

CHAPTER SIX

Critical Autoethnography as Intersectional Praxis

*A Performative Pedagogical Interplay on
Bleeding Borders of Identity*

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FOR ME, DOING CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY IS SOMETIMES LIKE capturing a picture of yourself in a glass borderless frame; a picture in which an image of you is represented and there are sightless borders of containment; containments called race, sex, gender, culture, and occasions of human social experience fixed in time and space, floating in a fixed liquidity of memory, giving shape to experience, structuring vision and engagement with the intent for others to see and know you differently as you story the meaningfulness of personal experience in a cultural context. For me this is the engagement of autoethnography. The critical in critical autoethnography captures a moment in that borderless frame and holds it to a particular scrutiny—intersplicing a sociology-of-the-self with a hermeneutics of theorizing the self. Yet in the process of such an engagement, there is always a feeling of risk: a risk of bleeding, in which the presumed categorical containments of your identity threatens to exceed its borders, revealing the ways in which we are always both particular and plural at the same time; never contained and always messy.

I often have used the construct of “bleeding borders” or “bleeding identities” to reference the false boundaries that limit social possibility—whether that be the migration of identities across place and space, or the limitations of what we are supposed to be, based on the materiality of bodies, the presumed fixity of sex and gender, or the historical points of origin that

signal cultural and clan affiliation (see for example Alexander, 2011). I have argued that the notion of “bleeding” is not necessarily a violent metaphor, as much as the travel between permeable membranes of bordered identities within an embodied text—often when inter/intra-cultural-racial encounters force a realization of the predicament of selves. Such a construction in my engagement of a critical autoethnography also reveals the intersectional nature of identity.

In her oft-cited essay, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women,” Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995) offers the construct of *intersectionality*, which examines the intersection of race (particularly African American raced identity) with gender (particularly African American women). In her conclusions, she speaks to “recognizing that identity politics takes place at the site where categories intersect thus seems more fruitful than challenging the possibility of talking about categories at all. Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics” (p. 377).

For me, in doing critical autoethnography you always experience odd moments of catching a glimpse of yourself in a glass borderless frame; images of yourself reflecting back from the gloss and glean of a polished surface layered atop the fixed image of yourself, a potentially reified rendition caught in time; a ghosting, if you will, that when viewed, forces a critical reflexive moment of searching for the missing pieces of yourself that the shutter of the lens did not capture but only critical autoethnography can recover—revealing the dynamic of politics at play in the scene that at once appears fixed but in actuality bleeds the lives narrated in the picture and the very moment of viewing the picture itself. So, it is in this way that I want to begin this exploration of critical autoethnography as intersectional praxis, and as a particular pedagogy of doing.

Trying to Tell the Story of a Borderless Frame

There is a story that I want to tell. No, there is a story that I *need* to tell. A story claimed by others that will be told, whether I like it or not, but it won't include my voice. It won't include my side. It won't include me in the manner that I want to be re/presented. It won't include me trying to make sense of the story in the process of thinking and writing the story. It won't include the story of me stepping back to see the story with perspective; the story of me stepping back from the picture to see me in the picture of the story trying to get perspective; the story of me stepping back to critically see me and others in the story I tell, knowing that it is not exclusively my story (nor theirs). In this moment I am not staging a moment that reifies a given reality, but taking stock of how I am implicated in the scene of a

happening. Maybe I will be “read” in this story. Maybe the story is really in that photo. That photo that sits on the shelf in my living room that everyone makes comment about. That photo of my three brothers and me, the one from the wedding:

His wedding, and
His wedding, and
His wedding, but not my wedding.
That photo.

That *queer* photo of three straight Black men dressed in white tuxedos and one queer Black man dressed in a tan suit. Me, still with long hair that they joke makes me look feminine, in relation to their own performed masculinity in which the length of hair becomes a politic of gender. It’s not a joke, it is a critique and one that in my childhood far preceded the dreadlocks that later grew as an act of resistance from my head.

Brothers.

Brothers?

That photo that I staged and had someone take. That photo that I gave a copy of to each of them, pressed behind a prism of glass with a borderless frame, implicates me. It implicates them. A borderless frame, as if there are no limits to its containment or limits to the interpretations by which every brother tells a story.

It is a wedding photo.

It is a photo taken at a wedding.

It is a photo of my three brothers and me.

