STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF OTHERING: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR

INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATES

by

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Communication

Boise State University

May 2017

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE

DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

of the thesis submitted by

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Thesis Title: Students' Experiences of Othering: Recommendations for Inclusive Classroom Climates

Date of Final Oral Examination: 09 March 2017

The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Stela Saltaga, and they evaluated her presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

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The final reading approval of the thesis was granted by John G. McClellan, Ph.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The thesis was approved by the Graduate College.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

As universities in the United States become increasingly diverse, the problem of "othering" in classrooms becomes an important issue to explore. Othering is the process of treating or perceiving one as different from ourselves, and can result in alienation and other challenges for students succeeding in higher education. Embracing a qualitative research approach, this study explores the experiences of "othering" through the stories of twelve students who have been treated differently than others in the classroom. The findings of this study provide insights into the complex relationships between "othering" and students' experiences in the classroom, and contributes to more informed understandings of "othering" so that scholars and practitioners can better address this increasingly important issue in the future. Specifically, with inclusive excellence efforts becoming increasingly common on university campuses, the findings of this study inform several strategies for instructors to promote more inclusive classroom climates.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF BEING OTHERED

This thesis project explores the experience and potential consequences of

"othering" in the university classroom. As students' progress in higher education they

frequently encounter obstacles or challenges to overcome. One such challenge is that of

being othered in the classroom. Winslow and Winslow (2014) define othering as, "a

discursive process of separating We from Other as a means of constructing hierarchies of

power" (p. 1). In other words, othering involves a process of communication that

somehow distinguishes individuals as different in ways that maintain particular power

relations. Winslow and Winslow explain that the othering process:

> Begins with the foundational principles of communication: before we Other, we
> symbolically create and exchange meaning, so that we can make sense of the
> world and influence one another. By attaching vocabularies to human
> experiences, we simplify our social lives, and all the complex dimensions of
> individual differences into a more coherent explanation of who we are and who
> we want to be. (p. 1)

On the surface, simplifying our social lives through vocabularies describing

human experience does not seem harmful. However, research has revealed that this

process of othering has detrimental effects among groups and for individual motivation.

Johnson (2004) claims that othering creates an exclusionary matrix that treats the other as

inferior; leading to inequality, tension, dissention, and even conflict between members of

groups. Consequently othering is a problem because it can easily manifest into an "us

versus them" mentality excluding or alienating those who are different (Johnson, 2004).

By perpetuating a discourse of "difference," in a potentially competitive climate such as

academia, it contributes to a tendency to emphasize separation rather than unity (Vacarr, 2003). This discourse of difference can then lead to some groups taking priority over others and being offered more opportunities.

Jones, Castellanos, and Cole's (2002) research revealed that othering has detrimental effects on a student's motivation, identity, and comfort in a school setting. As a result, a student's self-esteem, and overall success in higher education might suffer (Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002). Gaining a more extensive knowledge of the ways in which students are othered, and the ways in which the practice of othering affects students, is crucial for bringing awareness to this problem in ways that may help to prevent it in the future. As such, for this thesis I propose exploring how students have experienced being othered in the classroom and to make sense of how othering has affected students' experiences in higher education. My hope is that insights gained in this study can help instructors become more aware of the issue of othering and consider possible solutions to reduce its prevalence in higher education and enhance efforts toward inclusive excellence and creating more inclusive classroom climates.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) explain inclusive excellence as being an active process through which those in higher education achieve excellence in learning, teaching, student development, and institutional functioning, through diversity, inclusion, equity, and equity-mindedness (AACU, 2016). And those working on inclusive excellence with a focus on communication often seek ways to enhance the inclusive climate in the classroom through varied communication practices. This thesis aims to explore students' experiences being othered in the

classroom and take this information to consider better practices for creating inclusive classroom climates as a part of larger inclusive excellence practices in higher education.

In studying the process of othering in communication, I intend to look at the ways in which people interact with those whom they deem different from themselves or as outside of their predetermined notions of normality. Those notions are often based on preconceived biases, ingrained in our cultural meaning systems, or the result of personal experience. The ways in which the practice of othering is carried out may vary from person to person, depending on their personal prejudices and vocabularies, however, othering occurs when the communicative practices result in someone perceiving him or herself as different from what is perceived "normal." Through this thesis research, I hope to discover what practices in the classroom result in othering and thus result in students feeling as if they do not belong or somehow do not meet the same standards as their peers.

Turner (1994) used the phrase "guests in someone else's house" to explain the feelings of alienation experienced by students who are othered. This description offers the sense that students made to feel outside of the dominant group may never entirely feel welcome or comfortable in their classroom surroundings. The ways in which faculty (and students) set some students apart from their peers through attention to particular differences has an effect. The problem of othering is a contemporary issue in American universities. Recent research shows that American universities are seeing an increase in the diversity of their student body in terms of students' ethnicity, nationality, race, social class, and age (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). However, even with increasing

numbers, many underrepresented students still feel as though they are part of the outer circle looking in.

One common course of action to alleviate the problem of othering is improving communication to promote inclusivity in the classroom. Classroom inclusivity is important to not only the individual students, but to the environment of the classroom as a whole. Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, and Lovett (2010) describe inclusive teaching strategies as crucial because:

> Even though some of us might wish to conceptualize our classrooms as culturally neutral or might choose to ignore the cultural dimensions, students cannot check their sociocultural identities at the door, nor can they instantly transcend their current level of development. Therefore, it is important that the pedagogical strategies we employ in the classroom reflect an understanding of social identity development so that we can anticipate the tensions that might occur in the classroom and be proactive about them. (p. 169-170)

The potential benefits of creating inclusive classrooms are important, and thus many institutions are promoting efforts aimed at creating more inclusive campus environments supporting the more diverse students. More positive and inclusive changes such as these are a welcome introduction, but the practice of othering is still occurring.

Many scholars have studied the issue of othering in the classroom, explored the experience of othering in higher education, and provide possible solutions to the issue of othering (e.g., Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2003; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; AACU, 2015). This literature reveals that othering is a very real, current, and potentially avoidable issue in our education system. For instance, Carter (2008) talks about her experience being an African American student in a predominantly white school. She states:

> I was acutely aware of my minority status. As a high achieving Black student, I was often referred to by my teachers as, 'the only one' or 'one of the few' in this

category, which characterized me as exceeding despite their expectations. In the classroom, I was not always allowed to be an individual, but was often defined by my racial group membership. More often than not, I felt compelled to speak and behave in ways that would situate me as the representative of my racial group. (p. 230)

This situation, as well as her feeling compelled to speak as a representative of her identified racial group, is not uncommon. Other scholars have explored this issue when facing a situation where one is saddled with a set of expectations about who or what they should be, many times it is considered best to meet those expectations rather than to be further displaced (see Lu, 2001). Carter (2008) continues to describe how racial framing made her feel as though her work was inadequate compared to her white peers. She questions if the only reason she was receiving good grades was because her teachers thought that was the best a black student could accomplish. The words and actions of the instructors were influential enough to make Carter question her worth as a student entirely.

Instructional practices as related to cultural expectancies are critical to a discussion about othering because, in many cases, classroom practices that result in being made to feel as either on the inside or outside of the dominant culture can define one's place within society. American culture has established an ideal that some people find easier to attain, while others are precluded or prevented from achieving (Lu, 2001). For example, some are treated differently based on personal factors out of their control, and this may set them up for failure later on in life. Further, studies show that often students from underrepresented groups in higher education, or come from neighborhoods with lower socio-economic status, are expected to not only go to schools with less funding, but to either drop out early or not continue on with higher education (see New York Times,

2009). These students are often treated by instructors and other students with this implicit bias and thus offered less attention, funding, or opportunities than the students who more neatly align with cultural expectations of what a student in higher education should be. In this way, a cycle of disenfranchisement perpetuates itself among those not as well represented in higher education classrooms. As a result, underrepresented students are often expected to go into low-wage service or manual labor jobs and never surpass their parents' level of economic success (Campbell, 2003). This expectation is compounded when considering students with learning disabilities who are either moved to separate classrooms or are openly treated with different expectations for education and success beyond school.

The practice of othering serves only to limit understanding and encourages continued separation and divergence among different people which can have a significant influence on the ways students participate in the classroom and whether they succeed in higher education. These experiences and the consequences can influence students throughout their lives. Researching the ways students experience othering, as well as the perceived problems of being othered in higher education, can provide useful insights into understanding and possibilities for change.

As such, for this thesis project, I intend to gain a more extensive understanding of the experiences of othering in the classroom and its possible affects for students in higher education. By interviewing students who have at some point in their education felt as though they had been othered by their instructor or other students in the classroom, I can gain insights into peoples' experiences and the possible consequences of these experiences for their efforts in higher education. Scholars indicate that othering can

negatively affect a student's ability to perform academically, resulting in lower self-esteem, and reduced capability for achieving success in the future. Consequently, this thesis provides students the opportunity to share their experiences and what they believe the possible effects of othering have been on their lives as students in higher education.

Further, qualitative understanding of student experiences being othered can provide insights for making recommendations for improving the efforts toward inclusive classroom climates. My hope is that the findings of this study can encourage heightened awareness of how students are othered in the classroom and more understanding for the lived consequences of treating others differently, contributing to inclusive excellence efforts in higher education. By including students' experiences to the conversations about othering and the challenges of inclusive excellence, this study can start a new conversation that gives voice to those who have been silenced and marginalized in the classroom. My goal in conducting this study is to gain further knowledge of the effects othering has on students and ways in which the education system can modify itself to account for shortcomings which either lead to or are caused by othering.

Thus, my hope in conducting this research is that I will be able to add voices of students who have experienced being othered to the academic conversation about inclusive excellence in the classroom. Accomplishing this will bring awareness to the ways in which othering is experienced as a problem by students themselves and can show how othering affects students' feelings of self-worth and their potential for academic achievement. If those in higher education who wish to promote inclusive excellence are informed by these voices it might promote new ways to create an inclusive classroom culture that encourages, rather than stifles, their differences. Including the voices of

students who are minorities, refugees, have a slower pace of learning, have disabilities, or have been otherwise categorized as an other, this study can learn from their experiences and begin establishing better ways in which to interact with those students in the classroom that promote inclusivity rather than alienation.

In order to achieve these aims, I began this study by reviewing relevant literature on issues of othering in higher education with attention to dialogue theory as a useful perspective for engaging the other. Specifically, I intend to review literature on "othering," pedagogy, diversity in universities, and efforts toward inclusive excellence. Grounded in this literature, I developed an argument for why studying othering in the higher education classroom is an important effort and how the findings from this study might contribute to more dialogic approaches for addressing the issue of othering in the classroom. I then reviewed the methods for engaging in this qualitative study to gain insight into the lives of various students who have been othered in the classroom and how these experiences have affected their academic careers. Through the use of interviews with a variety of students who consider themselves to be different, I intend to gain insights into their individual and collective experiences of being othered.

I then reviewed the findings of this study providing insights to the students' experiences being othered and discuss how these findings can help scholars and practitioners interested in promoting classroom inclusivity in its many forms. My aim is to explore the complex relationship between othering and students' experiences in school, and contribute to more informed understanding of the phenomenon of othering so that scholars and practitioners can better address this increasingly important issue in the future.

CHAPTER TWO: IDENTITY, DIALOGUE AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

In order to ground this study, it is important to understand how the concepts of othering and inclusive teaching are being discussed in current literature. A more robust awareness of the issue of othering can help provide a needed rationale for higher education institutions to promote more inclusive communicative practices in the classroom as a part of fostering more inclusive university environments. For this reason, this chapter is aimed at reviewing current literature about identity, "othering," othering in schools, and pedagogy, as well as exploring dialogue theory and its implications for understanding "othering."

Identity

Identity plays a significant role in the ways in which we understand ourselves and others. Ainsworth and Hardy (2004) explain identity as being constructed in language. They claim that one's identity is constructed through processes of linguistic categorization that define identities by their relationship to, and difference from, other identities. In this way, one's identity is a process of accumulation of meanings about who they are, based on how they make sense of their personal characteristics and experiences. Understanding identity in this way can help us see that when one expresses his or her beliefs, opinions, and culture (or any combination of these and other character traits) is a process of creating ones identity. Essentially, identity is the outcome of a process of one developing his or her self-image through communication, constituted when individuals present themselves to others in particular ways and generate meanings about themselves

in relation to others. In many cases, a perceived identity may be the deciding factor in how others interact with someone else and whether or not they relate to them. Based on Ainsworth and Hardy's (2004) claim that identity is constructed through processes of linguistic categorization, I would argue that because identities are usually created in relation to others, it is important to recognize individuals are always attempting to find balance between who they are and who they want to be in a society comprised of other people who have already categorized them as something they are or should be.

Identities result in members of society categorizing people, by distinguishing and highlighting their differences, and having these categorizations seem normal and natural. Warren (2001) describes the labels that define identity as being based on, "arbitrary characteristics that have been repeated so much over time that we view them as natural constructs" (p. 95). However, as these arbitrary categories become prominent in society, they are used to make sense of others. The problem with this is that some become unnecessarily limited by the ways they are categorized. Warren (2001) gives an example of this when stating, "by locating race on bodies, one risks assuming like qualities based solely on skin color without acknowledging the different cultural factors that work together to construct identity" (p. 91).

When considering the consequences of this way of thinking about identity in the classroom, this can become a problem when a student's teachers and peers only see them as a one-dimensional character, and treat them in accordance with what they know about that particular characteristic. Further, the student may also identify with only that one characteristic and begin to think that is all they are. By differentiating a student as the "black one" or the "gay one" or the "Muslim one" we are using a single term as the

description of one's entire identity. However, identities are not singular, whole, or fixed. Instead identities are always changing, vary in different contexts, and are the result of ongoing language use (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). This is why it is a problem for an individual to prescribe someone to a singular identity. Everyone has multiple fragmented identities, making it important to understand intersectionality.

Symington (2004) describes intersectionality as the simultaneous living of multiple identities. For instance he explains that, "people live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history and the operation of structures of power. People are members of more than one community at the same time, and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege" (p. 2). Understanding intersectionality helps us to understand that we cannot use a single term to describe someone's entire identity because that will not capture the multiple identities they may have and will limit our understanding of who they actually are.

In a similar way, Lu (2001) claims that subordinate groups' identities are being defined by dominate groups through discursive practices and media representations. In referencing discursive practices, he is referring to how a relationship is created by asserting power through the use of language. Media representations refer to the ways individuals and groups are talked about in the media and represented in certain ways. Thus, identity is already assumed when students enter the classroom because of the ways in which it is represented in media and is then reaffirmed and solidified inside the classroom. In regards to identity construction, this would then mean that one's identity is not exclusively formed through their membership within a group but is essentially placed on them by those perceived to hold more power. Lu (2001) claims, "this critical

perspective on identity formation challenges the essential view of ethic/cultural identity as solely based on membership, questions the discursive practice of otherness and dichotomized thinking, and sheds light on viewing identity as fluid, multiple, and ever changing" (p. 207). Embracing this perspective we can see how the effects of dichotomized thinking could be used to form the identities of those considered others. Defining someone, or a group of people, as "others" for any reason, is equivalent to defining them as "not one of us." Understanding identity as fluid also helps direct attention to identity as able to be changed. Further, depending on the ways in which we define the characteristics and what they mean to us in our culture, identity is only as static as its place in relation to the rest of society.

Identity is not only contextual, but also relational. Identities are constantly being redefined as people are growing, learning, and experiencing new things. Formation of one's identity happens through relation to others as well as how one classifies themselves. Gee (1999) explains:

> In order 'to have' an identity- whether social, ethnic, or gendered- someone has thus to subscribe himself (sic) and be ascribed by others as falling within a certain category. This category, even though not always explicitly, prescribes the individual to respect accepted associations among ways of using language, thinking, acting, values and interacting, in the right places and at the tight time. (p. 43)

By having an identity, one is associating with the relations in which that identity is connected. The problem is that identities are complex and are made up of many different characteristics so although someone may differ from the norm in some ways, they may ultimately be more similar than different.

