

OPENING DOORS TO DISRUPTION: A POSTSTRUCTURAL DECONSTRUCTION OF
COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISCOURSE

A Dissertation
by
ASHLEY MYERS MORRISON

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
At Appalachian State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2023
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Reich College of Education

OPENING DOORS TO DISRUPTION: A POSTSTRUCTURAL DECONSTRUCTION OF
COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISCOURSE

A Dissertation
by
ASHLEY MYERS MORRISON
May 2023

APPROVED BY:

Star Brown, Ed.D.
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee

Alecia Jackson, Ph.D.
Member, Dissertation Committee

Ann Marie Radaskiewicz, Ed.D.
Member, Dissertation Committee

Vachel Miller, Ed.D.
Member, Dissertation Committee
Director, Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Marie Hoepfl, Ed.D.
Interim Dean, Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies

Copyright by Ashley Myers Morrison 2023
All Rights Reserved

Abstract

OPENING DOORS TO DISRUPTION: A POSTSTRUCTURAL DECONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISCOURSE

Ashley Myers Morrison
B.S., North Carolina State University
M.S., North Carolina State University
Ed.D., Appalachian State University

Dissertation Committee Chairperson: Dr. Star Brown

The purpose of this study is to disrupt damage-centered assumptions about community colleges by problematizing how power-knowledge relations work within the discursive practices of dominant community college discourse. As a post qualitative study, I plugged in Michel Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) poststructural theories of power-knowledge, subjectivity, and discursive practices with community college discourse. A thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) approach to inquiry allowed me to plug in Foucault's theories, my analytical questions, and multiple texts such as television commentary, advertisements, job descriptions, and organizational publications. These analytical moves created assemblages of encounters and experiences that exposed the power-knowledge relations at work within the discursive practices of community college discourse and made visible how certain community college subjectivities (student, leader, and institution) have become normalized.

The open door ad/mission discourse provided the conceptual frame for this work, as such each dominant discourse is presented as a door to be opened. Further, I disrupted my

writing with *sidelight* stories that illustrate my own encounters with discursive openings and closings. My final move dismantles dominant discourses and closes normalized community college subjectivities, not to reject foundational community college discourses, but to open community college discourse for reinscription in different ways.

Acknowledgements

I would like to first and foremost thank my husband, Matt Morrison, for the patience, love, and continuous support that you have shown throughout this journey. You never wavered in your resolve to help me see this through. I will always be grateful for all the days and nights you did the duties of two parents so that I could have the time and space to complete this goal.

My children, Jack and Sam, also deserve acknowledgement. When this journey began they were seven and four, respectively. There were days when I asked for their silence and patience, and most of the time they delivered beautifully. I also understand that because this work was always in competition for their attention, I have missed many moments of togetherness. I only hope that one day they come to see that this work was done as much for them as for me. I also want to give them credit for being the disruptions that inspire me. Each time they threw the door open and burst into my writing room, my thoughts scattered to the wind and often could not be reformed. Their actions sparked the idea of disruptive discourse.

My committee was wonderful. Dr. Brown has been the most amazing dissertation chair and coach. Her dedication to this work matches my own and as we moved through these pages, we became writing partners and friends. I could not have asked for a more supportive or helpful guide. Dr. Jackson was the first person to read my ideas, and she encouraged me to take up post qualitative *thinking with theory* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) as my own. She pushed me to be creative and take risks. Her faith that I could do this made me

bold and smart. Dr. Rad was an encouraging and supportive reader. As a fellow community college dean, her comments throughout the writing let me know that my ideas resonated beyond my own perspectives. Perhaps most importantly, Dr. Rad's dissertation work (McNeely, 2020) served as a jumping off point for my own. Finally, Dr. Miller has been a steadfast and supportive presence throughout my whole doctoral journey. The first thing I remember him telling me was to "trust the process," and he was right.

My parents, Ben and Kim Myers, have also earned a space on these pages. They have never doubted that I would achieve my goals and their no-nonsense resolve has become my strategy for persistence. As my first teachers, they gave me the tools that I have most needed—courage, intellect, motivation, and determination.