It is a photo that weds us to each/other.

It is a wedding photo that I am allowed to be in but I can’t be part of the wedding.

Each of the brothers in white is married. Each of the brothers in white invited the other brothers to be in their wedding. I received no such invitations. This picture is performativity; the iteration of an iteration, of an iteration, maybe of an intention. But that’s my story. The story that I gave them in a borderless frame. In the picture I am the anomaly. I am the irregularity. I am the peculiarity. I am the queer. Invited to attend the wedding, but not to be in the wedding.

Not invited to wed.

That photo of my three brothers and me, the one from the wedding; from the symbolic weddings:

His wedding, and
His wedding, and
His wedding, but not my wedding.
Invited to attend the weddings, but not to be in the weddings.
Not invited to wed.

I staged this photo as I am staging this story to document our brotherhood, not realizing that the abject body in the photo (and maybe in the story)

would be mine. The queer brother in tan also standing in place for the absent queer brother, a fifth brother, who died from AIDS before the weddings; another tan suit? We called him Tanny, which was short for Nathaniel. I am implicated in the staging of this photo. I am implicated in the telling of this story. I am implicated in this story through a complicity of blood, gender, race, and writing. This story is not apolitical.

It is a story about brothers and gender performance.

It is a story about the heterosexual privilege to wed.

It is a story about inclusion, exclusion, and bordered and borderless identities that bleed in the banal moments of weddings, and photos, and the mixed identities of brothers (biological, cultural, racial, or spiritual). It is a story about the intersectionality of identity; a meeting place of race, sexuality, culture, and gender; co-informing, co-narrating and co-performing identities that become something altogether different, more. I don’t know their stories.

It is a picture that I love.

It is a picture that I hate.

It is a picture that I hate to love.

It is a picture that I study with critical intent to find my selves floating in a fixed liquidity of identity politics.

In the presence of my brothers I am the same and not the same. I am a Black man linked with other Black men by biology and heritage. Yet the particularity of sexuality, their heterosexuality and my homosexuality, becomes the perceptual variable that marks our difference—in that way in which our relational dynamic is both intraracial and intercultural at the same time.

In using autoethnography as a critical methodology in performance studies classes and even classes like interpersonal, relational, and intercultural communication, I have often asked students to engage in an explication of lived experience in a cultural context; exploring themselves in relation to and in the context of cultural communities. But in particular, I have asked them to do a performed close analysis of their identity as a critical nexus. Following Crenshaw (1995), I am asking students to not easily settle on the particularity of their race, sex, and gender or even the more amorphous constructions of culture and class in which they glom onto a collective sense of self as practiced in alignment with others. I ask them to address the bleeding borders of their identity that place them betwixt and between; places and times in which the seeming singularity of their identity becomes plural. In an autoethnographic assignment, I ask them to speak to variables of personality, positionality, and the politics of being that dynamize their sense of self in relation to culture and society.

Hence, Crenshaw’s construction of intersectionality is helpful as an analytical tool in teaching this approach to autoethnography without the limitation

of only focusing on race, sex, and gender. In some ways, maybe I am engaging what Wenshu Lee (2012) references as a *critical intersectionality* that expands the “holy trinity of identity markers, race, class and gender” to such variables as “age, religiosity, ideology, and party identification” and more (p. 922). And while Lee does not cite Crenshaw, the intentionality of her reference is implied. And while Lee does not offer a particular definition of *the critical* in her construction of *critical intersectionality*—such a meaningful definition is at the core of my own orientation (in this approach) to teaching autoethnography and the evidenced student enactments as response to this assignment that I include in this essay.

The notion of “critical” is an engagement of discernment of the deep meanings in any given situation with the potentials and possibilities of transformation. In approaching a critical autoethnography, I often use D. Soyini Madison’s orientation to doing critical work. In her construction, Madison (2005) writes that critical work seeks

to articulate and identify hidden forces and ambiguities that operate beneath appearances; to guide judgments and evaluations emanating from our discontent; to direct our attention to the critical expressions within different interpretive communities relative to their unique symbol systems, customs, and codes; to demystify the ubiquity and magnitude of power; to provide insight and inspire acts of justice; and to name and analyze what is intuitively felt. (p. 13)

Madison’s construction is aptly applied to engaging a critical autoethnography because it asks deep questions and demands rigorous considerations. In teaching critical autoethnography, I often frame each of her definitional components as questions that students must ask themselves, thus forestalling the tendency to simply tell a good story, but to tell a critical story of meaning situated in a cultural context with potential to transform self and society (Spry, 2001). So with this framing of a critical autoethnography as intersectional praxis, I want to share with you samples of student work in a junior-level performance studies class at California State University, Los Angeles. I present two pieces with the students’ permission. Each of the student efforts follow a form that might be described as a *poetic autoethnography*, both in the form of engagement as well as in that way in which poetry is a liquidity of emotion that fuses the politics of story and form.