Overall, identifying someone by a singular characteristic restricts people from truly understanding their own identity and limits the possibility of mutuality and

understanding with others. When we only see characteristics that make someone different, and do not attempt to reach a dialogue, coming to an understanding can be very challenging. As mutuality is critical for us to learn and grow together as a society, it is important that we make attempts to understand each other. Baumann, Kuhlberg, and Zayas (2010) define mutuality as, "patterns of feelings, thoughts, and activities in relationships that are characterized by empathy, engagement, authenticity, and empowerment" (p. 617). Dialogue theory is one theory that promotes coming to an understanding and embraces treating others as individually distinct in their identities, or living in intersections of multiple identities, not as a whole or fixed identities. It is a theory that embraces the notion that our identities are unique which is important in the understanding of how one constructs their identity.

Dialogue Theory

Dialogue theory provides insights into the problem of othering in classrooms because the aim of dialogue is mutuality, understanding, and change. Specifically, dialogue theory provides a possible model for instructors and students to deepen their mutual understanding and come together to produce a more inclusive classroom climate. Simpson (2008) describes dialogue at its best as, "an interaction among people that produces something greater than the sum of its parts and leaves participants changed by that interaction" (p. 139). She goes on to describe dialogue at its most powerful as, "the opportunity or potential that exists in any interaction to challenge a previously held belief by 'thinking together' with others to deepen shared understanding or meaning" (p. 141). Dialogue then, at its best and most powerful, would be the coming together of different people given the opportunity to "think together" and come to a deeper shared

understanding of each other with the potential to change previously held beliefs. Dialogue theory accounts for the diversity of peoples within a dialogue navigating a way to come to a mutual understanding. Consequently, dialogue theory is an appropriate lens for looking at othering and the outcomes presented when those coming together do not strive to find mutual understanding. This dialogic way of understanding challenges some of the problems associated with viewing someone as the other and allowing differences to define the relationship with them rather than finding a common ground from which to understand one another. The importance of mutual understanding when communicating with the other is essential to productive conversations, new perspectives, and a deeper understanding of those in which one differs (Black, 2008).

While dialogue scholars offer different definitions of dialogue, they typically agree upon several defining characteristics of what dialogue hopes to promote. Dialogue aims to deepen understanding, challenge and change previously held beliefs, and encourage reciprocity and mutuality. The notion of the other and how one engages the other is key to dialogue theory and helps to further define the goals of dialogue (Black, 2008; Simpson, 2008; Poulos, 2008; Kim & Kim, 2008; Barge & Little, 2002). This type of dialogue that encourages engaging the other in reciprocity and mutuality is often referred to as *genuine* dialogue. Poulos (2008) explains genuine dialogue as being more than talk:

> Most agree that genuine dialogue, when it does occur, is a complex matrix of speech and silence, of giving and receiving, and of listening and expressing. It involves talk, to be sure, but this is talk that reaches beyond mere information transmission or instruction, or command, or even exchange. It is talk that carries us to new places, talk that constitutes change, and talk that creates and transforms realities. (p.119)

In stating that it is a type of talk that creates and transforms realities, we are exposed to the depths that dialogue may take one who is open-minded and willing to create a new shared meaning and change.

In order for genuine dialogue to occur, it is important that one allows themselves to not only listen, but to be heard, and to not only be affirmed, but to affirm others. Reciprocity is a means of achieving understanding. It is difficult for someone to understand another's views, experiences, and opinions if they are not first told to them. Similarly, we as individuals, cannot hope to derive meaning where none was provided. It is not so much the act of dialogue that leads to understanding, but the meaning which is taken away from it. Black (2008) states:

> Dialogue's emphasis on multi-vocality, open-mindedness, human connection, and the co-creation of meaning allows group members to explore more fully the complexities of other people's commitments and perspectives as well as their own. Although aspects of emotion, reason, and values are present in all communication, dialogue theory emphasizes how these aspects interrelate much more explicitly than does discussion. (p. 94)

When one engages the other in genuine dialogue, they will leave feeling different, their opinions will be changed, and their eyes and minds are open to different viewpoints, and, new meaning will have been created for both parties. Dialogue's complexities lie in its ability to delve below the surface of talk and reemerge with a new reality for all involved. This can only be achieved if all parties are willing to understand each other and are open to the possibility of transforming the reality of which they are already a part. If any one party does not participate in an open and honest dialogue, mutuality is lost as well as the dialogue itself. One must be willing to share themselves, as much as to listen to and accept the other.

Dialogue theory adopts the belief that mutuality and understanding are essential to communication. This is important in bridging the gap of otherness in that, through reciprocity, the self-centralized motivation is subverted greatly to the point that by acknowledging the uniqueness of the corresponding entity in communication, a superior form of "wholeness" can be experienced. Simpson (2008) remarked, "dialogue exists as a potential in every interaction to 'think together' with others to create richer and more complete knowledge. When this potential is missed or left unrealized, we reinforce partial and incomplete truths about the world" (p. 140). This idea emphasizes how important achieving a true state of dialogue is. Without it, the opportunity for understanding is lost in differences and preconceived biases.

Dialogue theory calls for an openness when conversing with someone deemed the "other." It calls for reciprocity, understanding, listening and sharing, and a desire to come to a moment of creation together. Dialogue can help to reshape and broaden those realities by including another's knowledge as well. One should seek out dialogue to expand their understanding of others and themselves. Poulos (2008) calls for us to seek out conditions in which dialogue may be possible. He states:

> Most agree that dialogue cannot be forced or prescribed, cannot be made to happen. But some, at least, say that we may do well to set conditions for dialogic engagement by attuning to the possibilities that inhere in the encounter with the other. If we set ourselves to listening to, to acknowledging the value, and to cultivating awareness of the potential or the 'unfolding' of the other, while openly and respectfully unfolding ourselves, then engagement of the full dialogic potential of a given encounter may be possible. (pp. 118-119)

By reaching a full dialogic potential, something new should emerge. New ideas, perspectives, thoughts, and opinions should be formed, and through that deeper

understanding, a feeling of togetherness. It is this mutual understanding that othering threatens.

As such, in order to "set the conditions for dialogic engagement" there must be several qualities among the interactants. In particular these qualities include: affirmation, listening, openness, to/fro interactions, and taking advantage of moments to "think together." Affirmation assumes someone already has something valuable to contribute so one is approaching them with the intent to understand. It is then important to listen so that one may derive meaning from the other. Openness seeks for a willingness of those in dialogue to first listen and understand, allowing for an unobstructed sharing of knowledge. Reciprocity must also take place, or a "to and fro" sharing of meaning. This allows one to not only listen but to be heard, not only affirm but be affirmed. Finally, taking advantage of moments to "think together" allows those participating in dialogue the opportunity to come to a deeper shared understanding of each other. If these conditions are attempted to be met, then there is more potential for dialogue and thus potential to reach understanding and mutuality.

When one is attempting to negotiate their understanding of self and the other, there is a power dynamic that takes place. When someone "others" or is "othered," the subject of the othering is degraded and sometimes dehumanized. This can lead the individual to feeling isolated and unworthy. If we as a society are hoping to encourage higher education for all, it is important to encourage dialogue as a means toward unity (Keaten & Soukup, 2009). Barge and Little (2002) state "engaging in dialogue allows us to overcome the human impulse to deny that our thoughts create things and to begin exploring the way we are socialized into viewing particular prejudices, beliefs, and

assumptions as normal" (p. 377). By engaging in dialogue we are able to combat those prejudices, beliefs, and assumption with a more genuine understanding of the other. This deeper understanding leads to a togetherness rather than a divergence. As othering can have detrimental effects it is important to reach a level of understanding that helps to prevent othering. Othering is an important subject to research because an expanded knowledge of othering can help to shed light on experiences and create a more positive environment for all.

The Problem of Othering

While dialogue encourages engaging the other with reciprocity, the practice of othering precludes dialogue from taking place. When one thinks of the "other," they are typically focusing on ways in which others differ from themselves. Although this does not necessarily have to be associated with a negative connotation, it often is. This can be especially true when it begins to manifest into the act of "othering." Othering has many definitions, but essentially comes down to actively treating individuals or groups as though they are lesser based on perceived or actual differences of some kind. According to Gillespie (2007), "othering occurs when Self represents Other in terms of what Self is not (and in terms of what self does not want to be) in a way that is 'self-aggrandizing'" (pp. 3-4). He later goes on to add, "literatures on othering, self-esteem and intergroup bias point in the same direction: toward a widespread tendency to differentiate ingroup from outgroup and Self from Other in such a way as to bolster and protect Self" (p. 4). This treatment may come in many different forms and degrees and the party enacting the othering may not even realize they are doing it. As there is group

identity, there will be "othering," and this drives the need to discover ways to overcome it and reach a point of understanding.

  Brons (2015) analyzed each of the forms in which othering has existed, and continues to exist today. He describes the process of othering as the "simultaneous construction of the self, or in-group, and the other or out-group in mutual and unequal opposition through identification of some desirable characteristics that the self/in-group embodies and that the other/out-group lacks" (p. 70). Either additionally or separately, the opposition can be based on the embodiment of an undesirable characteristic by the other/out-group, one which the self/in-group lacks (Brons, 2015). These characteristics include, but are not limited to, anything from skin color to education to disability. The key is that a characteristic, or combination of characteristics, have been deemed undesirable. This means that those with such characteristics are considered part of the out-group, or the other.

  Brons (2015) claims that othering constructs a superior self/in-group in contrast to an inferior other/out-group. Although this superiority and inferiority is normally left implicit, it does not go unknown or unnoticed; it is quite obvious to all parties, no matter the group one is in. Brons later explains, "although othering often sets up a superior self/in-group in contrast to an inferior other/out-group, it can also create distance between self/in-group and other/out-group by means of a dehumanizing over-inflation of otherness. The other then, is not so much (implicitly) inferior, but radically alien" (p. 72). This can make a near impenetrable border between the self and other and makes it easier to justify social exclusion, discrimination, or subjection due to differences found between "them and us."

One may find themselves as the other for a variety of different reasons or characteristics they may possess. However, Brons (2015) claims there are three main variants or three different others, that can be distinguished. He states, "the concept of 'the other' has been used to designate a range of rather different but interrelated ideas that are not always clearly distinguished. If these are disentangled, three main variants, three different 'others' can be distinguished, and three different thinkers can be associated with these three different 'others'" (p. 74). These three variations can be broken down into the characteristics associated making someone the other, but they will fall under one of these groups. Brons explains that the first is the other as another individual. This simply means they exist as another mind and body that is largely unknowable to the interpreting self. Anyone who is not you, is the other. According to Brons the second is the other constructed in opposition to the self. This is the variation that most are familiar with and that which will be the focus of this research. Essentially, this is the other with an undesirable characteristic that the self either cannot or does not want to relate to that leads to them being defined as the other. Finally, Brons (2015) explains that the third other is a much more abstract notion of the other as someone, or something, outside of and/or in some way opposed to the self. This includes the other as a reflection and projection of the self or as radically other and including both other subjects and the relationships between the self and those others. For the purposes of this research, I focus specifically on the second other and the ways in which, after it has already been constructed, its positionality affects those in relation to it.

When looking at what it means to be the other, one discovers an overwhelming feeling of being on the outside looking in. Whether that means being a minority

surrounded by a culture created to fit the majority, or feeling excluded because you do not fit the standard of the norm, differences can be impactful. Usually it is the differences that are emphasized when one defines the other, as those are the things that are most misunderstood. Not being able to recognize or understand someone else's intentions can cause one to be unsure or, at times, even hostile. However, at the same time, as a society we are drawn to what we find alien to ourselves, whether due to curiosity, fear, or the desire to learn. Lindlof (1995) states, "the other ethnic group, the other economic class, the other gender- often appear to us exotic, fascinating, deviant, repugnant, or incomprehensible, mostly because the normative reference of the other's performance is unclear" (p. 18). That lack of clarity can be both unnerving and interesting, making the other someone who many do not always know how to interact with in various social settings. In a society that often has an "if you're not with us, you're against us" mentality, being the other can be stressful and difficult to negotiate with people around you. As our society has a standard for what it considers "normal," anyone who does not fall within that standard is considered the other. Nakayama and Martin (1993) illustrate this when talking about whiteness in America. They state, "by emphasizing how 'they' are different from 'us,' we reinscribe whiteness as the norm and this 'us' becomes a generalized U.S. American" (p. 114). This is also true in regards to ethnicity, religion, culture, sexuality, ability, etc. By focusing on what has been decided is the norm, we are only serving to compare and emphasize differences, rather than find similarities or accept both as a new norm. In the process, the fear of and aversion to exceptionality is reinforced, rather than challenged.

Our world is a medley of varied age, cultures, religions, races, ethnicities, genders, social and economic statuses, sexual orientations, etc. Within the already vast myriad of differences, every individual person has a multitude of various experiences, thoughts, opinions, desires, and so forth. Simply put, there is no shortage of variety in regards to humanity. And with each of these variances comes an opportunity to learn, step outside of one's comfort zone, and see new perspectives through having a dialogue. However, if those differences are seen as negative, problems can arise. Developing an 'us versus them' mentality can be not only detrimental, but dangerous as well. This can be especially true in an academic setting. By viewing someone as the other, even in the absence of real or implied inferiority, one has classified them as 'not one of us,' and therefore lesser.

Scholars exploring the problem of othering reveal a few common types of othering in higher education. These types include: immigrant othering, racial othering, international student othering, and disability othering. Although othering takes many different forms, highlighting a few examples reveals how othering taking place, and how universities might work to address these issues in the classroom.

<u>Immigrant Othering</u>

Immigrant students are one group that has experienced othering in their education. Having unique needs such as cultural and linguistic differences from their peers, often results in immigrant students being treated differently and not receiving the same academic opportunities as native born students. Immigrants may have difficulties communicating to their instructors and challenges relating to their peers. Vernez and Abrahamse (1996) state, "concerns have been raised that immigrants in U.S. schools and

colleges, with their perceived unique needs, are not given the attention they may require, thereby affecting their educational opportunities as well as their opportunities for eventual success in the U.S. labor market" (p. 2). Although immigrant students may be just as motivated and intelligent as native born students, they are often overlooked or preemptively expected to fail. Instructors may mistake a student struggling to understand, with having a lack of motivation. Vernez and Abrahamse go on to describe the relationships of immigrant students with some of those closest to them in school such as the teachers, professors, and administrators in our educational institutions. He claims that they often describe these youths as, "highly motivated and eager to integrate successfully into schools as well as into the broader American society" (p. 2). However, there is a disconnect between many immigrant students and their peers and instructors. This disconnect can cause discomfort, misunderstanding, and biases. These students may be treated as less intelligent than their peers, when the reality may be they are just struggling with the language in their academic work. The treatment alone may be enough to discourage immigrant students from seeking help in classes. Research shows that racial minority students have similar problems in regards to their educational experiences.

Racial Othering

The United States has a history of racial segregation in schools that still appears in some forms today. Othering racial minorities may come in many different ways but racial spotlighting and racial ignoring may be two of the more prominent in classrooms today. This may take the form of teachers and peers asking the student to speak for their race or ignoring their race at times when subject content may focus on it. Carter (2008) mentions this when describing her time in school as a black minority student. She describes racial

spotlighting as a minority student perceiving that they are being positioned as racially hypervisible, especially when it is by a white teacher or white students. Carter (2008) explains one way in which students describe experiencing racial spotlighting as, "being positioned as a native informant by their teachers and peers" (p. 232). However, I would expand that to all students experiencing any kind of spotlighting due to their perceived differences.