My colleagues in the Online One cohort have been a tremendous support since our first Zoom class in August 2019. Not only have we encouraged each other through the doctoral journey, we have loved each other through a global pandemic and numerous life events. I am particularly thankful for my friends in the Honesty Corner. They kept it real, and they have also been readily available to answer my questions and listen to my stories.

Finally, I am grateful to the community college for being a place of hope.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my husband, Matt Morrison, for having the strength to disrupt damage every single day.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
Dedication	viii
ASSEMBLAGE ONE: OPENING	1
Part One: Encountering Doors	3
My Positionality and Subjectivity	5
Community College Discourses in the Literature	10
Significance of My Study	19
Arrangement of My Dissertation.....	24
Part Two: Theory as Threshold.....	30
Poststructuralism: Key Principles and Assumptions	32
Poststructuralism as My Theoretical Framework	57
Part Three: My Analytical Toolbox	62
Thinking with Theory	62
Concluding Assemblage One	83
<i>Sidelight - Why Doors?</i>	85
ASSEMBLAGE TWO: THE STUDENT	87

Door One: Opening the Deficit-Shame Discourse.....	93
Deficit	93
Shame	102
Door Two: Opening the Competition Discourse.....	110
Multiple Missions and Discourses.....	110
Competition	114
Certain Student Subjectivities	130
<i>Sidelight - Assembling the Doors.....</i>	<i>137</i>
ASSEMBLAGE THREE: THE LEADER	139
Community College Leadership.....	140
Door Three: Opening the Masculinity Discourse	144
The Community College Executive	144
Discourse of Masculinity.....	146
Door Four: Opening the Mission/aryism Discourse	170
Mission/aryism	171
<i>Sidelight - Doors Are Artifacts</i>	<i>178</i>
ASSEMBLAGE FOUR: THE INSTITUTION	179
Community College.....	180
Door Five: Opening the Junior Discourse.....	186
Junior	187

Door Six: Opening the Community Discourse	198
Community	199
<i>Sidelight - The Hall of Doors</i>	225
ASSEMBLAGE FIVE: REFRAMING COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISCOURSE	227
Part One: Dismantling Damage: Closing the Normalized Subjectivities	227
Refusal of Damage	237
Part Two: Framing New Doors	243
Contributions to Community College Discourse.....	244
Contributions to Educational Leadership	248
Contributions to Inquiry	249
Areas for Future Inquiry	251
Concluding Thoughts	256
<i>Sidelight - The Open Door</i>	259
References	261
Vitae	277

ASSEMBLAGE ONE: OPENING

After the end, I return to the beginning to open this work. Such is the endless and repetitious nature of this inquiry. I think about how my movement back and forth through this dissertation mirrors the movement of a door on its hinges, again and again crossing its threshold as it opens and closes. I now know how this work unfolds, but when I first put my cursor at this point on the page, I did not. I only knew that I was embarking on a journey into something radically different and I had to do so with the faith that something wonderful would disrupt from my work. I hope that you, as reader, find this so.

Unlike I, you do not have to begin this journey by stepping into the unknown. I can allow some foreshadowing of what is to come. First, you will encounter many doors. One of the premises that guided my thinking is that doors are meant to be opened. This statement mirrors the adage that rules are made to be broken. Education assessment lingo might phrase my thoughts in this manner: rules are as to doors as broken is to open. Out of the gate (gate is synonym for door), I illuminate discourse as a set of rules or practices to be broken or disrupted. This is hint number two. Alternatively, one might also say that doors are meant to be closed. Yes, there is the other side to this story that rules are meant to be followed. I think you will find that in this case, that is not the side I am on. In fact, writing my dissertation in this way pushes against the status-quo and establishes myself as a breaker of dissertation rules. I cannot justifiably call that a hint since beginning a dissertation in this manner makes that an obvious statement of “fact.” Thus, I choose to take up an alternative view of why doors should be closed, and in later sections of my writing, I use the metaphor of closing to make clear that certain discourse or rules should be refused. Which brings me to my fourth and final foreshadowing: if discourse is made of rules to be broken or disrupted,

and doors are meant to be opened, then my work moves through doors to problematize the damage-centered discourses of the community college. In the end, when these discourses are opened and the normative subjectivities they produce are closed, I offer to all a salutation for a disruptive reopening.