“Advocate of Hope” by José “Pepper” Jimenez Quiroz

*I was brought to a land where I had no identity, got my ID for about a dollar 20,
so technically I was conceived at the corner store,
I never gave a damn before,
so why start now,
look into my past,
see I was born,
as an outkast,*

*everything I do is so unconventional,
I miss a lot of church so the music is my confessional,
it's a shame I focus on me try to make the right move,
in a year or two u gonna see me on the breaking news,
either talking recklessly,
probably making history,
doesn't really matter,
my pops facing repo,
I connect to the people standing at home depot, just like prostitutes,
tryin a get a buck or two,
tryin a get a meal,
I was born a dirty immigrant I learned to work the field,
I aint no sergeant but yea I know the drill.
My life is like a movie I just wanna see the reel.
They label me an alien,
I'm just tryin a phone home,
Look where I went wrong,
Look at my mistake,
Born in the wrong place.
Aint that a shame, my whole damn life's like Obama's campaign,
Advocate for hope, hoping for some change.
Bring it back to suspense this is just like the show,
black swan flow,
got the academy owned,
my globe aint gold,
and oscar owes more than he could afford, that's just how it goes,
stress does linger,
smiles do vanish,
every hustler on the corner first language is Spanish.
I don't smile at cops,
I hardly laugh at all,
racism hurts,
but I just laugh it off.
I been numbed by the world,
real life vicodin,
fell on the 3rd,
got right back up again.
I gotta play my cards,
there is no fold,
no bluffing when the truth is exposed,
so here I go as I testify, on my every day life, looking at me like your life's like mine,
but you're judging from the outside,
look inside of mine.
They label me an alien, I'm just tryina phone home,
Look where I went wrong,
Look at my mistake,
Born in the wrong place,*

Aint that a shame, my whole damn life's like Obama's campaign,
 Advocate for hope, hoping for some change.
 People where I come from usually become crooks,
 they don't even see success they're scared to look.
 I know about the immigrants,
 didn't need to read a book,
 at the age of 16 that's when my whole world shook
 every moment past that, man I fully understand all the obstacles in my path,
 so I rarely show pity,
 I'm labeled as a stranger in my own damn city, treating government like my God,
 I hope he forgives me.
 I swear this right here is torture, me I'm the reason for the fence along the border,
 Mexican champ but I aint talking cainvalasquez,
 anybody touching me on the mic, nonsense.
 Mexican in the blood I can name some cartels, but me I will never never ever tell,
 not an ounce of a snitch,
 I'm tryin a get big,
 literally like opera.
 I'm rocky balboa when it comes to tasting victory,
 sorta like cesar chavez yea I'm making history.
 I was born with this burden it's my original sin, green card or not I gotta win, life's
 like that, gotta face facts, I put actions in my dreams, now that's my dream act.

“We Will Beat Discrimination” by Daisy Evelyn Muñiz

So something happened at 18, as I got ready for college,
 It messed with my head, couldn't explain it with my own knowledge,
 You see, border patrol planned raids all over my small town.
 For about a month, they targeted anyone they saw was brown,
 Pulling people over, even those walking the streets.
 In Lake Elsinore there was a border patrol fleet
 Never had I seen the town look so deserted, no one walking out their doors,
 And the thought of this, man, it shook me to my core
 Man, I was scared and I was born in this nation.
 But, my parents weren't, yeah, I'm the first generation
 La migra took friends, co-workers, and neighbors
 Good people I knew, who only wanted labor.
 And I thought
 We can make it through with the help of God and with determination.
 Even with the odds against us, we will beat discrimination (2x)
 I closed my eyes and opened them every morn' at 3am
 Wondering who else is having to do the shit I am.
 Hugged and kiss my dad, we each got in our car.
 Then I'd drive behind him, looked up, and wished upon a star
 Daddy's little girl was now protecting him.
 But, I didn't mind, yeah, I'd do it all again.