She also describes racial ignoring as a minority student perceiving that they are being positioned as racially invisible in the classroom. This is only the case when they desire to be visible as a racial group member or to be visible at all. Both situations are detrimental to the student's education and may make them feel uncomfortable in the classroom. This form of othering can occur in the context of any difference a student may possess that deems them the other. By being positioned as a native informant they are pressured to speak for the group they are considered to be a part of. This further reaffirms that they are not considered to be a part of the dominant group and that the only way the dominant group can understand them is through this type of translator. Carter (2008) stresses the harm this can do by explaining the physical and psychological discomfort the students experience as a result of spotlighting in the classroom. She emphasizes that hypervisibility can have serious academic consequences on students. Racial highlighting and racial ignoring are problems because instructors they do not promote a welcoming community that engages all of its diversity in a way that is promoting a comfortable learning environment.

International Student Othering

The same discomforts, misunderstandings, and biases experienced by racial minorities are often experienced by international students attending American schools for any extent of time. International students must overcome culture shock, language barriers, and the process of trying to integrate their culture with the new culture they are a part of, while hoping to be accepted by those around them. Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) claim that there are fluctuating degrees of culture shock that international students experience. As they are living in an unfamiliar culture and are no longer surrounded by their usual support system of friends and family, they are also attempting to communicate in a different language and learn through U.S. teaching methods which can often be very different from those in which they easily recognize. The challenging learning environment can be very difficult when combined with the already prevalent pressures associated with trying to perform well academically. If international students are suddenly thrust into an environment where they are made to feel they do not belong, these difficulties are heightened and can ultimately harm their academic performance.

Support is very important to a student's success and being in a new culture that does not offer that support can be detrimental. Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) state, "international students need to feel welcomed, accepted, and included, in order to be motivated to explore the new culture and befriend culturally dissimilar others. They seek friendships to re-create the support network that they miss from their homelands" (p. 553). If an international student feels like the other, rather than welcomed, accepted, and included as they are, the feeling of being "a guest in someone else's home" is very real. To an extent it can even be considered an intruder in someone else's home, if the othering

is severe enough. A fourth group that often experiences othering similar to this within the school system, is students with disabilities.

<u>Disability Othering</u>

Students with disabilities make up a significant portion of the student population. And disabilities vary widely and include some that can seriously hinder their ability to succeed to the same extent as their peers. Hopkins (2011) explains some of the barriers students with disabilities may face in higher education; these can range from physical access problems, to poor teaching practices, to inconsistency between departments, and anything in between. He remarked that these barriers make students with disabilities perform considerable extra work both physically and emotionally; work that their peers do not have to worry about. The differing circumstances already make students with disabilities feel like the other and this is only heightened when they are treated in a less positive way than their peers.

Additionally, other students and staff may not know how to interact with students with disabilities or they may feel it is an inconvenience to have to make alterations to meet their needs. Whatever the case may be, Hopkins (2011) found that, "recent research has identified numerous barriers faced by students with disabilities when they attempt to access the higher education curriculum" (p. 711). This is still true even with recent legislation enacting laws to attempt to prevent such barriers. Hopkins (2011) included this in his statement, saying, "recent legislation means that it is now illegal to treat a student, for reasons relating to a disability, less favorably than a non-disabled student unless this is justified to maintain academic standards" (p. 711). However, this less favorable treatment is still something common among many students with disabilities.

Students who are immigrants, racial minorities, international visitors, or disabled are only a few of the factions that have experienced othering in their time in school. othering effects students throughout their lives and will likely continue on after their time in school. It is important to emphasize the problems with othering and encourage discourse between students to promote mutuality in the long run. The AACU (2015) has claimed that the United States is in the midst of a change. The ways in which we are defining "success" are changing. Less focus is being placed on grades and credits and more is being placed on ensuring students are well prepared for their life after school. The AACU believe this shift in focus has direct implications for what it means to establish development in progressing educational equity. To achieve this, educators must decide if they believe students are successfully achieving the knowledge, adaptive skills, and hands-on experiences that prepare them to apply what they have learned to their lives after school. If every student is given the same confidence and opportunity to achieve success, both in school and after, teachers will be on the positive end of this change. This will take incorporating inclusivity into their pedagogy, being aware of their own identity as well as the student's identities, and doing what instructors can to promote dialogue and discourage othering in the classroom.

Toward Inclusive Excellence in the Classroom

When looking at a specific environment, such as a college or university classroom, othering can be a large concern. Through specific actions, or inactions, by teachers, staff, or other students, the classroom can become a place where the other is treated in harmful ways (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, 2012). Comfort, support, and confidence are crucial to success in higher education, and being othered can hinder any

one, or all, of these important qualities (Lesser, 2014). Specifically, othering can have negative effects on students' education and academic progress by making them feel as though they do not belong or are not on the same level as their peers (Borrero et. al., 2012).

The diversity of student populations in higher education is growing. Mallinger, Gabbard, and Starks (2016) state, "college students are increasingly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, religious/spiritual beliefs, immigration status, social and economic class, veterans' status, and the intersections therein" (p. 9). I would venture to also include diversity in: cultural norms, experience, language, dialect, family dynamics, education, career aspirations, backgrounds, political affiliations, and physical appearance. And still this list could go on. The diversity of students means that some of these students may have needs distinct from their peers. However, all deserve the same respect and opportunity as their peers and all need encouragement and support to fulfill the opportunity to succeed in academics. As such, faculty working within this diversity of students must strive to communicate in ways that do not other students. Faculty need to find ways to respect this diversity, listen to students' diverse perspectives and needs and come to an understanding together in dialogue.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (the AACU) has called for a commitment to equity and inclusive excellence. In their (2015) study, the AACU found that there is a continued disproportionate distribution of opportunity in America and that the effects of this inequality are apparent. The AACU believe that inequity is an issue because, "we have deep and persistent gaps in education, income, and

wealth, and these gaps are widening as our nation becomes more diverse" (p. 3). If we are to question why opportunity in the United States is continuing to be disproportionate rather than growing with the increased diversity, it leads us to ask how and why some are offered opportunities and others are not. These findings also highlight the differences between those who are better able to seek opportunities and those who are discouraged because they feel as though they are incapable of succeeding due to their underrepresented status. As some students are encouraged to pursue higher education, others are not given the same encouragement due to their status as the other. Society, teachers, peers, and sometimes even the student themselves, may be ingrained with the perception that as the other, the student is not as qualified for higher education.

The AACU (2015) believes that expanding access to quality education is the key to making truly inclusive opportunities for all. The AACU explains, "it is key to closing America's deepening divides, strengthening the middle class, and ensuring our nation's vitality" (p. 3). Unfortunately, there are still deep-rooted practices, such as othering, that reinforce inequality at all levels even though there are proven benefits to expanding diversity, especially in an educational setting. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2003) emphasize, "the impact of diversity on learning and democracy outcomes is believed to be especially important during the college years because students are at a critical developmental stage, which takes place in institutions explicitly constituted to promote late adolescent development" (p. 12). When diversity is not embraced, or better methods of communication, to promote inclusive practices in the classroom educators are doing a disservice to their students. This is why the AACU (2015) believes we are failing the very students who will be our future citizens and become our future leaders. In fact, they

believe that with the contemporary demand for workers with higher education and a relevant skill set, the U.S. is lagging behind meeting the country's needs. They state, "this needed talent must come from precisely the segments of U.S. society that the American educational system has underserved in the past and to this day" (p. 3). The underserved segments of American society will have the best chance to solve the problem, if they are able to succeed in higher education. Inclusive practices become a way to help ensure success in the classroom and thus increased success in the workplace.

However, it is not uncommon for underrepresented students to feel as though their access to opportunities, education, and potential jobs is more limited than that of other groups; this is an unfortunate characteristic of contemporary society. Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) explain that for decades the unequal distribution of education has been resting on the shoulders of minorities. Unsurprisingly, this problem of distribution causes minority students to question their education by wondering if they are receiving the same level of education as their peers. The AACU (2015) argues that in order to fix this disparity, higher education will need to make a persistent commitment to equity and inclusive excellence. They believe that in order to do this, we would need to both prepare students for and provide them with, the access to high-quality learning opportunities, and ensuring that students of color and low-income students participate in all forms of college learning (AACU, 2015).

Educational institutions are experiencing more student diversity, which is challenging instructors in the classroom to find new ways to improve communication and to be more inclusive. One such way is by implementing varied inclusive excellence programs and practices. Williams, Berger, and McClendon (2015) describe inclusive

excellence as consisting of four primary elements: a focus on student intellectual and social development, a purposeful development and utilization of organizational resources to enhance student learning, attention to the cultural differences learners bring to the educational experience and that enhance the enterprise, and a welcoming community that engages all of its diversity in the service of student and organizational learning. Each of these four components is aimed at creating a more successful academic environment that fosters learning for all students.

When looking at Williams, Berger, and McClendon's (2015) four primary elements of inclusive excellence, and applying it to a student's college experience, one can see the elements have a lot to offer in regards to a better educational experience. First, "a focus on student intellectual and social development" (p. 6) assumes that inclusive excellence offers the best possible course of study for the context in which education is offered and cares, not only about educational, but also social well-being. Second, "a purposeful development and utilization of organizational resources to enhance student learning" (p. 6) assumes that inclusive excellence seeks to establish an environment that challenges each student to achieve academically at high levels, while simultaneously not excluding any students. Third, "attention to the cultural differences learners bring to the educational experience and that enhance the enterprise" (p. 6) assumes that inclusive excellence is aware of and appreciates the variety of positions, experiences, and beliefs that each student contributes to the overall environment. Finally, "a welcoming community that engages all of its diversity in the service of student and organizational learning" (p. 6) assumes that inclusive excellence puts value on all students' experiences and education, and this brings value to the organization. It can be

very difficult to be an underrepresented student at a university and inclusive excellence is one way college and university instructors can work toward improving the challenging situation many students face.

Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) claim that "institutions are confronted with a growing minority population that has a different value system, an intensified awareness of their minority status, a need for climate inclusiveness and who are first generation to attend college" (p. 20). Each of these new challenges could easily lead to "othering," or it could be an opportunity for discourse, depending on the way communicative situations are handled. There is always a possibility for further educating all students and using situations that could be considered othering as opportunities for education instead (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2003). The best possible educational environment for all students is one of safety and encouragement that inspires learning and inclusive excellence strategies. Having a diverse student population also helps encourage open-mindedness and promote learning.

Studies have shown that diversity in the student population is beneficial for all students. By interacting with other students who are different from oneself in race, religion, socio economic class, culture, etc., students are able to gain new perspectives, and experience a level of empathy and unity they may otherwise never have been exposed. In their writing, Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2003) look to Piaget's theory of intellectual and moral development. Paiget argues that children and adolescents can best develop a capacity to understand the ideas and feelings of others and move to a more advanced stage of moral reasoning when they interact with peers who have different points of view. This idea is extremely important when interested in addressing the

problem of othering. If instructors and students are not able to understand the other, it does not necessarily mean they do not want to. Sometimes instructors and students have simply not yet been exposed to someone different or are not practiced in communicative techniques needed to generate an inclusive climate in the classroom. Vacarr (2003) explains this when saying, "what we understand when we use language to describe our reality is a preconception, a cultural package that we inherit as a result of our upbringing" (p. 131). Knowing this can help to explain the misunderstandings that often occur when interacting with someone whose reality may be different than our own. Vacarr (2003) goes on to say, "we do not all inherit the same language and, thus, we do not all inherit the same truths. The cultural context of truth is denied when dominance and privilege are touted as universal truths" (p. 131). When one is considered the other, they are denied both power and privilege. This denial leads to their truth holding less weight than those around them. The alternative would be finding communicative practices that help students share their truths, and accept each diverse background as a truth in its own right. These types of inclusive practices in the classroom can promote inclusive excellence and there is a possibility for instructors to facilitate this in the classroom.

One of the most effective ways to achieve inclusive excellence in the classroom is by promoting practices and principles of dialogue in the classroom. Dialogic practices can help students learn from each other and provide the opportunity to question their own truths and explore new meanings they may not have known existed before. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2003) state, "higher education is especially influential when its social milieu is different from student's home and community background and when it is diverse and complex enough to encourage intellectual experimentation and recognition of

varied future possibilities" (p. 13). Instructors who promote dialogic practices in the classroom can help students become more able to expand their intellectual horizons and discover new ways of thinking and doing through acknowledging and considering the experiences of the other. In particular, inclusive excellence practices in the classroom can help students overcome the challenges of being othered.

Promoting Inclusive Classroom Climates

Diversity of students is continually growing in higher education and instructors can help promote inclusivity to begin overcoming issues of "othering." Teachers and students alike are experiencing more opportunities to interact with someone whom they may consider the other, which can either promote opportunities or present challenges (Cummins, 2007). It is important for instructors to understand classroom climate to attempt to alleviate some of the potential problems that may arise. Ambrose et. al. (2010) defines classroom climate as:

> The intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environments in which our students learn. Climate is determined by a constellation of interacting factors that include faculty-student interaction, the tone instructors set, instances of stereotyping or tokenism, the course demographics, student-student interaction, and the range of perspectives presented in the course content and materials (p. 170).

Each of these factors can make a big impact on classroom climate, and in turn, a student's experiences and ability to learn.

Classroom climate is important because it can influences a student's engagement and performance in the classroom. A negative environment can be an impediment to learning. This is why it is important for instructors to understand how to create and sustain a positive climate for all students (Garibay, 2015). Through stereotypes, tone, faculty-student interactions and content, instructors are able to

influence if a classroom climate may be positive or negative. Bucholz and Sheffler (2009) state, "the type of environment that a teacher creates and encourages can either increase or decrease a student's ability to learn and feel comfortable as a member of the class" (p. 1). For this reason, it is important for instructors to be aware of their classroom climate, the role they are playing in the creation of the classroom climate, and the effects a negative classroom climate may have on students, especially historically marginalized students.

Many minority students still feel like outsiders in their schools and classrooms. This is causing them to struggle academically and is having an impact on the classroom climate and experiences of students. Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, and Suda (2012) emphasize this when stating, "schools are cultural contexts that have the power and potential to promote students' cultural assets or 'other' youth in a way that keeps them from creating meaningful academic identities" (p. 1). As this can have negative effects on students, it is critical for instructors to approach and promote interacting with someone considered the other as an opportunity to learn and gain new perspectives and to have dialogue. Researching methods that instructors can include in their teaching practice to help prevent othering is important to the overall study as it begins a discussion on improvements that can be made. When instructors are aware of their own identities and biases, their students' identities, how to facilitate difficult dialogues, and how to avoid engaging in microagressions they are more prepared to engage in inclusive excellence.

Students who feel unwelcome or unsafe in the classroom may have a difficult time participating and could end up feeling as though they are not good enough to be

there. They may avoid asking questions or giving their opinions in fear that their voice as

a minority may not be welcomed or taken seriously. Tompkins (2016) states:

> Students don't generally learn well, if at all, in stressful situations. Neuroscience
> tells us that the cortisol released during stress makes learning extremely difficult.
> Setting up a safe and positive learning environment is therefore essential if we are
> to create classrooms where all students feel like they belong and can take the risks
> inherent in learning (p. 25).

By practicing inclusive teaching methods, such as encouraging dialogue among students,

and being aware of their language and actions in regards to each student, instructors can

help to promote a safe and positive learning environment for all students. This is a step in

the right direction and helps to avoid the othering of students and many of the negative

effects that it causes.