Let's open the door.

Part One: Encountering Doors

When doors are *open*, we assume there are no forces at work preventing our exclusion. We accept as common-sense that barriers are broken and the allegorical red carpet has been placed beneath our collective feet. The American community college is where I locate my work, and the community college is predicated on having as both mission and admission (ad/mission) policy—an *open door*. My use of *ad/mission* embodies two intersecting concepts; as mission policy, the open door implies service to all, and as admission policy, the open door translates into entrance for anyone regardless of prior educational attainment or status. The *open door* is a commonly accepted community college discourse, and like any discourse, it is a productive force. *Discourse* is a collection of ideas and meanings situated within sociohistorical context that order reality in certain ways (Cheek, 2008; Saltman 2018). Concerningly, once a discourse becomes commonplace, its origins are forgotten, and its power becomes invisible.

Americans learn through narratives shared on social media, in popular television, within K-12 school systems, and by higher education marketing campaigns, what community colleges are and who might walk through their open doors. Commentary on the open door ad/mission discourse often positions those who attend community college as not having the high school grade point averages needed to attend university. Americans may easily hear and say that students attend community college because their families cannot afford to send them to more expensive four-year universities. When the American public thinks of a typical community college student, adjectives such as uncertain, unprepared, or undocumented are commonly included in their descriptions. Certainly, affirming comments are also made about attending local community college, such as commending a student's choice to save money.

And, of course, a trade education, such as welding, electrical, or cosmetology, almost guarantees attendance at a community college. Skill training has become a vital, arguably the primary, component of the community college mission. Yet, even when students make these much-applauded technical career “choices,” certain discourses are *always already* at play in everyday discourse.

A reading assignment in a qualitative research methods course introduced me to an article titled “Suspending damage: A letter to communities” by poststructural scholar Eve Tuck. In this writing, Tuck (2009) urges communities, researchers, and educators to reconsider the long-term implications of a damage-centered research framework. She explains that *damage-centered* frameworks position marginalized communities as depleted and helpless and asks the readers to question the hidden cost of framing communities as broken. As I reflected on Tuck’s words and work, I began to question how community college discourse often centers on the statuses of lack and brokenness. This idea resonated in my thoughts for weeks, so I asked a few colleagues to share narratives they often hear about community colleges. Their responses included: *community colleges want to be like real colleges; accepting a job at a community college takes you out of the discipline; students who go to community college cannot get into university; community colleges only care about technical trades; no one with talent wants to work there; it is high school 2.0; and we are doing missionary work.* As these narratives played in my mind, Tuck’s title evolved into “Suspending damaged-centered discourse: A letter to community colleges.”

My study makes visible how dominant community college discourse is positioning community college. Discourse is considered “dominant” when it is almost completely taken for granted or naturalized. My purpose, in this dissertation, is to refute damage-centered

assumptions about community colleges by naming multiple dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges and revealing how power-knowledge relations embedded within the discursive practices of these discourses are at work (Foucault, 1970, 1977, 1980, 1982). In this poststructural study, I plug in multiple texts (television commentary, advertisements, job descriptions, organizational publications) and Foucauldian theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and the subject to deconstruct how certain subjectivities of students, leaders, and institutions become normalized. The overarching question that guides my analysis is *how do damage-centered discourses produce community colleges?* In the opening assemblage of this dissertation, I offer an overview and rationale for my conceptual dissertation study by sharing my positionality and subjectivity, summarizing the major community college discourses in the literature, explaining the significance of my study, and introducing the organizational structure (assemblages) of my work.

My Positionality and Subjectivity

I admit that my only experience as a community college student was through high school dual-enrollment, where college-level credit can be earned for free and then transferred to a university. I had both the means and the grades to be accepted into a university after high school graduation, and, frankly, neither my guidance counselors nor I considered that the local community college might be a good fit. Ironically, the same guidance counselor, who handed me my acceptance packet into the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (I turned that offer down for North Carolina State University), ended up being my co-worker at a community college not even ten years later. Truthfully, many of the discourses I seek to disrupt are those that were inscribed upon me.