When we had driven out of town, Daddy would pull up to my side,
 Turned on the light so I could see him, smiling, he'd wave bye-bye.
 I'd turn mine on, wave back and smile,
 releasing all the stress I'd gained with every single mile.
 If I didn't do this, they might pull him over, taken him there and then
 just as they had done with many other men.
 As I drove home, I'd pray: God get him home safe and sound
 And wondered what would happen when I moved, when I wouldn't be around.
 Oh, and I didn't mention my mom, who was basically on house arrest
 'cause going out risked getting deported, just like all the rest
 So that left me to take and pick up the kids, to go buy all the groceries.
 Inside the stores were Catholic women, whispering, holding rosaries.
 I'm not Catholic but I'm sure our prayers were much the same,
 Lord keep us safe, we beg this in Jesus' name.
 I wanted to tell them,
 We can make it through with the help of God, and with determination
 Even with the odds against us, we can beat discrimination (2x)
 When BP drove behind me, my heart would sink.
 When I got home, I would just lay there and think,
 How the hell can I be proud to be American like this,
 I felt so illegal, though and American miss.
 I was so ashamed of being from the USA,
 And I felt horrible for feeling this way.
 But, it's hard when you're living like a pigeon while you're dreaming like an eagle,
 Because there's no good jobs if you are an illegal.
 Things were getting outta hand, something had to be done.
 So, a group of us decided to march under the IE sun.
 We needed to show ICE we wouldn't take this lying down.
 So, with picket signs and loud voices we marched throughout the town.
 Town hall, the mayor couldn't even show his face,
 All we wanted was for him to put himself in our place.
 Sheriff's department, a deputy came out,
 Said "sorry, this is something we can do nothing about."
 The rage grew inside me; I wanted to defend my kind.
 Let this border patrol pull me over, I'll give him a piece of my mind.
 It frustrated me that you can stand up and be proud of that red, white, and blue,
 But, if you're not the right color, it might not be so proud of you.
 Watched the news, every Spanish channel addressed the issue at least a bit each day.
 But, flip the channel to English news, and not a damn station had a thing to say.
 Did they not know, or did they simply not care.
 Promoting the American dream, but they're not even playing fair.
 My parents left it all for a better opportunity.
 So, someone tell me why we've been suffering an eternity.
 It was for me and my siblings that they stayed even when the going got tough.
 Persecuted like criminals, never once heard them say "enough is enough."
 How had they endured this for so long, after 2, 3 weeks I was falling apart.
 There had to be something I could do, some way to do my part.

*I sat and realized I had two options; act or pout.
 I could sit and cry and whine that there was no way out,
 Or, I could get up, wipe my face, and take some action.
 But, I was only one of two; God was the rest of that fraction.
 And I thought,
 I will make it through with the help of God and my determination,
 Even with the odds against me, I will beat discrimination (2x).
 I had to show my parents the worth of their sacrifices.
 So, I prayed that God would deliver us from this crisis.
 I promised myself I'd graduate from a university,
 And that I would show the world that good can come from diversity.
 So, now I sit in class, less than six months to go.
 Then, I can work more and provide my family with dough.
 We've applied for residency, but that's also expensive.
 And the background investigations, man those things are extensive.
 But hey, we've got nothing to hide, so we should be OK.
 But this process takes forever, wish it was complete today.
 And it's \$200 to process the first three forms.
 Make sure to bend our knees and pray there's an immigration reform.
 'cause if this process isn't over before there's a new president,
 The new one might revoke any chance of becoming residents.
 So, I've got to hurry up, so I can pay these fees
 Because this lawyer doesn't get paid with only thanks and please.
 Tell me getting a job isn't easy, yeah, it's rough out there
 I won't accept the pessimism
 I just crack my knuckles and, uh, flip my hair.
 I declare my family's success, won't take no for an answer.
 Gotta fight back, 'cause discrimination is like cancer.
 Don't get me wrong, I love the U.S. come what may,
 But I don't wanna live with the fear of losing my parents every single day.
 You need money, a good lawyer, blah blah, I've heard it for so long,
 Obstacles like broken records, playing the same old songs.
 And I got people asking, "Why'd you choose, instead of working, to go to college?"
 I'm not doing it for me, not just to gain knowledge.
 I do it so at grad I can say "good job mom and dad,
 You got me here because you gave everything you had.
 My degree is for you, so are the blessings that come from it.
 It's because of you I'm on top. It's because of you I've reached the summit."
 So, now I'm looking up, and so darn optimistic.
 Got a smile on my face, been so long, I surely missed it.
 I embrace the discriminated, hyphenated me,
 The Mexican-American my parents soon will be.
 And as for our future,
 We will make it through with the help of God, and with determination,
 Even with the odds against us we will beat discrimination. (2x)*

