take a postmodern position that suggests that the two different worlds of the Me and the Self offer guidance, not right or wrong dogma. If I choose that position then the result will be a dialogue in which I allow the other into the conversation and I become open rather than defensive.

Whenever I am at a crossroad having a conversation with my Self, the guidance I receive from that part of me—the Self—that is contained and constant and mine alone is for me alone, not any other person. To apply my Self's guidance to another (especially without discussing it with the other person),

would not only be arrogant and dogmatic, it would take me out of the position of being a relational individual and place me back into the position of the traditional notion of the individual.

I recognize that the other person may have a Self that guides him/her and that person's Self is not mine. The collaboration between these two people with contained Selfs comes into play when we meet at the crossroad *as Selfs*. We bring our Self-positioning to the conversation—unique individuals with unique ideas and guidance who are able to co-create or co-construct based on common ground. We may be completely different, but our different guidance might lead to great collaboration. I also recognize that the above description comes from my own experience, and that it may not fit with another's understanding of her/himself or of what happens when in conversation.

I am putting into practice the social constructionist theory of relational [S]elves. The individual, when listening to her Self, is authentic to her being and thus can be humble and respectful with others, especially if she allows others to be authentic to their Selfs. In this way trust is built and sustained because each person would not have the need to influence or manipulate others into being or doing what the other wants. She also would be able to search for common ground with others that they both individually and authentically agree upon and work together towards that goal while respecting each individual's unique Self. The relationship is a key element to this picture, but it is created from each person's Self first. Only then can relationships be built on trust and common

ground and respect and humility. Only then can harmonious communities be built and sustained.

Application to the Field of History

This dissertation is relevant to a community to which I have belonged for almost a decade—my professional field of history. This discussion is important to me because I made a difficult, life-altering decision to leave a doctorate program in American history to pursue an interdisciplinary doctorate in the social sciences; yet, I am a professor in a traditional history department. At times I feel like I am an outsider and not accepted into the community because I do not fit the mold of the traditional academic. In other words, I often choose alternative ways of producing scholarship (like this dissertation) and relating with my colleagues that is outside the confines of what it has historically meant to be an academic. What do I do? How do I situate myself within my department going forward? Using the knowledge and experience gained from my dissertation process, I am at a crossroad in conversation with the historians of my department, the field of history as a whole, and most important, the culture of the Academy. I have a choice to make: which philosophical stance shall I wear as I approach the conversation at the crossroad? I could choose to approach the crossroad from the language-game that might say a PhD in ('pure') History is required to teach history at the college level; you are not qualified. This perspective might cause me to assume (incorrectly) all of my colleagues take this position. This assumption results in two options: take on a defensive attitude when interacting with my colleagues and defend my relevance, or leave the department to find

historians that agree with my decision to teach history with a PhD in Social Science. An alternative language-game might create the perspective that a person with a PhD in Social Science teaching history might introduce new and useful ways of approaching the craft of history. This perspective might cause me to visit with my colleagues and talk about ways of approaching our common craft. I have chosen in the last few months the latter approach, which led me into many conversations with the Chair of my department about the value interdisciplinarity might bring to our field.

Throughout our conversations, the Chair and I found common ground: an historian should be trained in the traditional methodology of the field, *and* the introduction of interdisciplinary studies might make the field and teaching of history even better. The key to the above is the *'and'*. I understand (and agree) that my colleagues want to make sure I am trained thoroughly in the traditional methodology and the craft of history. They want to make sure I am doing 'good' history and that I will train the students to be 'good' historians. Of course, I agree. However, why would knowledge of other academic fields be a hindrance to the study of history; would not the study of social science theories help the historian wade through the past? As one of my colleagues recently stated, the inability to thoroughly know all of the academic disciplines is "the frustration of the historian". She expressed her desire to have the time, resources and ability to delve into psychology, philosophy, sociology, mathematics, physics and the like because she recognized that her lack of knowledge in those fields translated to the possible misunderstanding of the past. In her potential accidental misreading of

the historical documents she realized that she could possibly produce 'bad' history.