Twenty-five years have now passed, and of them, I have been employed in a NC community college for 16 years, first as a faculty member, then as a division chair, and now as an academic dean. I have served on many community college faculty/staff interview committees and have often asked: “Why do you want to work at a community college? Specifically, our community college?” Answers frequently rely on some description of the geographical area and a desire to move into this beautiful region. Someone rarely gives the answer I seek: a brief description of the community college mission, what it means to work with community college students, and how the candidate’s unique knowledge, skills, and characteristics will contribute to that mission. After easily over seventy-five candidate interviews, I have learned that even those wanting to work in a community college struggle to answer my question in a way that avoids hints of damage.

It would be hypocritical to pretend I answered that question well when I was interviewed sixteen years ago. I applied to the community college not because I was running toward my dream career, but because I was running from a job that I knew was not my dream. The not-my-dream-job happened to be a faculty research and extension position at a well-known university. When I told my then supervisor I was resigning, his reply, “To go to a community college?” voiced his disdain. And like most of the candidates I interview, when I was asked for my “why,” I fell back on the tepid response of “I want to move to the area.” In my case, this was my reason for applying. The community college I interviewed at sixteen years ago and the one where I still serve today is located in my home community.

Twenty-first-century globalization discourse makes a desire to live and work in my *community* seem as glamorous as only wearing khaki pants and white button-down shirts. Even though I am happy in my current role, many times over the years I have questioned if I

remain in my community because I may struggle “out in the world.” Never mind that when I was “out in the world,” I managed perfectly fine. I suppose I have been in the community long enough for normative damage-centered discourses to do their work subjugating me as someone capable of only belonging here.

This fear forces me to acknowledge that perhaps part of my work is a selfish desire to counter the damaged-centered discourses shaping me, my community, and other communities like my own. Nevertheless, I cannot divorce myself from my positionality. And since my own story influences my inquiry, I am required to ask if my choices in telling this story might maintain problematic constructions of power and knowledge. For example, I have not experienced community college from the post-secondary student subjectivity. As a community college employee, my choices may be more reflective of my desire to name and refuse damage than the other stakeholders in this work. Furthermore, I am using an indigenous scholar’s definition of damage-centeredness (Tuck, 2009) as the framework for how discursive practices produce community colleges, a distinctly American institution. I wonder how Tuck might feel about this and ponder if I am taking liberties that perhaps I should not. These questions weigh on me but opening a conversation about how damage-centered discourses are at work is what I seek; therefore, I willingly take some risks. I hope that scholars with other positionalities will take up this work once the door is open.

I would be remiss not to draw your attention to the distinction between damage-centered and deficit. Deficit models emphasize what a particular student or community lacks to explain underachievement (Tuck, 2009). Damage brings forward the pain and loss in individuals or communities and is distinct from deficit in that damage is more socially and historically situated. Damage looks to historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to

explain contemporary assumptions of brokenness (Tuck, 2009). Therefore, damage is intrinsically connected to the power-knowledge relations operating within discourse. Ultimately, the question to be asked is: “What are the costs of thinking of [community colleges] as damaged?” (Tuck, 2009, p. 415). This work does not request an answer; instead, thinking with Tuck’s question sparked the emergence of my overarching research question: *How do damage-centered discourses produce community colleges?* From my overarching question, three Foucauldian analytical questions erupted:

- What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered?
- How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses?
- How do certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions become normalized?

Discourses become dominant because the power-knowledge relations at work within them position the discourses to look normal, natural, or even good (Foucault, 1970, 1977, 1980, 1982). In this way, the power-knowledge relations within discourses’ discursive practices enable and promote the primacy or dominance of the discourses and keep them circulating in our social world. This circulation normalizes the subjectivities produced by dominant discourses. My work intends to make visible how power-knowledge relations within discursive practices produce the damage-centered “truth” discourses of community college by breaking these discourses open for exploration.