José's and Daisy's performances work to fulfill qualities of effective autoethnography and critical work. Each is self-reflexive of their sociopolitical interactivity placing their bodies on the line of border politics. Each is a provocative weave of story and theory that moves both emotionally and critically as they narrate lived experience in a sociocultural context. Each performance works through and emboldens the varying modes of using autoethnography as methodology (e.g., mode of research/inquiry, mode of re/presentation, mode of critique and resistance, mode of activism).

Each of the performances engages in a systematic unpacking of experience as a form of social criticism; each offers clear conclusions not designed as controls, but as possibilities of knowing and engaging the social world. And each is aesthetically pleasing and intellectually astute, demanding that the audience use these contributing qualities as information gathering, truth seeking, action steps, and templates for engaging their own situatedness of being (See Alexander, 2009). And maybe, more importantly to the particularity of this exploration—each critical autoethnographic exploration illuminates a complex intersectionality of being and becoming.

Both José and Daisy explicitly frame their autoethnographic performance as political, activist, and resistive. Daisy marks a struggle against discrimination and her particular involvement in political protest against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E) in the Inland Empire (I.E.) of Southern California. José discusses his Mexican American masculine identity construction and the iterations of discrimination he experiences as a result. Each of these performances was a partial and self-referential tale that connected with other stories, ideas, discourses, and contexts of these performances, as well as being delivered in a class at a predominantly Hispanic Serving campus—with many first-generation, and a number of "undocumented" students in the class, who, at the end of these performances, began to narrate aspects of their own experiences. Each performance created a plausible and visceral lifeworld and a charged emotional atmosphere as an incitement to act within and outside the context of the work.

These performative engagements sought to articulate and identify the hidden forces and ambiguities that operate beneath the appearance of their story as well as keying in the nexus of the broader politics of immigration and border rhetorics. Each excavated the critical expressions and conditions of living within their interpretive culture, inspiring acts of justice; and by virtue of their first-person subjective location, they sought to name and analyze what is intuitively felt and expressed in the narrative. And both of these autoethnographic performances engaged in a critical dialogue with history, social structure and culture, which the performances help to foreground as always and already dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language—with an embodied critical intersectionality of their own predicament. And maybe therein lies the complicated beauty

of critical autoethnography as intersectional praxis. Both José and Daisy engage in an argument of intersectionality not exclusive on a bodily or cellular level, but acknowledging the social construction of identity—as historical, social, locational, and cultural—their bodies meeting at the borders and politics of time and place; bodies on the line in public debate of value and territorial imperatives that have human consequences (see Alexander, 2009).

The Classroom as a Border/less Frame: A Conclusion

My purpose in this short essay was to explore an approach of teaching critical/autoethnography as an exercise in intersectionality and the ways in which the borders of identities bleed. In the process, I offered you two student examples undergirded by principles of theory that define my approach to a critical autoethnography and critical intersectionality with allusions to effective qualities in each. The work of my students engages a level of complex theorizing that forestalls, and at times brings into sharp contrast, the facile and reductive orientation of intersectionality limited by just race, gender, and class to address a more complex critical intersectionality that speaks to the politics of bleeding identities that includes, among others, national and international politics of citizenship, issues of desire and disdain in which the body is revealed as always and already a political location; a nexus of being, as well as a literal and figurative border crossing. In fact, each performance is an act of resistance and a struggle for self-definition that bleeds the borders of the expected and the known—voices struggling to be heard between complex and overlapping borders of identity.