There are several communicative practices that can help instructors practice

inclusivity in the classroom. Instructors must first become aware of their own biases,

assumption, and limitations. Armstrong (2011) makes a case for this when claiming,

"fighting our own assumptions- about our students, about what we can or cannot foster in

our classroom, about where and how diversity can thrive- is one of the keys to true

inclusivity in higher education" (p. 60). She claims that we, as instructors, frequently fail

to distinguish inclusivity in course content and diversity in the student population from

pedagogical inclusivity in the classroom. What this essentially means is that if the content

of the course is not in direct conversation with issues having to do with difference and

social justice, then issues having to do with difference and social justice, do not need to

be spoken about in the course. However, this in no way means that those issues do not

exist in the classroom, rather just that they will not be addressed in terms of content. This

mindset, Armstrong would claim, and I would agree, does a disservice to all within the

classroom. As classrooms are social environments, they offer the opportunity for inclusivity to occur or not to occur. I would argue that many times inclusivity begins with the teacher and is disseminated to the students. This calls then for the teacher to first be aware of their own tendencies to other, have dialogues with their students, and focus on making sure every student knows their voice is welcomed.

Students come into, and leave, the classroom with their own beliefs and interpretations of experiences. It is up to the instructor to communicate in ways that promotes inclusivity and open-mindedness during situations, especially when the other may be the focus. Smith (2016) believes that, because of the level of interaction that it involves, teaching goes much further than just the distribution of course material. She claims that with the range of topics there is always a chance someone will say something that may either spark a debate or lead to the sharing of information, personal differences, insights, beliefs, and unique experiences. Situations like this can inspire dialogue and ways to be inclusive or they can incite othering. Mallinger, Gabbard, and Starks (2016) agree with Smith's assessment of the instructor's role when they state, "faculty can set the stage for facilitating difficult dialogues through the creation of a supportive culture" (p. 11). A supportive culture is extremely important to the classroom climate overall. With a supportive and positive classroom climate, instances of othering are less likely to happen and dialogue is more common. Smith (2016) advises developing a rapport with students as well as using positive communication to help them connect and understand the ideas of others. Communicating with the other with the goal of understanding can change the outcome of communication in a more positive way. It can open the door to new perspectives and enhance the learning experience for all students.

There are many ways in which othering can occur within the classroom. It is important for instructors to be aware of othering as it is happening, in all forms that it may happen, and actively practice communication techniques to mitigate the situation. This includes making sure they are not othering students themselves. Microaggressions, for instance, can be considered one example of othering in action. Mallinger, Gabbard, and Starks (2016) define microaggressions as subtle "forms of prejudice and discrimination." They differ from overt prejudice and discrimination in that they are subtle verbal or nonverbal communication. Whether intentional or not, microaggressions are harmful to members of marginalized groups and still prevalent in our classrooms today even with the increase in diversity. Cheung, Ganote, and Souza (2016) agree that it is important for teachers to be aware of microaggressions. They state, "as the diversity of our student population continues to increase, we must work harder to include all learners by raising our own awareness of microaggressions, preventing them whenever we can, and stopping them when they occur" (p. 15). It is much easier for instructors to be mindful of microaggressions, than it is for them to recognize and manage them in a classroom setting. This is why it is important to focus on how communication can create a positive classroom climate from the beginning.

Koro-Ljunberg (2007) speaks about her own teaching experiences with trying to introduce the concept of the other. She claims that with her teaching goals related to encouraging her students to engage in critical thinking and to identify, construct, and respect the voices of the other, she finds a challenge with the students who are not willing to engage in self-reflection. As well as students who initially resist the other, including other voices, identities, theories, methods, and approaches. This is a problem because she

feels that ideally, conversations among learners would result in transformation and change. It is difficult to implement principles of dialogue if there is resistance and both voices are not equally sharing and listening. Although it is possible to not other, and without dialogic interactions in the classroom, it is impossible for all student's voices to be heard so student can come together to understand and work through problems. Instructors must be aware of communication that "others" as well as promote inclusivity in order to tackle problems quickly and use them as an opportunity to engage a larger discussion promoting dialogic transformation and change.

Studying the Experiences of Othering in Higher Education

Given what the research says about othering in higher education and the attempts to be more inclusive as an organization and in the classroom, many questions remain unanswered and some important voices seem to be missing from these studies. Additionally, instructors might become more aware of the real issue of othering by gaining insights from the experiences of students who have been othered in the classroom. As such, my aim in this study is to gain insights into the problem of othering in higher education classrooms by engaging in a qualitative research study inviting students who perceive themselves as the other to tell their stories of being othered. If othering in the higher education classroom is a problem because it affects students' self-esteem, social relationships, and their overall academic success, then we need to applaud the challenging efforts in which institutions and instructors are working diligently to try to overcome. However, these efforts can be improved if we learn more. The first step is to gain more insight from the students who have been labeled the other. The following are the two questions guiding this study:

1. What experiences do higher education students have being othered in the classroom?

2. How do insights from these experiences offer strategies toward improving inclusive classroom climate?

By inviting students to share their experiences being othered and assessing these collective experiences I aim to provide useful insights into the problem of othering in the classroom and useful suggestions to instructors interested in addressing these challenging issues in the classroom. I hope that in bringing more awareness to the issue of othering, through the voices of those who have been othered, this study can promote a spirit of mutuality, and foster more inclusive education practices within the classroom. In the next chapter I review my qualitative methodology and explain the specific methods I used to engage in this study of othering in the higher education classroom.

CHAPTER THREE: QUALITATIVE STUDY OF OTHERING

This thesis study aims to reveal common experiences among students who have felt othered in their higher education classroom and examine the social and academic implications of othering among these students. I intend to employ qualitative interpretive methods to engage in one-on-one interviews with students and to interpret student's experiences of othering in the classroom. Using a qualitative methodology, in the form of interviews, I aim to learn about students' experiences being othered and explore their personal feelings of self-worth and motivation after having been othered in the classroom during their academic career for any perceived reason. In this chapter I reviewed my methods in detail, including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is particularly useful in studying deeper meanings of social and cultural phenomenon. In describing qualitative research, Berg (2006) states, "qualitative procedures provide a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about the actual people researchers observe and talk to or people represented by their personal traces. As a result, qualitative techniques allow researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives" (pp. 8-9). The ability to uncover and share understanding gives qualitative researchers a way to look at their data as a personal experience with a resultant shared meaning that can be translated for a reader. Accomplishing this translation requires active interpretation. The more personal effect of qualitative research allows it to delve into

social settings, cultural ideals, and the ways in which people make sense of their social settings based on their cultural ideals.

Qualitative researchers strive to understand their subject and the motivations behind what they do, rather than just knowing that they do it and how much it is done. As such, qualitative research requires interpretation of the interview data in order for me to gain an understanding of student experiences and translate those to the reader. Lindlof and Taylor (1995) state, "qualitative inquirers strive to understand their objects of interest" (p. 9). Understanding is an important aspect of qualitative research. Silverman (2000) added to this by stating, "if you are concerned with exploring people's life histories or everyday behavior, then qualitative methods may be favored" (p. 1). As the focus of my research surrounds the experiences of those affected by othering in their day to day lives a qualitative methodology can help me in telling my participants stories.

Further, qualitative research methods are well equipped to focus on the deeper meanings of social phenomena. In my research of the othering of students, my goal is to find out what social, emotional, and cultural effects othering may have had on a student. What I care about is understanding the experiences of students that have been othered and how these moments have affected their larger academic experience. As Lindlof and Taylor (1995) state:

> Qualitative research involves the production of knowledge, not its discovery. From the pragmatist point of view, we are in the business of creating the beliefs from which we can act. As such, we are ideological agents fully enmeshed in the ethical consequences of our claims. We are in the business of creating dangerous knowledge- knowledge that changes people's lives. (p. 25)

This statement reflects the larger goals I am hoping to achieve through this study. I hope to produce knowledge about the experiences of being othered to improve inclusive

excellence. I want to find out how our understanding of othering has come to be and what that means for students, as well as to help create new knowledge of othering that helps to positively change the lives of students by informing inclusive excellence efforts. Thus, a qualitative methodology is a useful approach for studying othering and what it means in people's lives to help illustrate problems that need change.

Overall, qualitative research provides me with particular methods of data collection needed to for engaging in this study. Silverman (2000) mentions that deeper understanding of social phenomena is found though methods of qualitative research. I have chosen to do a qualitative study because I want to look at the ways in which othering affects students from their point of view, and qualitative research helps to encourage the participant to articulate their experiences freely. Engaging in this type of study requires identifying and recruiting the participants of this study, engaging in data collection through one-on-one interviews, and performing interpretive analysis of these data. The following sections detail the each of these methods for engaging in this study.

<div align="center">**Participant Selection**</div>

The first step in this qualitative study is to determine appropriate participants. The participants must either be knowledgeable about the subject or have firsthand experience, as well as be willing to share their stories. As Silverman (1993) states, "a strength of qualitative interviewing is precisely its capacity to access self-reflexivity among interview subjects, leading to the greater likelihood of the telling of collective stories" (p. 104). To keep the data authentic and relevant I chose my participants carefully. For my study, I concentrated on finding participants that have experience with othering in higher-educational settings and the classroom more

specifically. Othering in this context can then mean students who are considered tokens for their races, religions, cultures, etc., or any students whose differences have been highlighted in some way that makes them uncomfortable. And because I am interested in the othering of students in higher education, I looked at Boise State University as the source of my participants. I have easy access to students and resources here because I am a student at the university myself. This gives me the advantage of knowing the campus and having access to helpful resources in finding participants.

I am seeking to find out the effects othering may have had on students' educational experiences and the ways in which we talk about othering in the setting of a college classroom. For such a study, it is most valuable then to seek out college to be participants in the study. Berg (2006) encourages reaching out to college students in general because they are typically well-receptive to interviews. He states:

> One easy way of locating a site and population may be to turn to college students. After all, college student are easy to locate on college campuses. They are likely to be willing to take part in an interview- either out of curiosity or to help out another student (p. 40).

Consequently, I focused on college students, rather than lower education students, because they are at a more appropriate age and education level to better articulate their experiences with othering. They also tend to be more reflective of their learning which will help when telling stories of their educational experiences inside the classroom.

I focused specifically on Boise State University students because, in addition to fitting my criteria, I had the most access to these participants. Berg (2006) advises "select a site or setting that is reasonable in size and complexity so the study can be completed within the time and budget you have available" (p. 39). Being a Boise State University student, at the time this study provides me the opportunity to more easily reach out to

other students. Berg (2006) went on to say, "the decision to use a particular research site is tied closely to obtaining access to an appropriate population of potential subjects" (p. 40). By focusing my research on Boise State University students, my goal was to obtain access to these potential subjects who are an appropriate population in regards to the data needed for my research.

To find potential participants I used what Lindlof and Taylor (2011) refer to as snowball sampling. I am cautious to participate in a form of othering in itself by approach students whom I believe may have had experiences with "othering." As such, snowball sampling helped me to make those connections as guided by students. Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) explain snowball sampling as a method that "yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest" (p. 141). By going to various resources around the Boise State University campus such as the Educational Access Center, Gender Equity Center, International Student Services, and Multicultural Student Services and inquiring about potential participants for my study I found students who have been othered in their college experience and were willing to share their experiences. By starting with a few initial participants for this study, I asked them to provide contacts of others who may wish to participate in this study and this process was repeated until I had identified 12 participants for this study.

Twelve students was sufficient for this study because after conducting these interviews I felt able to share collective experiences resonating across these students' stories. Trethewey (1999) explains this idea when describing that the aim of her participation as a researcher in the process of interviewing is focused more on telling the

stories of her participants rather than presenting a clear and unblemished window upon reality. My goal in this study is similar to Trethewey's aim. I engaged in interviews to gain satisfactory knowledge about the experiences of students who have been othered and tell their stories so we could learn from their experiences. As such, interviewing twelve students provided an appropriate amount of stories to find emergent common experiences among the participants.

Data Collection

After identifying the participants of this study I invited them to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The transcripts from the interviews served as the primary source of data for this study. Interviews are excellent methods for gaining firsthand knowledge of a phenomenon and how one directly impacted by that phenomenon feels (Silverman, 1993). Using interviews I was able to gain a more in-depth understanding of the experience of being othered as encountered and described by the participants of this study. Berg (2006) simply states, "interviewing may be defined simply as a conversation with a purpose. Specifically, the purpose is to gather information" (p. 89). The gathering of information is the basic goal of my research and the information gained help guide my study toward some understandings I anticipated and others that were entirely unexpected. Lindlof and Taylor (1995) add that, "interviews are especially well suited to helping the researcher understand a social actors own perspective" (p.167). For my research specifically, I conducted semi-structured interviews. Lindlof and Taylor (1995) explain semi-structured interviews as being informal, with room for flexibility, but also prepared with a list of questions. In this study, I was able to discover perspectives on othering from those who have experienced

it. These interviews were my "bread crumbs" guiding me toward a conclusion which marks the end of this study's journey.

Qualitative interviews are one of the best approaches for answering the questions pertaining to othering because the interview transcripts can help one to ascertain how othering is being talked about and how it is understood in our culture. Researching the cultural implications of othering and how it has come to be, as well as how it is being exhibited today, can open the door to further understanding of this phenomenon. When describing interviews, Lindlof (1995) states, "their purpose is to bring the researcher's attention to such matters as the group or organizations philosophies, purpose, mythic origins, recent history current personnel, procedures, immediate challenges, and perspective agenda" (p. 124). Looking for common experiences among the interview responses by exploring what is said, by whom, how and where helps me gain an extensive understanding of othering and its effects on these students' educational experiences.

After locating participants through snowball sampling I invited each participant to an interview. I conducted the interviews in a private setting of the participant's choice (ranging from coffee shop to private rooms in the library to my office) so that they felt comfortable sharing their experiences without anyone overhearing. The interviews lasted anywhere from a half hour to over an hour and attempted to keep the interview process semi-formal and relaxed to promote a comfortable environment for all participants. Before conducting any interview, I began by telling the participants about the study and having them sign an informed consent form.

In order to gain the knowledge I constructed interview questions that were simultaneously specific and open ended to engage in open conversations with the participant, while not directing the conversation in any specific way. Silverman (1993) states, "the primary issue is to generate data which give authentic insight onto people's experiences" (p. 91). As this is an important aspect of my research, and thus my goal was to develop questions about othering that were broad enough they allowed the participant to speak freely of their experiences. The following is a sample set of questions I asked all the participants:

1. What has your experience been in college?

2. What was a situation in which you felt different in the college classroom?

3. Why do you believe you were treated differently?

4. How did these experiences make you feel? Did you talk to anyone about it?

5. How did this situation affect the way you feel about your education?

6. How did this situation affect your self-esteem?

7. In what way does who you are play a role in your experiences?

8. Did your experiences affect your ability to succeed?

9. Is this feeling associated only with one situation?

10. What do you think would have been different (academically or socially) if this experience(s) did not happen to you?

11. What would you want the university to know about your experience? What can they do?

Asking these questions allowed the participants to open up and explore the depths of their experiences. I gained much insight into the individual stories of students who

identified as being othered in the classroom. Follow-up questions allowed our conversation to flow in ways that made sense for the interview situation and for the stories being told by the participants.

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. I also took field notes in a notebook during the interview to capture some key ideas while making sure to not distract from the interview. In my field notes I attempted to capture anything that stood out during the conversation, such as specific experiences participants have had with othering or anything that helps to explain how the participants' understanding of othering and their experiences with it have been shaped. When the interviews were concluded I spent the following thirty minutes taking more notes capturing my initial reactions or thoughts from the interview. The interview transcripts and field notes were the primary data analyzed for this study.

Data Analysis

Following Berg's (2006) interpretive data analysis techniques, I analyzed the interview transcripts and my field notes through a focused process of interpretation. Berg offers clear and concise steps that the researcher may follow. He states, "when qualitative analysis is undertaken, certain priorities must be established, assumptions made during the design and data collection phases must be clarified, and a particular research course must be set" (pp. 133-134). He begins his description of analyzing interview data by clarifying that to start one's data analysis the researcher must seek naturally occurring classes of things, persons, and events, as well as important characteristics of these items.