Tuck (2009) urges scholars to institute a moratorium on damage-centered research and imagine how findings might be framed from a desire-based perspective. Like Tuck, my

aim is to make clear that with every signification and resignification on social media, on television, in literature, and within the institution, there is an opportunity for community college discourse to be altered. But first, I must draw attention to the damage-centered discursive practices that frame community college. As Tuck (2009) said, this is the paradox of damage: “to refute it, we need to say it out loud” (p. 417). In this work, what is of interest to me is how dominant discursive practices of community college fixes community college students, leaders, and institutions into normative subject positions. I do not desire exactitude because poststructuralists are skeptical of descriptions of truth, knowledge, subjectivity, and rationality grounded in humanistic determinism (St. Pierre, 2000). Instead, this work offers an opportunity for different and radical inscriptions. St. Pierre (2000) writes, “The poststructural critique . . . can be employed to examine any commonplace situation, any ordinary event or process, to think differently about that occurrence—to open up what seems ‘natural’ to other possibilities” (p. 479). My challenge to myself and the readers of this work is to be willing to think differently. To open the door not to what is right or wrong, but to why we occupy the positions that we do.

I imagine that many of the readers of this work will be within the American community college system. After being introduced to Foucault’s (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories, I felt a sense of urgency to speak out because I believe, as a system, we are in the midst of fundamental shifts. Education, particularly community college education, faces many challenges: funding shortfalls, artificial intelligence, anti-intellectualism, apathy, employee turnover, and “barriers” due to students’ socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, and gender, to name a few. We need to have difficult conversations about how community colleges can be done differently, and our role in shaping society. I want community college

leaders and policymakers to engage in these conversations. I am issuing a challenge to all community college leaders through this work. We can be fully prepared to educate every student who walks through our open door and develop a local community capable of solving global problems, but not until we openly deconstruct how we are produced by damage-centered discursive practices of dominant discourse. In seeking the dominant and intersecting discourses of community college, I share the current and historical discourses that are shaping community colleges in the sections below.

Community College Discourses in the Literature

A summative perspective of community college literature solidifies my conviction that many of the discourses around community colleges center students, leaders, and the institutions themselves in damage. Publications by organizations in direct association with community colleges claim that community colleges are the answer to the new American economy—if only they are *reimagined, re-envisioned, or redesigned* (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012; Amey & Twombly, 1992; Ashford, 2020; Bailey et al., 2015; Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; O’Banion, 2019; O’Banion & Culp, 2021; Opportunity America, 2020; Pusser & Levin, 2009; Townsend & Dougherty, 2006). These discourses position the institutions as *in need of reform*; however, the “reformative ideas” or “transformative ideas” are often built upon dominant ideologies and established norms deriving from rational humanism. Similarly, discourses in popular media, social media, and scholarly work (Cohen et al., 2014; Chen, 2022; Dollar, 2018; Munsch & Kelsay, 2015; Russo & Russo, 2009) position community college students into *deficit-based* subjectivities: the students who did not make the grades for university acceptance; students in need of additional social, emotional, and financial support for college success; students who have been laid off from

factory jobs and need retooling; students who stopped their education for life circumstances and now need a second chance; and so on. Clearly, each student will have overlapping and competing needs.

The community college's attempt to meet many needs is written into their mission (Amey, 2006; Ayers, 2011, 2017; McNeely, 2020; Meier, 2008). State legislations codify community college missions as academic transfer preparation, occupational education, workforce training, developmental education, and community service (Cohen et al., 2014). Inherent within the multiple facets of the community college's mission is a discourse of *competition* (Ayers, 2017; Vaughan, 1991): collegiate education versus technical training, community economic and workforce development versus general education, and globalization versus global citizenship. Unfortunately, the discourse of competition has left Americans confused, and in the absence of clarity, what is often said perpetuates specific ideas about community colleges.

This quote by President Donald J. Trump during his February 1, 2018, speech to a Republican congressional retreat illustrates how competition and confusion make space for certain ideas:

A lot of people don't know what a community college means or represents . . . And I think the word 'vocational' is a much better word than, in many cases, a community college. You learn mechanical, you learn bricklaying and carpentry, and all of these things. (as cited in Smith, 2018, p. 2)

Beach (2011) explains one reason why not only President Trump but also the candidates whom I have interviewed over the years and I have been confounded: "the institution of community colleges offered an 'egalitarian promise,' but at the same time, it also reflected

the constraints of the capitalist economic system it was embedded in” (p. xxxii). Community colleges, like all institutions, are embedded in sociohistorically-produced discursive fields *always already* in play. Unfortunately, how discursive fields work to produce our institutions are not easily visible. Thinking with Foucault’s (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories shows the entanglement of these discursive fields and the ways power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to produce community colleges in a multitude of ways, and as a result, the multifaceted community college mission is often in contradiction.