At the end of June 2009, my department hosted the World History Association's annual conference. People from 39 countries attended the conference along with well-known, well-respected historians. I also participated in three different capacities: as a faculty member on two session panels, as a volunteer, and as a graduate student studying something other than the discipline of history. Many people asked me about my specialty, assuming that I would give them a simple answer like imperial Russian politics, American missionaries in the Ottoman Empire, or gender issues in China. I realized that I could not answer their question easily in part because I could not say something succinct like modern American cultural history (which was, incidentally, my specialty at UC Davis), and I had not yet figured out how my current studies applied to the field of history. I struggled with that question and responded to it in a variety of ways, experimenting with which answer resonated with me the most.

After the conference I was still bothered by the looming question, 'how do I fit into the field of history?' I realized that I had come to another crossroad moment and that I had two choices: I could do what I usually did prior to my dissertation process and leave because I 'othered' myself; or I could try out my new perspective I gained from this process. I decided to go with the latter and see the value I brought to the field of history, my department and my students. Within approximately fifteen minutes after I made my choice of philosophical

stance, my contribution became crystal clear. It has to do with the *historian* rather than the *field* of study.

While in graduate school studying 'pure' history, the concept of perspective was presented as the keystone to the field. Professors discussed perspective quite often, but it seems odd to me now looking back that the professors did not address the *concept* of perspective itself—what does the word mean, how does one develop perspective? In other words, perspective is the foundation of the discipline but they did not cultivate that foundation.

How can an historian adhere to the standards of the discipline if the historian does not grasp the most basic foundation of the field? Yes, the historian can study the trans-Atlantic slave trade from a European merchant's point of view and then study it from an African adolescent boy's point of view; those different accounts demonstrate two different perspectives on the slave trade. Yet, what perspective(s) does the *historian* bring to her sources? How does the *historian make decisions* regarding her craft? The way in which the historian approaches her sources is as important as the points of view presented to her. Is the historian approaching her sources with a modernist hat on or with a postmodernist hat on? An historian reading this might say that she is completely objective and that she prefers not to bring any personal stance to the sources. In saying those words, the imagined historian has created a perspective from a particular philosophical stance. She has chosen the stance of *not* assuming that there is one truth; she has chosen *not* to assume one is better than the other; she has chosen *not* to keep part of her self open and the other parts closed. It is all about the *historian*.

The historian is not a robot; she does not act in a predetermined manner. Rather, the historian is integral to history because she is involved in its story (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Halttunen 2002). The personal choices matter; the philosophies chosen matter; the understanding of the person's self matters. I suggest that understanding your notion of the self, the awareness of your perspective of you, is essential to being a qualified historian. I also suggest that, even though my PhD is not in 'pure' history, my scholarly and experiential comprehension of perspective and what it means to the craft of history contributes to that field, my department and my students.

I am at the end of this project and have come full circle. I decided to leave a traditional American history doctoral program to pursue a doctorate in Social Science in part because I wanted to find alternative approaches to scholarship and relationship. Finding myself in two cultures at once—teaching in a traditional history department while writing a dissertation from a non-traditional approach—led me to have conversations with my colleagues in my department about their experiences in graduate school and as professional historians. Those conversations directed me to a different line of inquiry about the notion of the self. Even though my focus for this dissertation seemed to change, I suggest that the subjects of self and history are interrelated and create a reflexive effect: an historian's perspective of her self will influence the very craft she practices—she will influence her interpretations of the past—as well as the craft influencing the historian's understanding of her self. In other words, an historian who understands her notion of her self will help that historian be aware of the

perspective she brings at any given moment to her field, her research and to her professional community.

Appendix A

The following is a list of sources I have read—after the majority of the

dissertation was produced—as part of a more comprehensive literature review.

The list is ongoing.

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