For this study, my focus is on the types of ways in which othering takes place and the type of effects it has on students. First, I read through all my transcripts and

corresponding field notes. Then, I looked for common experiences that resonated across

the interviews. I gave each type of experience a code as a way to help me separate

different topics of interest into larger ideas. Berg (2006) makes sure to note that it is

important the researcher focuses on naturally-occurring categories rather than ones they

hope to find. As such, I used codes that emerged in the terms offered by my interview

participants. He goes on to say that when every interview transcript has been read and

every index sheet has been appropriately annotated, the researcher should have a

comprehensive means for accessing information. As such, I created a type of filing

system noting different codes and the experiences of othering in which they related. I

also linked each experience of othering with different affects as described by the

participants. This allowed me to access numerous pieces of the data simply, flexibly, and

efficiently. When my initial coding was complete, I re-read the transcripts and

highlighted each according to the codes I created. This process allowed me to consolidate

the codes to identify similar experiences that emerged across interviews.

At the end of this analysis, I had identified five common experiences and several

effects of these experiences that resonated across these interviews. In the following

section I aim to retell these collective experiences in the participants' terms and I hope

that by doing so I am better able to show not only how othering is happening in the

classroom but how it has real effects on students' academic lives. I also provided

responses to my guiding research questions of "what experiences do students have being

othered in higher education?" and "how do insights from these experiences offer

strategies toward improving inclusive classroom climate in the classroom?" I then

followed the presentation of findings with a discussion as to how these findings resonate

with current literature on othering in higher education and inform efforts toward inclusive

excellence practices in the classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Interviewing twelve Boise State University students provided the opportunity to gain insights on students' experiences being othered in higher-education classrooms. While the participants described having very different academic backgrounds and goals, each explained that they had repeatedly been made to feel different and it had in some way affected their educational experience. Of the six men and six women participating in this study, one was a student with a physical disability, two were international students, one was a nontraditional student, two were students from ethnic groups, two were refugee students from eastern Europe, two were women currently in the military, one was an international student with a disability, and one was a nontraditional student with a physical disability. I am highlighting these specific qualities of the participants because this is the way each student chose to identify his or herself and each stated that these identifying characteristics were in some way related to their experiences with othering in the classroom.

Specifically, during interviews these students explained their experiences being othered, or treated differently, because of their identifying characteristics. What emerged across the interviews were some common experiences across the students' stories about being othered in the classroom. In particular, analysis of the interviews revealed five common experiences about being othered in the classroom. The common experiences include: feeling singled out, becoming involuntary spokespeople, being less likely to participate, having to prove their worth, and feeling silenced. These experiences were

mentioned several times by more than one participant. For instance, across the 12

interviews, spotlighting was mentioned 17 times, tokenism was mentioned 13 times, lack

of voice was mentioned 11 times, loss of desire to participate was mentioned 11 times,

and a need to work harder was mentioned 13 times. Although students may feel they are

being othered for various reasons, the common experiences emerging from the analysis

show how othering itself manifests in similar ways across these varied student

experiences. In the following sections I will review each of these common experiences

and summarize these experiences by responding to my first research question asking how

students experience being othered in the classroom.

<u>Singled Out</u>

The first and most salient experience that emerged across the interviews was that

of spotlighting. Spotlighting is the act of making one hyper-visible (Carter, 2008). In the

classroom this is displayed as instructors directing specific questions, assigning specific

tasks, or directing activities that highlight a student, or students, difference from their

peers. Students experienced this in various ways. For instance participants explained this

idea as feeling "put on the spot," "outed," "put on the table," and "singled out." This was

a very common experience among the participants. Almost all of the students I

interviewed mentioned spotlighting in some way, making it the most prevalent pattern to

emerge, as well as the most directly related to obvious negative feelings developing in the

classroom.

Several students mentioned that feeling othered often began during the first few

moments of class. It seems it has become a fairly common practice among instructors to

have students on the first day of class stand and say their name and answer a question of

the instructor's choosing. The questions are typically something along the lines of "what is your major?" and "tell us a fun fact about you." Although this activity may seem like a quick and efficient way for students and instructors to learn each other's names, it spotlights individual students, if only for a moment. This form of spotlighting can become harmful, however, when students feel that disclosing their name or some "fun fact" positions them as being different. For instance, Igor mentioned that every time he is asked to do this activity he is left feeling awkward, getting weird looks, and like the only thing his peers actually know about him is that his name is unusual. Rather than being helpful, he believes, "it's more of like this is my name and people look at you and you just kinda want to sit down and don't let people look at you." He believes that this activity strips him of the opportunity to express his complex identity and instead only offers a chance to highlight one thing about his identity. He expressed this when stating, "it's better when you can get in groups and introduce yourself because then you can explain where you're from and who you are rather than them [classmates] just hearing your name and giving you weird looks." Similarly, Lilith has had comparable experiences with this situation. However, instead of only stating her name, she was asked to disclose more than she was comfortable with. She explained that "during roll-call when they notice your name is spelled differently and then they [instructors] look at you and make you basically say everything about where you come from." She went on to add:

> I just don't like when all eyes are on me. I'm kind of a shy person and I didn't ask for my skin to be brown, I didn't ask to be Indian so you don't need to ask where I'm from, you don't need to ask about my family and if I eat Indian food every night.

Although Igor's felt he did not have the opportunity to explain his name, Lilith felt she was asked to explain more than she may have wanted to, both participants felt spotlighted because their names were unfamiliar to the instructors or not common within the culture.

A couple other participants described being treated differently because of their names, however in different contexts. Dario, for example, described a situation in which one of his professors constantly repeated what she said to the class to him with no explanation. "She would specifically look at me and go 'Dario' and then repeat the same thing again to me as if I didn't understand it like everyone else." He described this confusing behavior as being unnecessary and frustrating and could not think of an explanation for it aside from his name on the role sheet being clearly foreign. While he understood her directions the first time, being displayed in front of the class made him question whether or not he did understand, and if the other students saw him as needing more guidance than the rest.

Jessica and Nora, both women currently in the military, described feeling "singled out" or spotlighted because of being in uniform. Although this took form in several different ways, both mentioned they felt most singled out in a class where the instructor required students in ROTC to sit separately from the rest of the class. Nora stated, "in my military history class, all of the ROTC cadets are required to be in alphabetical order in the front of the classroom. I think about the students in the back that don't even have to take the class, how lucky they are they don't even have to take this class." Jessica's comment about this situation reflected this very closely. This requirement clearly brought on negative feelings toward the class as both students mentioned this making them feel isolated and different from the rest of the students in the class.

A couple other participants described scenarios where they were spotlighted when asked to do something differently than their peers. Barbara, who describes herself as having an, "invisible disability" that prevents her from participating in some classroom activities, such as taking notes or exams by hand, has experienced this. She told me a story about a time a professor asked her to get up in the middle of class and leave to take an exam elsewhere due to her disability. She stated:

> When we had the final he pretty much had me get up in front of everybody and leave the room when I had to go and type my answers. He wouldn't let me bring my laptop in, so I had to get up from our assigned seating and march my little handicapped body out of the room. That was pretty upsetting for a seventeen-year-old in college.

Barbara explained that throughout the class the professor made it very clear that he did not agree with the special accommodations, and because she did not look as though she had a disability he did not find her deserving of the special accommodations he was asked to give her. She stated, "he pretty much felt like people like me were getting special treatment and making him have paperwork which he told me to my face." She also mentioned that this sort of "outing" seemed to be a reoccurring scenario throughout her years in higher education. She described feeling uncomfortable in situations where instructors asked students who needed to use laptops to sit in the front row. She stated, "it's a classroom and they aren't monitored and so they'll say 'everybody with a disability who has a laptop can sit in the front row.' Well when you're the only person doing that, ya know..." She went on to say, "I felt in my education outed a lot and when I was outed people can't look at me and know my disability." These stories reveal moments when students were spotlighted by instructors resulting in making a student's

difference known to the rest of the classroom. In Barbara's words it came off as "hey look this person is different."

<u>Involuntary Spokesperson</u>

Another common experience among the participants that emerged from the interviews was the idea of tokenism. Zimmer (1988) describes someone considered the token as, "someone who meets all of the formal requirements for entrance into a group but does not possess the 'auxiliary characteristics' (especially race, sex and ethnicity) that are expected of persons in that position (p. 65)." Tokenism occurs when instructors ask "token" students to speak for the entire group they are a part of to share their perspective for the rest of the class who is not a part of their group. Tokenism emerged among more than have the participants in stories when instructors asked students to speak on behalf of a larger group of people, based on their related ethnicity, culture, occupation, or any other identifying factor, often left participants of this study feeling pressured into being involuntary spokespeople. The act of tokenizing, not only highlights students differences, but also puts students in a situation where they feel like they must be a representative for everyone who is somehow similar to them whether they want to be or not. Dario described an experience being tokenized when he stated:

> There are a lot of times where different professors might ask you to give the opinion of an entire culture or country, you know different situations when they're teaching, especially history classes or marketing classes, when they're talking about different groups of people and then they'll be like "oh what does your country think of this" or "how do things sell in your country?" as if we're specialists on a country.

Of all the students who mentioned experiencing tokenism of some kind, most described feeling as though they had to offer a great response to represent the group of people they were being asked to speak for well. Additionally, most admitted to feeling unqualified

and uncomfortable attaching their individual experiences with an entire group of people because they shared one characteristic. Diana emphasized that is stating, "I felt really put on the table and everyone was looking at me and I wanted to have the best fitting answer but I can't because I can't talk for them. I can just talk for me."

It was also mentioned several times that the tokenism was associated with incorrect or offensive stereotypes. One of the best examples of tokenism associated with a stereotype was offered by Harrell, an international student from Pakistan. He described a situation where, during a discussion in class on the ways in which women and men are treated differently, his professor asked him to describe how women are treated in Pakistan. Harrell said:

> I got pointed out being the only international student in the class and he [the professor] was like "well you're from Pakistan right? So how are women treated in Pakistan?" And the way he asked this question, his tone of voice was so different I could tell it was saying that women are treated differently at home. You're sitting in a discussion class with 20-25 people and everyone starts looking at you wondering what does he have to say about his culture. I am from 75,000 miles away so everybody starts looking at me like what does he have to say and they are expecting something drastic or really different.

Upon answering his professor's question, Harrell described feeling as though he would spend the rest of his time in college being an ambassador for his country. He stated:

> All that situation made me feel was that this is my first semester in college and I am going to be here 4-5 years, and it's my job to answer people in the nicest way possible and clarify that no this is not how it is. I'm an ambassador for my country kind of, in this school, in this university, in this city, in this state. I think I should portray a really good image, not just a good image but what it actually is.

This situation put a lot of pressure on Harrell who wanted to represent his country in a positive way.

However, as several students noted, they are not able to speak for others because they have different experiences or they simply may not know the answer and are afraid of

looking uninformed or unintelligent. For instance, Jessica mentioned being afraid to ask

questions in class because she did not want to be the voice of all in the military. She

revealed feeling uncomfortable asking questions in class at the risk of asking a "dumb"

question and having it portrayed as her speaking for the army. She stated, "I could never

really participate in the classroom because like I said before you can't really speak for

yourself. Everyone looks at you and thinks you're speaking for the army." Nora, who is

also in the military, mentioned a similar sentiment but spoke on controversial topics and

not wanting her opinions as an individual to be associated as the opinions of those in the

same uniform. She spoke on feeling the need to separate herself from the situation before

she could offer her opinions in class. She stated, "sometimes, before I'd speak in class,

I'll disclaim this is my opinion not the whole United States army." Although it may be

well intentioned on the instructor's part, as it is likely they to want to embrace students'

differences and encourage a variety of voices, the feeling of being othered experienced by

some students is apparent. Even if the gesture may seem like encouragement toward

hearing differing opinions, it may ultimately lead to tokenism and pressuring students to

voice opinions much larger than they are comfortable with. Being overly encouraging of

student voice is not always the case. In some scenarios students I have interviewed feel as

though their voices are being suppressed or do not matter.

<u>Less Likely To Openly Participate</u>

Participation is essential to success in the college classroom. Participation

helps students to feel included; it demonstrates their knowledge of the material, and it

offers opportunities for further education. Students who felt othered in the classroom,

however, consistently expressed the experience of losing their desire to participate,

making claims such as: "I was definitely less likely to openly participate," "I didn't want to go to that class and I came into work to complain about it almost every day after class," "in education I kept more to myself in class," and "I would say my freshman and sophomore year it effected the way I participated in classes." Each of these comments was made by a different student in reference to how feeling othered affected the student's feelings about their academic experience.

For instance, several students mentioned not wanting to participate because they didn't feel like they belonged or assumed their opinions would not be welcome. Others mentioned not feeling good enough or smart enough to participate based on interaction with instructors and peers. Both David and Harrell spoke on feeling inadequate to contribute in the classroom. David said, "I was really hesitant to contribute because I really didn't know how people would take my input." Harrell shared this sentiment when stating, "I didn't want to talk to more people because I felt like when my confidence was shattered I just thought like I'm probably not as good as these people so I shouldn't talk to them." Harrell's comment was directly related to an instance of spotlighting in the classroom, whereas David's comment came from feeling displaced. However, both these students and several others agreed their time in the classroom would have been more productive and beneficial had the felt it was a more inclusive climate.

When asked what might have been different had students not felt othered in the classroom, replies included assumptions of more participation. Oz stated, "I feel like I would just be like one of the other students who just listened and chimed in to what is going on in class" and Cece included, "I would feel more welcome I would feel more like I belong in a way and at times not discouraged to speak up and voice my opinion." As

many instructors may view student participation as a very beneficial thing, the theme of students feeling unable or unwelcome to participate causes a less than ideal classroom environment. Although students lack of desire to participate stems from various different internal conflicts, the root of the problem seems to always begin with an experience of being othered. Consequently, participants explained that they needed to work harder than others to succeed or to displace the inadequacies experienced by being othered.

Proving Worth

Another common experience among the participants of this study is that othering in the classroom led to a desire to go the extra mile and work harder than their peers. Half the students I interviewed explained how they often felt they needed to work harder or needed to prove that they belonged in the classroom. Every student who mentioned feeling this way followed with a story of academic success from their additional hard work. However, the problem stems from the initial feeling of one needing to "prove themselves" as it emphasizes the classroom as a place where not everyone belongs and some must work harder than others in order to achieve the same goals. These students expressed a sense of needing to prove they are as "worthy" of being in the classroom as their peers.

Several students mentioned feeling they had to work harder than their peers to prove themselves. David mentioned feeling this way being a nontraditional student in his classes. He said, "I have to work twice as hard to prove that I am competent and I have looked at the material. I felt like I had to work for it and earn it." He went on to talk about how instructors and peers seemed to think that he should either know everything or know nothing and treated him in ways that illustrated that thought process. He mentioned

feeling as though he always had to be cognizant of his position in the class and show that he was able to do just as well, if not better, than traditional students. Cece echoed this sentiment in her statement and also touched on the feelings of self-doubt that accompanied this experience. She stated:

> At first you definitely feel like you don't belong, and my self-esteem, I felt like maybe I don't know what I'm talking about but then you obviously just have to work hard and prove, not only to them, but to yourself that you do belong there and no one can take that away from you.

Although many students I interviewed felt pride in their hard work, others did not have a choice but to work harder than their peers if they wanted to succeed. For instance, Oz explained that having a physical disability limited his ability to participate at the same level as his peers in some situations, and the lack of inclusive activities and assignments meant having to work more to understand the same material other students are provided. As Oz explained, "I have to go an extra mile in order to keep up with everyone." When a problem such as this persists across classes, this may mean some students are putting in more hours or more energy than their peers to be afforded them same opportunities other students are easily granted.