A broad view of the literature illuminates several major discourses that intersect to produce damage-centered assumptions about community colleges. These discourses include deficit, competition, masculinity, mission/ayrism, junior, and community. Foundational books, scholarly literature, and major organizational reports (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012; Amey & Twombly, 1992; Ashford, 2020; Bailey et al., 2015; Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; O’Banion, 2019; O’Banion & Culp, 2021; Opportunity America, 2020; Pusser & Levin, 2009; Townsend & Dougherty, 2006) with titles and headlines using the language of lack, such as reimagine, redesign, or transform, draw attention to a brokenness within community colleges that is in immediate need of repair. A language of lack paints community college students, and the colleges themselves, as deficit-based; and deficit language coproduces narratives of needing to be fixed or saved by heroic white masculine leaders or neoliberal enterprise. Meanwhile, a competition discourse produces binaries of winners/losers. Simultaneously, narratives of contradiction and confusion cultivate opportunities for community colleges’ missions to be buffeted by continuously shifting cultural and political economic values, and for others to speak on behalf of community colleges. These dominant discourses, ostensible in the literature, remain largely

unaddressed. In the next section, I take up the history of junior/community colleges to illuminate the conditions that have produced these specific discourses.

Historical Overview of Community College Discourses

A historical overview of community colleges, called initially junior colleges, reveals the evolution of discourses (democracy and Christianity, vocationalism, neoliberalism, and transformation) that have been producing community colleges since their humble origins in the early 1900s. As novel institutions, state and local leaders did not have organizational blueprints to use as institutional models (Ayers, 2017). Therefore, it fell to the community college movement leaders, whose key figures included Christian ministers, to create a common junior college purpose distinguishable from secondary education and universities (Meier, 2008). The first community college, Joliet Junior College, was a creative collaboration between William Rainey Harper, President of the University of Chicago, and J. Stanley Brown, superintendent of Joliet Township High School in Illinois (O'Banion, 2019). They discovered a shared commitment to quality education as roommates at a National Baptist Convention, where they imagined a new model for higher education. In this new model, Joliet Junior College served as a junior academy to the University of Chicago (O'Banion, 2019). The 1930s and 1940s saw an era when university professors dominated the community college movement, effectively positioning junior colleges as the upper tier of secondary education. The proclaimed junior college's purpose was to socialize youth through vocational and general education (Meier, 2008).

Democracy and Christianity

By the 1950s, the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC—a national organization for community colleges and precursor to the American Association of

Community Colleges) promoted an educational and social movement that was an amalgam of Christian evangelism, moderate educational liberalism, and democracy (Meier, 2008). A statement by AAJC's public relations editor and future executive director, Minister Edmond Gleazer (1958), exposes the junior college's democratic and evangelical mission, "I believe in all my heart in those causes which can move people to fulfill their God-given potentials. The junior college in this democratic society can be—ought to be—that kind of cause" (as cited by Meier, 2008, p.134). Less than two decades later, Gleazer (1970) pronounced that the open door ad/mission was a Christian revelation borrowed from the scripture, "Behold, I have set before thee an open door" (as cited in Meier, 2008, p. 134). For early community college leaders, there was a continuum between religious aims and the social purposes of the community college movement (Meier, 2008).

Vocationalism

The 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s brought about a time of community college proliferation and increasing national support. Experiments in adult education and community-based programming intertwined with the post-World War II initiative to abandon "scarcity economics," the introduction of the G.I. Bill of Rights in 1944, and the 1947 Truman Commission Report. These efforts opened community colleges and their discourses to the influence of diverse students (minorities and women), adult learners, faculty, policymakers, and lawmakers (Meier, 2008). Notably, in 1967, then-Governor of California Ronald Reagan pronounced that "higher education should prepare students for jobs, and taxpayers should not be 'subsidizing intellectual curiosity'" (Berrett, 2016, as cited by McNeely, 2020, p. 18). Over the ensuing decades, a vocationalist approach increasingly dominated community

college missions (McNeely, 2020). During this same timeframe, community colleges were declared to be one of the primary avenues to the middle class (Meier, 2008).