My own autoethnographic entry was presented as an intersectional study of my race and gender, the politics of legalized same sex marriage, and the bleeding borders of “brother status” in a fixed liquidity of time and space. But while I situate my autoethnography in an analysis of a photographic image of my biological brothers and myself—these variables of race, sexuality, and gender are always and already present within the dailiness of my life. They often become palpable in the classroom. The classroom as a confluence where bodies and lives, cultures and curricula often encounter in a clash of determinations and destinations. The classroom, where historically, only particular stories have been told in a linear fashion that resist cultural variations of situated tellings; stories told of conquest that do not recognize the bodies of students that refuse to be colonized over and over again through someone else’s narrative authority. The classroom, where the body of the teacher becomes reductively representative of the curriculum; ahistoricized, dera(c)ed, and neutered, talking a talk that often threatens to perpetuate self-oppression. And alike, the complex lives of students are made generic for the ease of transmitting a

particular knowledge, often void of a critical application and recognition of how students resist facile explanations of compartmentalized realities, because often their lives, as does our own, intersect and straddle multiple bordered realities.

In the classroom, I often flaunt my particularity as a teacher—as a Black/gay/male teacher in the ivory tower. I flaunt it, not as gaudy evidence, but as a dissenting member to professed social constructs; like that picture of myself captured in a borderless frame standing in a tan suit next to three white tuxedos—presumed difference in relation to orthodoxy; a photo that I staged to commemorate a moment so that I could consistently critique that reality from the inside out and from the outside in. In the classroom, I often engage in a critical show and tell. The materiality of my body and manner captured in the gaze of students, shows a sense of who I am—so I follow up with telling; critical tellings of lived experiences of growing up in the south; critical tellings of my life with my partner of 15 years—tellings of our talks about our marriage as a resistance to public propositions that would deny us such a right. I metaphorically share with students who we would invite or not invite to our wedding, to be in our wedding, to be the best man, and why. I tell intimacies of the personal, not to titillate, but to tease at what should and should not be spoken of in the classroom—thereby sanctioning students to also tell; to tell of their tales, to tell of their travels, to tell of the tensions and the tensive aspects of their lived experiences that bring them to this current moment; experiences that cross borders but always carry the residual tracks of where they come from and how they live between worlds and realities. I like the idea of tracking and trafficking stories across the borders of the classroom.

The classroom is like a borderless frame; a series of contextualized engagements that offer the allusion of possibility but contains a particular territory; a particular reality. Critical autoethnography as critical praxis bleeds what Roger I. Simon (1992) refers to as the horizon of possibility, creating an “openness of expression of capacities encouraged in a free society and the normative, regulating forces of those social forms which define the terrain on which everyday life is lived” and storied (p. 28). It becomes what Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) might call a border pedagogy that helps students to understand that “[o]ne’s class, race, gender, or ethnicity may influence, but does not irrevocably predetermine how one takes up a particular ideology, read a particular text, or respond to particular forms of oppression” (p. 119). It becomes what Paulo Freire (2002) references as praxis, reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.

In the photographic image of my brothers and me, it may appear that I am held in a particular stasis of that relational dynamic, but that is just a photographic image. My life is much more expansive, and I wear multiple suits of different colors. I offer my students the possibilities of seeing themselves and

showing themselves in such ways, in the classroom—bleeding the borders between the present and the possible.

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SECTION III



Negotiating Socially Stigmatized Identities

THE THIRD SECTION OF THE BOOK EXTENDS THE SECOND SECTION by focusing on the negotiation of constructions of identity that are marginalized within larger social structures. These four chapters highlight the similar and different ways in which diverse stigmatized identities (based on race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, disability, and body politics) are experienced across contexts. In addition, each of the chapters demonstrates the need to understand how marginalization is enacted on multiple levels simultaneously—something that becomes apparent through intersectionality. *Standpoint theory*, *co-cultural theory*, and *cultural contracts theory* function as insightful theoretical frameworks to contextualize these chapters.

Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory is based on one simple idea: Life is not experienced the same for all members of any given society. In explicit and implicit ways, our *standpoints*—determined by our social/cultural group memberships—affect how we communicate as well as how we perceive the communication of others. Standpoint theory is established in the work of many feminist scholars (e.g., Harding, 1987, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987). Although it has traditionally been used as a framework to study the lives of women, it can also be applied to the perspectives of those marginalized in terms of race, ethnicity, class, religion, and so forth (Wallace & Wolf, 1995). Through