One story that really struck me was Barbara's story about her 'invisible' disability. Due to her physical disability she had the option to have accommodations for her classes which in theory should help to produce a situation in which she was allotted the same opportunities as her peers. However, as she disclosed her story to me, it became clear that the process of requesting accommodations was othering and resulted in needing to work harder. Barbara stated, "for a year I stopped using my accommodations because it was just easier not to have to have that conversation at the beginning of the semester." She explained to me that due to the accommodations she felt like her education was a

burden on other people. Barbara explained shocking experiences in the classroom, as illustrated by her comment:

> I think that it gave me a really thick skin of being able to tolerate things because when you've had teachers call you gimpy, like I have, or crippled or all these different things, it kind of wounds you to take whatever anybody is going to give you in college.

However, she also discussed how these experiences led to resilience and a desire to persist, differences and all.

The experiences of going the extra mile, motivated some students to complete their degree and succeed; despite being othered. The feelings often seemed a mixture of negative experiences fueled by motivation to succeed such as Lilith stating, "it just makes me want to get my degree faster and do more when I get my degree" or David stating, "every time I felt marginalized it made me angry, which made me work harder." Although there certainly is room for improvement within the classroom, I don't want to ignore the individual student's triumphs, motivation, or inspirational reasoning for choosing to speak up and participate in this study. Students such as Cece, who has looked upon classroom after classroom of predominantly white male students in her discipline, and chose to end her interview by saying, "it definitely was a wakeup call, but just because I'm the only Latina in there just means that I need to graduation and I need to continue my education and that way 5-10 years from now there will be more Latinas sitting in that classroom." My hope is that through this study I will be able to raise awareness of othering, promote inclusive excellence, and encourage all students to feel welcome and heard in the classroom.

<u>Silenced</u>

The fifth common experience explained by the interview participants is that of being silenced. One of the questions I posed to interview participants was if they had spoken to anyone about the times they felt othered. The answer among all participants was overwhelmingly "no" and the reasoning was almost entirely because they either felt their opinions and experiences would not matter or that the administration would side with the faculty no matter the situation. In a word, they felt silenced because they did not think anything would change. In particular the status of "professor" was called out as something they cannot overcome. Harrell mentioned this directly when saying, "obviously the university is going to favor the professor's voice more because they work at the university." In some cases students just felt as though they were not heard and in other cases students had subsided to their perceived reality that professors with tenure could do and say whatever they wanted so there was no point in saying anything. Nora reflected this sentiment when saying, "I've heard it a lot before that professors who are tenured basically do or say what they want and it's totally okay because they aren't going to get fired." Lilith expressed a similar feeling stating, "professors should try to connect to the students more than just be the tenured professor that doesn't have to worry about losing their job."

Those students who felt silenced in the classroom believed it detrimental to their academic learning, and mentioned their college classroom experiences could have been enriched through more inclusion. For instance, Lilith stated the following about classroom discussions:

> I think that the discussion could have been better and I think that it could have
> forced me to get outside of my comfort zone to see it from a different perspective

as well as other students so I always think that talking about it and learning from different areas and having more class participation talking always helps because everyone comes from a different background.

This sentiment that things would be better if inclusive practices were employed was echoed several times throughout my interview process. Students who have felt othered, not only want to be heard, but they also want to be exposed to the experiences of others and feel as though they are a part of an inclusive community for all.

One idea that emerged across the interviews was that this inclusion actually begins with the instructor. David articulated this best when he stated, "I think the faculty needs to try to include and see everyone in their classroom as a resource and a potential whether old or young." He, and several of the other participants, felt that this lack of inclusion was very detrimental to student's ability to feel equal in the classroom. He went on to add, "when people end up marginalized, when no one asks them when they feel kind of left out, then yea you just dry up and blow away. It's bad. I have felt left out." Unfortunately, this matter is not always as simple as supporting inclusion. Several participants voiced concerns that they believe there are no reprimands for professors who do not practice inclusivity, and as such, even if they were to voice their opinions they would remain unheard. Barbara expressed this concern when stating "I think accountability needs to happen when your students come with these stories and to me it's a human rights violation." The experience of feeling that any complaint would not be heard results in the common experience of being silenced.

This silence seems the result of a stigma surrounding the role of a tenured professor. The participants of this study felt that professors have the ability to do and say whatever they want without repercussions. To a student who already feels marginalized,

this impression seems to also make them feel powerless and thus silent to the issues they face. When speaking about her experience in the classroom Nora stated, "unfortunately, the professor is tenured, I've heard it a lot before that professors who are tenured basically do or say what they want and it's totally okay because they aren't going to get fired." Harrell shared a similar sentiment mentioning that it isn't really fair the student's voice isn't voiced and that the university does not take action because, "students are just students. You have only so many professors and how many thousands of students at BSU. Obviously they are going to favor the professor's voice more because he works for the university." In various different ways, this idea of not sharing experiences of being othered kept emerging. Although it was not clear how much each student knew about the tenure process itself, it seemed that some professor's actions spoke loudly to the student's previous exposure to tenure stigmas, whether that be through media or word of mouth. Nora reflected this ideas when she mentioned, "I feel like tenured professors have this demeanor of that they can do and say what they want." She went on to add, "I have heard other stories from other students who have had racial issues with professors but they are tenured and all they have to do is apologize and it can be some half-assed apology." Other participants went on to add that this perceived behavior reaches farther than just the classroom in that when students do take action if often feels ignored. In her story, Barbara mentioned that in her four years of undergraduate schooling she often found that when one makes a complaint it often goes nowhere. She stated, "I think that what we are talking about is a much bigger issue than just 'oh be more coy about it', it's talking about when you're going against a professor and saying I don't want to be treated this way." When students not only feel othered, but also feel voiceless and powerless to stop it,

those feelings feed into their lack of willingness and desire to participate or even be in the classroom. Students who feel as though they do not have a voice are also less likely to want to engage in class discussions, speak with their peers, or voice their confusion.

I would like to note that one of the questions I asked students was what they would want the university to know about their experiences and what they thought the university might be able to do. Multiple students mentioned they would be happy just to know that the university was aware of the problem and were trying to work toward solving it. I believe this speaks directly to students feeling as though they don't have a voice and that their complaints aren't being heard or taken seriously. Several students I interviewed agreed with my assumption that othering was not usually intentional; so much as it was a lack of awareness on the instructors end. This notion led to several suggestions of ways in which this problem may be alleviated. Multiple students suggested classes or workshops dealing directly with bringing awareness to othering or ways in which to conduct classes so that all students feel comfortable and included. As I know developmental workshops such as this are already offered to university staff, there may be a lack of accountability in regards to actually going to them. As that was the most prevalent suggestion students themselves gave as a way to relieve the problem "of othering" I believe it is important to consider as a recommendation for teaching.

Summary

In summary, through interviews with current Boise State students, I was able to find patterns of, feeling singled out, becoming involuntary spokespeople, being less likely to participate, having to prove their worth, and feeling silenced, each connected directly to students feeling othered in the college classroom. Each of these common experiences

had a negative impact on student's academic life and resulted in students feeling different in the classroom. Overall, it seems that the practice of spotlighting and tokenism resulted in withdrawing from participation in the classroom and a need to work harder than peers to be valued, and being silenced maintains these practices with their unfortunate consequences.

I found spotlighting to be the most prevalent pattern across my interviews. Participants mentioned feeling hyper-visible in scenarios where instructors would single them out, ask them to do individual tasks, and even in the general classroom setting when they had to disclose their names in a way that turned all attention to them, even momentarily. Although every student I interviewed self-proclaimed to be "different," they were uncomfortable with the context and way their difference, or differences, were essentially "outed" in the classroom. The methods of this study helped reveal common experiences of othering in the classroom and varied practices that unnecessarily highlighted students' differences in a way that did not embraced them, but rather, displayed them.

Closely tied to spotlighting, tokenism was also a very dominant problem for students in the classroom with the main concern being speaking for others. Participants mentioned feeling uncomfortable and unqualified to answer questions pertaining to the entire group they are a part of. They acknowledged that although they share one part of their identity with a group of people, their life experiences are vastly different, and being asked to speak for them aligns them as an unwilling representative for the group. This also had the effect of assigning students to that specific group and thus differentiating them from the rest of the students in the classroom.

Students who were othered also experienced the loss of desire to participate and the need to work harder than peers to prove themselves. Often in the interviews, students would pair spotlighting and tokenism with a loss of desire to participate. It seemed that their experiences either made them want to focus as little additional attention on themselves as possible, or they were afraid other students would now see them differently so they did want to interact with them. Students mentioned not wanting to participate because they felt they did not belong or they were worried their heightened status as "being different" would cause other students to not want to interact with them. The loss of desire to participate did not, however, hinder student's aspirations to, not only succeed in class, but made it a student's objective to work hard to surpass expectations—to prove they were indeed worthy.

Students who were othered also expressed being motivated to work harder than their peers and prove themselves worthy of being in the classroom. While working hard might be seen (on the surface) as part of the task of an active student, the reason for why these students wanted to work hard was arguably not productive. Many participants expressed pride in their ability to overcome the challenges of being othered, and use it as fuel to motivate themselves toward success in the classroom. However, as the motivation is a product of experiences with othering, some students acknowledged this response was based on their individual self-perception and knowledge that they could succeed if they put the extra work in. The problem lies in students' experiences leading them to feel as though they are not equal to their peers and must work harder to achieve the same results or prove themselves worthy of being in the classroom with everyone else.

The experiences associated with being othered seems to be maintained and perpetuated by the experience of being silenced. Student's feeling as though they did not have a voice in the classroom seemed to be split into two varying concerns. Student's either felt their opinions were not heard or asked for, or on the more extreme end, they felt that if they had problems with a professor they would be entirely disregarded. Both issues focused heavily on a lack of student voice in the classroom. In the first scenario, students mentioned feeling as though there was no appreciation for their opinions or that they simply were not asked for. In the second, students expressed their frustration that there didn't seem to be anywhere they could go or anyone they could talk to if they had a problem with a professor because of the perceived lack of accountability. Overall, these findings help respond to my first guiding question.

Analysis of the interviews revealed common experiences among students who have been othered in the classroom. More specifically, analysis of the interviews allows me to respond to my first research question: What experiences do higher education students have being othered in the classroom? Collectively, the participants in this study experienced spotlighting and tokenism as part of regular classroom life. Students who were othered also experienced a lack of desire to participate in the classroom while becoming motivated to prove themselves through success in their classes. Further, the participants of this study experienced being silenced; preventing them from expressing any concerns about the practices of othering or their consequences for student learning, achievement, and growth. Overall, the findings of this study reveal common experiences of othering that seem to imply a type of cycle of ongoing practices and consequences of othering that are perpetuated due to the silencing of student voices in expressing concerns

about such practices. In the following section I discuss the findings of this study in terms of the literature on identity, dialogue, and creating inclusive classroom climates and I respond to my second guiding question asking how understanding these common experiences might enhance efforts to improve inclusive excellence in the classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The findings of this study relate to current research on identity and dialogue. And the common experiences of being othered in the classroom have the potential to offer insights into strategies used to promote inclusive classroom climates. In this chapter I discuss these findings in terms of the literature on identity and othering, as well as use the insights from the findings to offer strategies for instructors that they may be able to implement in their classrooms to avoid the othering of students. Embracing varied principles of dialogue theory I provide some general recommendations to improve inclusive classroom climates. The findings of this study reveal salient experiences, that if addressed through improved inclusive practices in the classroom or larger institutional changes, can be avoided in the future and enhance the experiences of students in higher education. The next step then, is to implement strategies to avoid othering students in the classroom and create spaces for voicing concerns about being othered. As such, the aim in this chapter is to respond to my second research question: How do insights from these experiences offer strategies toward improving inclusive classroom climates.

 Identity

Each student that I interviewed described their identity, or a large factor of their identity, as being the major reason resulting in their being treated as the "other." Each student claimed to be "different" and aware of their difference or minority status. When asked how they self-identified, each student answered differently. However, the consensus was that they did not identify as part of the "majority" or "norm." As

intersectionality makes clear, the students each have multiple, layered identities, are part of more than one community, and are likely simultaneously having different experiences. However, as intersectionality also tells us, these identities are derived from social relations, history, and the operation of structures of power (Symington, 2004). This was then relevant when the students were describing a singular part of their identity as being the contributing factor leading to their status as the "other." Language associated with spotlighting and tokenism highlight only one fragment of a student's identity, and at times, the fragment students least want highlighted.

Although each student claimed a different identity, they all ultimately assumed the same role, the role of the "other." As we have come to know identity as being constructed through language (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004) it becomes apparent that through the language associated with spotlighting and tokenism, the students in this study have assumed a new identity of the other. In other words, their complex identities were reduced to "the one who is different from the rest." Rather than celebrating intersectionality or identities as multiple and fluid, these findings confirm the notion that othering reduces identity to a singular mark. While the identities of the participants were different and multifaceted; the experiences of spotlighting and tokenism reduced them to a singular identity of other. As such, the consistent variable was that of being underrepresented. This leads me to believe that specific identity does not play a role in this study, but rather a more general population of underrepresented students that are experiencing being othered. This is important to note as it does not assume blatant discrimination so much as it calls attention to the emphasized nature of underrepresented students as being different from the norm. Spotlighting students for any reason focused

on their perceived or claimed identity quite literally highlights their difference. The same is true in regards to asking students to speak for an entire group. Tokenism not only focuses all attention to one fragment of a student's identity, it places them as a representative for that portion of their identity whether they associate with it or not. For these reasons it is important for instructors and students consider how principles of dialogue may better prepare them for the classroom experience.

<u>Dialogue</u>

Dialogue theory offers a lens to address the challenging problem of how to know the other person and reach a mutual understanding. In this study, the experiences of lack of participation and silence seem to confirm dialogue theory's assertion that being othered (or treated as an "it") breaks off the conversation and prevents mutual understanding from taking place.

Dialogue theory, however can also provide a response to this problem. Dialogue may offer a solution to othering in classrooms because I believe, from what I have gathered from interviews, the lack of dialogic practices in the classroom is what is causing the majority of problems that these stories have revealed. Participants mentioned not feeling as though they had a voice in the classroom or as though if they spoke up they would be ignored. The failure to affirm students, promoting generate a sense of reciprocity and mutuality seems to perpetuate lack of dialogue and result in multiple voices not being heard or considered in the classroom. Because the defining characteristics of dialogue include the aim to deepen understanding, challenge and change previously held beliefs, and encourage reciprocity and mutuality (Black, 2008;

Simpson, 2008; Pouos, 2005; Kim & Kim, 2008; Barge & Little, 2002), dialogue is precisely what is needed to address the problems of "othering."

I do not believe instructors are necessarily trying to "other" students but the lack of awareness, understanding, or preparedness seems to prevent dialogue from taking place resulting in students, with much to contribute, losing a desire to participate and ultimately being silenced. While achieving a genuine dialogue between instructors and students may not always be possible in the classroom, embracing basic principles of dialogue can be an important beneficial first step to understanding the problems that are happening and working toward addressing them. In this way both parties can hope to understand who the "other" is, how they identify, their stresses and concerns, and how the classroom can become a more inclusive environment. Instructors may reach a better understanding of student's apprehensions regarding spotlighting and tokenism. Students may feel as though they have a voice in the classroom and not as though they have to work harder to prove they belong. Although this is not the only solution I will suggest, working toward practicing basic principles of genuine dialogue in the classroom is an important place to start. Each instructor, student, and classroom is different and may require different approaches to reach inclusive excellence but they each should start with the mutuality, open-mindedness, and human connection that dialogue theory calls for in order for change to happen.

<u>Promoting Dialogic Practices to Promote an Inclusive Classroom</u>

My findings seem to confirm much of the ideas reviewed in the literature on identity, dialogue, othering, and inclusive excellence practices. However, it also has much to offer these areas of study. For instance, my findings confirm that spotlighting

and tokenism are problems needing to be addressed in the university classroom. My findings also confirm that the examples of underrepresented groups who are frequently othered (due to race, disability, international or refugee status, military affiliation, or untraditional status) are the same groups who emerged as part of my snowball sampling and thus became participants of my study. Student who felt othered for racial or disability reasons, as well as international and immigrant students, were a part of those who offered to be interviewed for my study as well as those who I often found mentioned in literature regarding students and "othering." Although I ultimately ended up with a more diverse group of people, it reinforced what the current trends revealed in the literature.