Neoliberalism

By the mid-1980s, the influence of capitalist neoliberalism, with its emphasis on economic growth, *privatization* and *globalization*, became a bipartisan ideology influencing community colleges' open door promise. Under neoliberal policies, power and control shifted from students, faculty, and local colleges to corporations, politicians, and national foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (McNeely, 2020). As a result, students have increasingly been viewed as human capital; leaders, such as faculty and mid-level administrators, were stripped of their power; and institutions were buffeted by corporate discourse.

Transformation

Neoliberal discourse of the 1980s and 1990s remains prevalent today, and with the turn of the twenty-first century, national discourse began positioning the community college as yet to deliver on its two primary missions: the open door admission policy of equal access and being comprehensive (Vaughan, 1991). A discourse of not-yet-succeeding (i.e., *failing*) allows cultural and political-economic values to shift community college priorities from personal development and democratic engagement to job-skill training (McNeely, 2020). And, as colleges are shifting to meet these demands, leadership priorities have transitioned from *higher* education to *hire* education (Stancill, 2019). Simultaneously, leading community college scholars are positing ideas to “*transform*” the community college. For example, the book *13 Ideas that are Transforming the Community College World*, edited by Terry O’Banion (2019), aims to re/energize concepts shaping community colleges today. Some of

the key ideas presented include *demography as opportunity* (Edgecombe, 2019), which expands on the community college's original mission of open access by committing to affirm the worth of minority, low-income, first-generation, and historically disenfranchised students; *guided pathways to college completion and equity*, a movement to close persistence gaps for historically marginalized students (McClenney, 2019); and *the evolving mission of workforce development in the community college*, describing how the workforce discourse became a dominant community college value and how community colleges continue to evolve their workforce mission to meet the needs of local industry (Jacobs & Worth, 2019).

Community college history indicates that community colleges take up the dominant discourses of the day. However, there is no published work to consider how these dominant discourses intersect to produce damage-centeredness, nor has any published scholarship animated Foucauldian (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) concepts of discourse, power-knowledge, and the subject to deconstruct how the power-knowledge relations at work within discursive practices enable and promote normalized subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) attribute this quote to Foucault in his work on madness and reason: “People know what they do; frequently they know why they do it; but what they don’t know is what, what they do does” (p.187). That said, my work does not take place in a vacuum. There are scholars who are acknowledging and challenging dominant community college discourses using critical and poststructural frameworks. In the next section, I situate my dissertation study within the ongoing academic discourse by introducing how these critical and poststructural scholars have problematized community college “truths.”

Ongoing Academic Discourse

Thinking with Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) conceptualization of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity, the purpose of my work is to problematize normative assumptions about community colleges and deconstruct how community colleges are produced by damaged-centered discursive practices within dominant discourses. To my knowledge, no other academic study has connected dominant discourses to damage or roused community colleges to refuse their normalized positionalities. My work is a companion to the scholarship of researchers who have employed critical and poststructural analysis to study how discourses are working within community colleges (Ayers, 2009, 2011, 2017; Mitchell & Garcia, 2020; McNeely, 2020; Wilson, 2021). For example, McNeely (2020) used poststructural theory and post qualitative inquiry to scrutinize current community college education practices that privilege the making of workers. McNeely's work deconstructs the preferred community college discourse of *vocationalism* within relations of power to make visible how a vocational discourse produces and constrains students as workers and leaders as worker producer subjectivities. Her work sought to unsilence a competing discourse—comprehensive education—and acknowledge points of resistance already at work within our institutions that oppose subjugation and champion the broader community college purpose (McNeely, 2020).

Additionally, Ayers's (2009, 2017) work draws attention to the discourse of *capitalism* in American community colleges by examining mission statements and employee positionality. As such, Ayers's (2011) critical discourse analysis also has relevance to positioning students as workers through findings such as: (a) community college mission statements are rescaling to accommodate a global economy; (b) learners are becoming

objectified as “employees,” and the community college “customer” is business and industry, not students; (c) some community colleges are espousing a broader vision for students which include citizenship and responsibility in a global community; (d) degree of globalization is correlated to urbanization; and (e) economic development has been normed in a global context, but institutions responsible for training workers are descaled to the local (i.e., community colleges).