However, my findings about the experience of being silenced seemed to contribute to this literature on othering. In particular, little scholarship on othering focused on the possible reason why othering persists and is maintained institutionally. My findings seem to indicate that students are hesitant to speak about their experiences of othering because of the structures that make up the university system. In particular, the sense that instructors and professors can do what they like in the classroom seems to be a significant reason why the practices that other students are maintained. This finding is especially important to me because if silence is the reason why the practice of othering is maintained, maybe by promoting useful dialogic practices we can find ways to break the cycle of othering and move toward more inclusive classroom environments. I believe the most beneficial way to promote inclusive excellence is to include students in the conversation about spotlighting and tokenism and the consequences of being othered.

As inclusive excellence is an active process with the goal being those in higher education achieving excellence in learning, teaching, student development, and

institutional functioning, it is important that we are always working toward inclusive excellence. Through diversity, inclusion, mutuality, and open-mindedness inclusive excellence is possible. The findings of this study, revealing common experiences among students with "othering," offers a better understanding of what the need for more inclusive practices in the classroom. Further, these findings reveal that that the barrier to inclusivity is othering and silence, because mutual understanding and reciprocity in talk is absent. Dialogue then is cast as an important practice if we are to achieve understanding and mutuality to start the process toward inclusive excellence. However, it takes mutuality to practice dialogue, thus what an instructor takes away from that dialogue should be used to promote an inclusive classroom climate. Basically, for students to truly feel heard, want to participate in classes, and feel equal to their peers, classroom practices must incorporate principles of dialogue to generate more inclusive classroom climates.

Because othering actions, such as spotlighting and tokenism, can lead to students feeling disconnected from their peers, they often result in a lack of classroom unity. Whether a few students feel as though they do not belong or the entire class lacks cohesiveness, it can affect the classroom climate. Since classroom climate encompasses the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environments in which students learn, there are many aspects for instructors to be aware of (Ambrose et. al., 2010). However, through this study I have found that students who feel othered are not so much aware of the overall classroom climate as they are about their own personal discomfort or lack of inclusion. Not one student that I spoke with mentioned the classroom as a whole or the classroom climate. To me, this further exhibits students who feel like the "other," also not

feeling as though they are a part of the class and instead feeling as though they are alone in their experience. Comparatively, instructors who promote inclusive classroom climates, also promote an environment where students feel they belong (Tompkins, 2016). Based on the findings of my study and guided by principles of dialogue theory, there are several strategies instructors can implement to reduce othering and promote a more inclusive classroom climate toward achieving inclusive excellence.

Recommendations for Teaching

The findings of this study point to several practices that can lead to a more inclusive climate in the classroom. In the following section I offer recommendations for teaching, grounded in the experiences of the students participating in this study, that if implemented might build strategies toward an inclusive classroom climate.

Each of the common experiences of being othered that emerged across the student interviews for this study provide insights into classroom practices that if improved can enhance the inclusivity of experiences for students. Should instructors embrace particular principles of dialogue and make inclusive excellence their goal, then what I outline below are recommendations for promoting inclusive classrooms as grounded in the findings of this research. In particular, feeling singled out, becoming involuntary spokespeople, being less likely to participate, having to prove their worth, and feeling silenced, are problems that can all be lessened or eliminated through particular communicative practices. Combining students' common experiences from this study and literature promoting inclusive excellence, my aim is to offer strategies toward inclusive classroom climates that are grounded in principles of dialogue.

<u>Singled Out</u>

Although the simple solution to spotlighting may seem to be just not spotlight, it is not quite that simple. Often instructors want to illicit participation from students in the class that do not normally speak up or they want to encourage new viewpoints. Consistent absence of a marginalized group's voice can also be seen as a form of othering so by directly asking a student a question it may seem like trying to give that student a voice. However, problems may arise as each student is different and what may seem like encouragement to one student, may be seen as spotlighting to another. As some students are shy or anxious about speaking in front of others this could be a very uncomfortable situation for some. Carter (2008) mentioned that students can experience physical and psychological discomfort in the classroom as a result of spotlighting. Hypervisibility such as this can have serious academic consequences.

As was seen through this study, almost all of the students I interviewed had a very negative reaction to spotlighting. Students mentioned feeling spotlighted right from the beginning of the semester when having to say their name in a very informal structure where there was not an opportunity to explain the origins, introduce themselves one on one, or have a dialogue. As such, to avoid spotlighting in this way, one strategy, based on what students I interviewed suggested, is to not have students stand up and say their name to the class. Rather, consider if the instructor walked to each student and formally greeted each student in his or her class. By doing this the instructor might be able to hear the correct pronunciation of as student's name, make individual contact, and immediately respond to any questions or concerns a student may have.

Further, because the aim of such first day of class activities is for students to have an opportunity to meet their classmates, instructors might direct a partnered interview activity. In this activity the instructor could pair students together and have students introduce and get to know each other for a few minutes. After the time passes the instructor could direct the students to find a new partner and talk with them. If students are able to do this with several of their classmates, they will be able to meet some of their classmates in a more meaningful way. This alternative activity would accomplish the general aim of meeting other students and allowing students to get to know each other in a way that does not spotlight any particular student in front of the entire class. Furthermore, these practices are based on dialogue theory in terms of aiming toward mutuality and understanding. Dialogue theory calls for coming to mutuality and understanding with the other. By allowing students to speak to each other and engage in dialogue, they are given the chance to apply affirmation, listening, openness, reciprocity, and take advantage of the moment to "think together." Rather than just hearing each other's names, or a coerced discussion response, this activity invites students into dialogue and to have the opportunity to come to an understanding and mutuality through the five dialogic practices. It is important to note that each of these only works with smaller classes and a large discussion hall class would need to alter these methods.

Another way the students from this study mentioned feeling spotlighted was through being asked to do different tasks or do the same task differently than their peers in front of the class. Sometimes other methods are necessary for a student to achieve the same outcome as their peers, however, there are alternative ways in which to negotiate this with the student. A couple of students I spoke with mentioned that they would have

felt more comfortable if their instructor had spoken to them separately before class or through an email to discuss their approach to the upcoming task, rather than "call them out" in front of the entire class. Simply understanding that treating a student in some way as different than the other students in class can lead to preventing this issue. Affirming one's difference and being open to some students being different can help by preventing the practice of calling students out in class. Calling students out, was a more specific form of spotlighting that emerged numerous times within my interviews, enough so that it needs be addressed in the classroom as a standalone issue rather than a subgroup of spotlighting.

<u>Involuntary Spokesperson</u>

Tokenism is another problem emerging when instructors try to give typically underrepresented students a voice in the classroom. However, to avoid the problems such as those emerging in the findings of this study, instructors must first question several significant assumptions attached to this act. Specifically, I encourage instructors to challenge the assumptions that students identify with the group in which they are being asked to represent, that they share similar experiences and viewpoints as that group, and that they feel comfortable speaking for that group. Garibay (2015) describes this problematic assumption some instructors are guilty of when assuming that, "all students from a particular group share the same view on an issue, and their perspective will necessarily be different from the majority of the class who are not from that group" (p. 12). Because this is not always true, asking a student to speak for an entire group positions them as a type of involuntary spokesperson.

The findings of this study align with other research that has shown that minority students often report either feeling invisible in the classroom, or feeling hyper-visible as the token minority. Their experiences of this situation are then heightened when they are addressed as the spokesperson for their whole group, and this can then ultimately have repercussions on their performance (Ambrose et. al., 2010). Students in this study, who expressed feeling as though they had experienced tokenism, described experiencing a lot of (unnecessary and unwelcome) pressure to represent their groups in a positive way. This lead to students either not speaking up in fear of misrepresenting their group or not participating in fear of making their group look bad if they were wrong in their answers or "asked a dumb question." When an instructor calls upon a student to speak for their entire group, they are assuming the student can and is willing to position themselves as the spokesperson for that group. Davis (2009) mentions this when stating:

> Asking a student to speak for his or her entire race, nationality, or other group both ignores the heterogeneity of viewpoints among members of any group and also reinforces the mistaken notion that every member of a particular group is an authority on his or her group (p. 66).

Based on my findings during this study, I have found that students do not feel comfortable or qualified to speak for entire groups of people. Dario echoed almost this exact sentiment when stating, "there are a lot of times where different professors might ask you to give the opinion of an entire culture or country… you know as if we are specialists on a country." Comments such as this, and similar ones I received throughout my interview process, led me to believe that when a student is involuntarily asked to represent a group of people the students themselves feel as though large unfounded assumptions are being made about them.

Consequently, alternative classroom practices are needed to avoid this problem of othering and encourage more inclusive classroom climates. It is important to consider how an instructor goes about asking a student to contribute to the discussion. Scholarly suggestions for instructors would be to attempt to foster a centralizing climate, ideally, an explicitly centralizing classroom (Ambrose et. al., 2010). Garibay (2015) states, "in explicitly centralizing classrooms, historically marginalized groups and perspectives are both validated in spontaneous discussions and are intentionally and overtly integrated into the content" (p. 4). Explicitly centralized classrooms are described as most inclusive which initially led me to believing this was the most beneficial climate in which to conduct a class. However, after hearing students' stories of feeling like a token minority, I feel that this is a strategy in which one must tread lightly. Based on students' comments, it seems as if an instructor explicitly asking a student for their opinion regarding their entire group or culture has the effect of othering more so than inclusion. The problem then arises that one does not want to move toward the marginalizing end of the continuum by not encouraging a variety of voices to speak. For this reason, it is once again important to refer to dialogue theory. Embracing principles of dialogue, instructors should be open and aware of students' feelings and positions. If an instructor can better listen to their students, affirm their feelings, and encourage them to express their own thoughts there is a higher likelihood of mutuality and understanding. Rather than the instructor making assumptions about students and using those assumptions to attempt to further discussion, instructors can have the opportunity to engage in more genuine forms of understanding students' positions, experiences, and perspectives. Instructors are thus encouraged to apply other dialogic strategies to further avoid tokenism in the classroom.

Davis (2009) offers a few potential suggestions for addressing this problem. She suggests treating each student as an individual, and recognizing the complexity of diversity. By treating each student as an individual, instructors avoid asking students to speak for an entire group of people, but rather are aware that they can only speak for themselves and their personal experiences. Davis (2009) states, "each of us shares some characteristics with others of our gender, race, place of origin, and sociocultural group, but these are outweighed by the many differences among members of any group" (p. 58). She goes on to explain the best course of action to take is to not project our experiences, feelings, or expectations of an entire group onto one student. It is also important to recognize the complexity of diversity. During a student's time in college they may experience multiple, evolving, and shifting identities because identity is not fixed. Davis brings attention to the fact that some identities are fixed and some are fluid, some are salient and some change with context. For this reason she suggests to avoid making assumptions about students based on only some of their characteristics while neglecting others, such as complexities in their lives and experiences (p. 59). These are a few suggests for how to avoid tokenism in the classroom and help students to feel as though they are a part of the classroom culture rather than the "other."

<u>Less Likely To Openly Participate</u>

If we are able to alleviate problems of othering it may encourage students to participate more who typically kept to themselves due to feeling like the "other." Many of the students in my interviews claimed to not want to participate because they felt uncomfortable after being spotlighted or as if they did not fit in the class due to tokenism. As a result, their experiences left them feeling as if their voices did not matter.

Participation is important to learning and at times even graded in some classes. Rocca (2010) outlines the benefits of student participation when stating the more students participate, "the less memorization they do, and the more they engage in higher levels of thinking, including interpretation, analysis, and synthesis. Students who participate also show improvement in their communication skills, group interactions, and functioning in a democratic society" (p. 188). Because participation is so beneficial to a student's education, instructors need to actively work toward creating a classroom climate in which every student feels comfortable to, and is able to, participate.

Based on my study, the result of students feeling othered was that they did not want to participate. Instructors communicating to students that they are different than their peers through spotlighting and tokenism, as well as, not communicating with students leading them to feel like they did not have a voice, proved detrimental to the students desire to participate in the class. Rocca (2010) states," there is still evidence that the instructor contributes to students' levels of participation, and students believe that their professors influence their participation based on the ways in which the professors communicate with them" (p. 194). This claim was reinforced through the results of my study.

To increase participation in the classroom, I would suggest first decreasing the problems that cause a lack of desire to participate. Being aware of and working to stop spotlighting and tokenism can help students to feel more welcome and comfortable in the classroom. However beyond that, instructors should seek to embrace principles of dialogue and seek out strategies for engaged participation on the class discussion—ways of participating that do not spotlight or tokenize but invite open conversation grounded in

the desire for mutuality. One example of this type of participation is partnering students for a brief discussion on a topic or encouraging small group discussions to work out an issue related to class. Similarly, students can be invited to write ideas on post-it notes to be picked up by the instructor to review. In both cases students are engaged in discussion without the fear of being "called out" or "representing their entire group." Students become one more voice in a diverse and open classroom.

Giving students a voice in the classroom can also help to increase participation because it directly relates to their contributions being acknowledged. Such affirmation is a core principle of dialogue as it offers students a chance to both listen and be heard on their own terms. They are also being affirmed in their contribution to class, as well as shown openness to their thoughts and opinions. Each of these helps to again promote an inclusive classroom climate. Inclusive classroom climates repeatedly show an increase in participation and are strongly recommended to instructors (Rocca, 2010). When students feel they are part of an inclusive classroom they are more likely to feel comfortable, confident and as though they belong.

<u>Proving Worth</u>

The findings of this study reveal that when students do not feel like they belong in the classroom, they became motivated to prove themselves as capable to their instructors. Multiple students expressed feeling as though they had to prove they belonged in the classroom or were equal to their peers. Students described feeling pressure to do better or do more than their peers to show they equally belonged in the classroom and to prove themselves they would often go the extra mile in their classwork.

To help address this issue, instructors should first be aware of this issue and recognize many students who feel othered may embody this type of motivation.   For instance, Mike spoke to this when stating, "I felt like I had to work for it and earn it when for everyone else it was just automatic." He went on to say, "every time I felt marginalized it made me angry, which made me work harder." And Cece mentioned that upon realizing she was the only Latina in many of her classrooms she felt pressured to graduate and pioneer a path for future Latinas. Stories such as this show a particular reaction to not having an inclusive classroom climate. As such, instructors should be aware and pay attention to how and why students are motivated to succeed and inspire more useful and productive ways to motivate toward academic success.

One way I believe instructors may help students to feel represented in the classroom is to include material that is representative of many different groups. Ambrose et. al. (2010) suggests "plan examples that speak to both sexes, work across cultures, and relate to people from various socioeconomic statuses, traditional age as well as adult returning students" (p. 183). As such, I encourage instructors interested in generating inclusive climates to, when applicable, provide a diverse and inclusive sources of readings and media in the classroom. Consider using reading material from a multitude of different authors and strive to use authors who are representative of different groups. Similarly, if using video clips to illustrate classroom topics, be sure they are representative of multiple voices and perspectives. For example, if an instructor finds that all of their assigned readings are authored by individuals traditionally associated with the majority, students not identifying with the majority may not identify with the material. Similarly, if an instructor only uses media clips that show higher socio-

economic status they may inadvertently marginalize students from lower-socioeconomic status. The use of varied media thus can help promote inclusivity in the classroom. Garibay (2015) warns against focusing solely on the experiences of one group or a single perspective. He states, "such exclusion sends the message that only the experiences and scholarship of some groups are valued and may lead to particular students feeling marginalized" (p. 7). Further, these practices to be inclusive of a wide variety of experiences demonstrate principles of dialogue as they offer affirmation that the students do in fact belong in the classroom and are represented. Students may be more likely to be open themselves if they feel they are a welcome part of the classroom, which is another important component to dialogue that may promote inclusive excellence. If students are able to see members of their group represented in the classroom material they may not feel as underrepresented or as if they do not have a voice.

Silenced

When students do not feel they have a voice in the classroom they may have a difficult time taking ownership of their education, participating in class, and asking for necessary changes to help them learn. From the interviews I did it seem that the most common reason students did not speak up about their feelings of being othered is that they felt they did not have a voice in the classroom or university. They felt their experiences and feelings would be brushed aside or made secondary to the instructors. It is important for students to voice their opinions as it is one of the only ways instructors can truly see what they are taking away from lessons and how they are interpreting their classroom experiences. It is important for instructors to give students an opportunity to speak up and when they do it is imperative to truly listen and validate them. Davis (2009)

states, "students need to feel free to voice an opinion and feel empowered to defend it" (p. 64) and Ambrose et al. (2010) adds that we need to "validate different viewpoints, even unpopular ones" (p. 181). There are a few ways in which instructors can help to give students a voice in the classroom including getting to know students so they feel comfortable speaking, listening when they speak, and following through with requests they make.

Ambrose et. al. (2010) suggest making an effort to get to know your students. This will help students to feel comfortable coming to you when they have questions or concerns. Rather than teaching a room of nameless faces, instructors can help to engage students and give them a voice by, once again, acknowledging that they are individuals and have individual needs. Encouraging students to have a dialogue can only work if the student feels they have a voice and will be listened to. Ambrose et. al. suggest that we can begin to reduce anonymity by "making an effort to learn students' names, providing opportunities for students to learn each other's names, inviting students to office hours, going to student's theater productions or sports events, and so on, can help to break down the barriers created by large classes" (p. 182-183). Once instructors recognize students as individuals, and students feel they can speak up, it is important to listen to them. Bucholz and Sheffler (2009) note that, "one way to make students feel as if they are welcome and trusted members of the class community is by listening to them when they speak" (p. 8). They go on to describe that, not only is it important to give students your complete undivided attention when they speak, but to verbally and nonverbally show them you are actively listening. A few suggestions they make are to orient your body to the student, maintain eye contact, nod your head, use facial expressions, and use verbal cues. By

showing students that you are actively listening to them when they speak, it will hopefully encourage them to keep voicing their questions or concerns and keep participating in class activities and discussions. Further, these practices align with principles of dialogue as they demonstrate affirmation of the other. They also promote listening, as well as reciprocity, which are both grounded in principles of dialogue. Each of these also help to promote an inclusive classroom climate involving dialogue as a means to achieve inclusive excellence.

Aside from giving students a voice in the classroom, I believe that, much like with encouraging participation, once instructors solve problems of stereotyping and tokenism, students will generally feel more comfortable in the classroom. These reoccurring problems seemed to lead to students not wanting to participate and feeling like they had to go the extra mile. Although instructors should focus on fixing these problems individually, they should also work to avoid creating a classroom climate where these experiences are prevalent. From my study I found the source of negative experiences students have encountered often started with spotlighting and tokenism, resulted in students not wanting to participate or feeling like they had to prove themselves, and maintained by being silenced. These experiences then ultimately led to students identifying as the "other" in the classroom which affected their academic experiences in different ways. Based on these findings I wanted to offer possible solutions to lessen students' experiences with othering and promote a positive classroom climate.

Summary

My ultimate hope for this study was that I would be able to share students' stories about experiencing othering in the classroom and use insights from those stories to offer

strategies toward inclusive excellence in the classroom. The findings of this study reveal five common experiences that emerged across the interviews. Through applying these experiences to relevant literature on teaching practices, I was able to offer possible solutions, grounded in dialogic perspectives, toward creating inclusive classroom climates. In particular, I recommend the following:

- Promote core principles of dialogue such as affirmation and appreciation of difference

- Offer different activities that encourage conversation yet do not spotlight students

- Treat each student as an individual

- Recognize the complexity of diversity

- Get to know students

- Listen when students speak

- Use a variety of different examples and literature to represent more groups of people

Furthermore, identity played a large role in the reason why students felt they were being othered and that due to experiences in the classroom many students felt that they actually identified as the "other." These recommended teaching practices, all in their own way, promote principles of dialogue as an initial step toward solving problems of othering. If these practices help students and instructors come to a more mutual understanding of each other, much of the misunderstanding and assumptions made leading to othering might be better avoided. Dialogue theory shows the ways in which dialogue promotes reciprocity, mutuality, and understanding, and challenges and changes previously held beliefs all of which are important to alleviating problems of othering and strive to achieve

inclusive excellence. Inclusive excellence is an important active process with a goal that is beneficial to all students. The goal being those in higher education achieving excellence in learning, teaching, student development, and institutional functioning, all of which are beneficial to individual students as well. The ways in which instructors conduct their classes, the actions they do and do not take, and the dialogue that is or is not had, all affect the classroom climate. This in turn affects student's ability to learn, succeed, and feel comfortable in the classroom. For these reasons I offered solutions for each of the five problems that were prevalent in the stories told by students in my interviews.

Spotlighting can cause physical and psychological discomfort for students and should be avoided. Students should be given the opportunity to speak up for themselves if they chose, or should be called upon to participate systematically as a part of the class requirements rather than for personal reasons. Asking students to disclose information to the class they are not comfortable with, or altering directions for one student in front of the class may make the student feel outed. Students who have an uncommon name may at times feel uncomfortable telling the class their name without the opportunity to further explain. Introduction activities that allow students to get to know each other past just their names may help to make this situation more comfortable. Students who need accommodations may feel uncomfortable receiving different directions in front of the class so it may be beneficial to make arrangements with the student prior to class. Each of these suggestions to avoid spotlighting came directly from my conversations with students during interviews. It is important for instructors to realize that there is a difference between encouraging participation and spotlighting a student where a personal trait is highlighted to the class. This form of hypervisibility also takes form in tokenism.

Much like spotlighting, tokenism is the act of essentially outing a student based on the group they are perceived to identify with. Asking a student to speak for an entire group of people assumes they identify with that group, share similar experiences, and are comfortable and able to speak for them. These assumptions are problematic for many reasons and can have negative consequences on the student's performance in class. Students positioned as spokespeople for a group of people may feel pressure to represent that group well and may ultimately end up misrepresenting that group or not participating at all in fear they will represent the group poorly. As such it is important instructors must be aware of their own biases and carefully consider how and for what reasons they ask students to participate. Solutions to avoid this problem include treating each student as an individual and recognizing the complexity of diversity. By treating each student as an individual, instructors are able to show they understand each student has their own experiences and views aside from a group they may identify with. It is also important to understand the complexity of diversity and that each student's identity is constantly evolving and changing. For this reason instructors should never make assumptions about students based on only some of their characteristics. It is important to avoid both spotlighting and tokenism in the hope that it will encourage students in the classroom.

Many students interviewed for this study expressed not wanting to participate in class for a variety of reasons associated with feeling like the other. Because there are many benefits to participation in class, it is something instructors should always encourage as well as actively work toward. By creating a classroom climate in which every student feels comfortable, instructors are encouraging participation. As not wanting to participate was a direct result of spotlighting, tokenism, and lack of voice in my study I

believe the best way to encourage participation would be to focus on eliminating those other problems first. Many students claimed to feel too uncomfortable to participate after experiencing spotlighting or tokenism, or they felt their opinions did not matter due to a lack of voice. Hindrances to participation such as these need to be taken care of to promote an inclusive classroom climate so that all students many experience the benefits of participation.

Feeling othered may at times also make students feel as though they need to overcompensate. Similar to losing the desire to participate due to spotlighting, tokenism, and lack of voice, these othered feelings may cause students to have a different yet similarly negative response. Some students in my interviews expressed feeling as though they needed to go the extra mile to prove they belonged in the classroom as much as their peers. Although there were some benefits to this viewpoint such as students working harder, it ultimately reflected a negative classroom climate in which some students felt they needed to show they belonged rather than the classroom being naturally inclusive. One way instructors can help students to feel represented in the classroom is through using a variety of different examples and literature that either represent or are written by members of different groups. The hope is that if students see they are being represented in the classroom, they will feel more like they belong already instead of feeling as though they have to prove their abilities. Instructors should work toward helping students feel comfortable and confident in the classroom and as though they belong to a community rather than they are in it alone or silenced.

It is important for students to feel as though they have a voice in the classroom because it helps them to feel valued and included, as well as, it gives instructors insights

into student's experiences in the classroom. If students do not speak up because they feel they will be brushed off or their opinions will not matter, they may have a difficult time contributing in the class at all. Instructors can help to encourage students to speak up by getting to know them and listening when they speak. By getting to know students individually, instructors are fostering an environment of trust and caring. This will hopefully encourage students to feel comfortable speaking in class. Simply going to university events students are involved in or remembering personal facts about students' shows that the instructor cares about students as individuals and reduces anonymity. When students are comfortable to speak up it is important to listen to them. By giving students full undivided attention when they are speaking it further shows care and encourages them to continue to speak up. Hopefully by alleviating problems of spotlighting, tokenism, and lack of student voice, instructors make progress toward eliminating the loss of desire to participate and students need to prove themselves.

These findings call attention to the issue of stereotype threat. Ambrose et. al. (2010) describe stereotype threat as, "the tension that arises in members of a stereotyped group when they fear being judged according to stereotypes" (p. 174). They describe stereotype threat as taking form in subtle triggers such as instructor comments, certain assumptions made about students, and tokenism. Each of these were shown in my findings in different ways. Instructors need to work to fix problems of spotlighting and tokenism so that students want to participate and don't feel as though they need to prove themselves. Hopefully this will result in less stereotype threat. Ambrose et. al. (2010) highlight that the way instructors frame the material and tasks has implications for learning and performance and can result in stereotype threat if not approached

appropriately. If we are able to work toward fixing these problems we may be able to achieve inclusive excellence through an inclusive classroom climate where all students feel welcome and valued. Through these discussions I aimed to answer my second research question.

By combining insights from students' stories from my interviews, as well as relevant literature about teaching strategies, I was able to answer my second research question: How do insights from these experiences offer strategies toward improving inclusive classroom climates? Insights regarding students experiences in which they felt othered in the classroom and the situations that caused them to feel that way helped me to look for possible solutions. Students' suggestions combined with relevant literature on teaching strategies, resulted in possible approaches instructors may use to move toward inclusive excellence in the classroom. Although this leads to multiple different answers to one question, one factor is consistent. Instructors must constantly work toward including principles of dialogue into their classroom instruction in order to promote an inclusive classroom climate and strive toward inclusive excellence. Instructors being aware of students' experiences can offer insights into being aware of their own biases, how different teaching practices may affect student involvement, and ways to promote a more inclusive classroom. Ultimately I found five common experiences among students who felt othered that offered insights of students' experiences allowing me to offer strategies toward inclusive excellence in the classroom. Students' stories experiencing spotlighting and tokenism, not wanting to participate, feeling as though they have to work harder than their peers, and feeling silenced gave me insights I was able to use to offer strategies. Strategies included promoting dialogue, offering different activities that do not spotlight

students, treating each student as an individual, recognizing the complexity of diversity, getting to know students and listening when they speak, and using a variety of different examples and literature to represent more groups of people.

By implementing these strategies into their teaching practices I hope that instructors are able to promote a more inclusive classroom climate and work toward inclusive excellence. That being said, there is still more work to be done in regards to students feeling othered in the classroom. More research should be conducted on possible instructor training, understanding the consequences of othering students, and how othering is understood and handled in the institutional level. By gaining a more comprehensive understanding of othering, scholars and practitioners may be able to offer more strategies to stop othering from happening to students.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This study reveals why it is important to promote a classroom that is inclusive and in which students are not made to feel like the "other." The findings of this study contribute to larger research on student experiences and potential consequences of othering in the higher education classroom. Research has shown that there are a growing number diverse students in terms of students' ethnicity, nationality, race, social class, and age (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002), and academic and social problems may arise for these students if they feel they are the "other." This research revealed five common experiences of being othered and proposed recommendations for instructors to promote more inclusive classroom climates.

I chose to do this study because I had experienced othering myself in the classroom and it caused me to struggle academically and socially in several different ways. Using my own experience, I questioned if other students shared similar stories and struggles feeling like an outsider in the classroom. I often wondered if I would have had a more positive experience had certain situations been different. These questions led me to wanting to focus my study on the othering of students in the classroom. By reviewing literature on identity, dialogue, othering, and inclusive excellence I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the discussions scholars are currently having regarding these ideas. While my findings confirmed much of the literature, they provide unique insights into the experience of being silenced. By conducting qualitative interviews with students who have been othered, not only does this study provide deeper understandings of these

experiences of being othered, but it offered the opportunity to reveal being silenced as the overall means by which the problem of othering is maintained. Further, the focus of this study was not only to tell the students' stories and use those stories but to learn from them to offer strategies directly connected to what students experienced in the classroom. My hope is that through telling students' stories and offering strategies linked to enhancing or preventing these experiences, instructors make changes in their teaching practices that result in a more inclusive classroom.

Additionally, through this study I realized that most students who volunteered to participate were unfamiliar with the term "othering." It seemed that although students had not necessarily labeled their experience as being othered they were aware that they felt different, uncomfortable, or like an intruder in the classroom. These negative experiences led them to wanting to share their stories; most it seemed, in the hope of helping future students who may be in a similar situation. Upon hearing these students' stories it became clear to me that othering was happening in these experiences. Once we were able to dive deeper in interviews it was apparent that students felt strongly about their experiences with othering and the effects it had on their time academically and socially in the classroom. And although most students agreed they did not believe the othering was intentional, so much as it was a lack of awareness, they believed it was detrimental in different ways.

As such, discussing this problem in terms of othering can be important as it can promote dialogic responses or at least recognition that no one should be treated as having a single identity or be known based on only a few identifying characteristics. In fact, of all of the students interviewed, most identified in different ways or claimed different

aspects of their identity to be the most prevailing. It seemed that the students were claiming the identity of the "other" as their classroom identity based on those situations. As such, I believe underrepresented students do not necessarily feel they are being treated differently due to their specific identity, but rather their general identity of the "other" due to not fitting into the majority.

Additionally, it is important that the common experiences of being othered are talked about among instructors. If a university is to become a more inclusive environment, then real experiences revealed in this study are important to generate awareness of the patterns so that they might be better addressed. If we want to encourage inclusivity and participation in the classroom, for instance, and do not want students to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome, then the insights that students provided regarding their experiences with othering in the classroom are needed to provide possible solutions. A combination of students' suggestions and relevant literature on teaching strategies, allowed me to offer potential strategies toward promoting inclusive excellence in the classroom. Based on this I was able to offer strategies such as promoting dialogue in the classroom, offering different activities that do not spotlight students, treating each student as an individual, recognizing the complexity of diversity, getting to know students and listening when they speak, and using a variety of different examples and literature to represent more groups of people. If instructors choose to implement these strategies my hope is that they will see classrooms with more participation and an overall more positive climate.

If an instructor's goal reaches past simple disseminating information and they want students to experience being comfortable and welcome in their classroom, have an

inclusive experience, feel heard, and feel included; instructors should strive to communicate in ways that support inclusive excellence. As research has shown, othering can have detrimental effects on a student's motivation, identity, and comfort in a school setting (Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002). For this reason, in order to achieve inclusive excellence, instructors must be aware of situations happening in the classroom and what they are doing that could make students have a negative experience. This study is important because hopefully once instructors are aware of students' experiences they can make changes to improve and help all students to feel like they are a valued member of the classroom rather than the "other."

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

Research for this project was approved by Boise State University's Institutional

Review Board, protocol #008-SB16-225.