Other work has critiqued masculinity discourse within community colleges. For example, a recent study of community college discourse by Mitchell and Garcia (2020) used feminist critical discourse analysis to critique community college presidential job postings from 1996 and 2016 to see how the language used in the postings describes who is desired in the office of the community college president. They determined that, although a counter-discourse exists, the predominant discourse exposes *heroic* ideals that favor men. Their research expanded other works that examined the language and images used to represent community college leadership (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Wilson & Cox, 2012). The conclusion across all publications is that the language used to describe community college leaders predominantly reflects the image of a powerful white man that stands apart from and above the college to lead the institution to new heights.

Finally, Wilson (2021) contributes to the conversation around community college “truths” using critical race theory to critically examine how Black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) are negatively impacted by community college practices of exclusion and extraction. Wilson writes that BIPOC students enter the community college believing in the *open door* promises of access and opportunity but are confronted with

spiritual assaults that prevent their academic success and murder their agency, histories, and humanity. To conclude, Wilson posits ways to create and maintain more liberating colleges.

Besides McNeely (2020), Ayers (2009, 2011, 2017), Mitchell and Garcia (2020), and Wilson (2021), most community college researchers focus on improving practices within positivist and interpretivist paradigms. The ways in which discursive practices produce community colleges remain relatively unchallenged, and in my Foucauldian dissertation study, I problematize how power-knowledge relations operate within the discursive practices of dominant community college discourses to normalize certain community college subjectivities.

Significance of My Study

The work of my dissertation problematizes the dominant discourses (collections of words and images circulating in society) that intersect to produce damage-centered assumptions about community college. Thinking with Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power, knowledge, and subjectivity, I deconstruct how power-knowledge relations within discursive practices are producing certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions. My work is important because calls for significant community college reforms have created a sense of mounting urgency, and admired community college publications are brimming with proposals to solve the community college's existential crises (Bailey et al., 2015; O'Banion, 2019; Wyner, 2014). These proposals are at work in their own ways, creating and maintaining certain narratives and flows of power-knowledge. Community college institutions, leaders, and students are not the passive products of discourse. Instead, what is said constructs dominant discourses, which influences how community colleges are positioned.

By and large, scholars have failed to consider how discourses work to produce what is normative about community colleges (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019). Researchers have not paused to confess that community college discourses are centered in damage; certainly, no one has asked how these discourses are producing our institutions, leaders, and students. Neglecting to analyze how these damage-centered discourses are constraining our community college system and selves is particularly troubling. As I reviewed the literature and what has been said about community colleges over the decades, I noticed several intersecting discourses at play which I deconstructed through my dissertation. Specifically, there was a need for community college discourse to be deconstructed within the effects of Foucauldian power-knowledge relations. It is necessary that the productive relationship between power, knowledge, and damage-centered discourse be opened to make space for alternative discourses and subjectivities. I use discourse in this work in two ways. Discourse in the singular represents the overarching community college discourse or the ideas produced by a collection of dominant discourses. I also use discourses in the plural because multiple dominant discourses (e.g., deficit, competition, masculinity, mission/aryism, junior, and community) are intersecting to produce the overarching damage-centered discourse of community college. My sincerest hope is that naming and deconstructing how community college discourses of damage are at work will help leaders, scholars, and society at large, think and speak differently about how they are positioning community colleges within higher education.

I chose to position this work within the theoretical frame of poststructuralism because poststructuralism works outside of clear boundaries offering flexibility and reflexivity of application in various ways. Because poststructural theory demands creativity and invention,

I draw inspiration from Christina Sharpe's (2016), *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* to think with the figuration of the community college's open door mission. Thus, *the door* becomes the conceptual-metaphorical framework for the effects unfolding from and folding into damaged-centered discourse. Because I am positioned within the community college, these effects are personal. And I share my subjectivities and encounters with dominant discourses in narrative disruptions of my writing that I call *sidelights*. With this analytical tool and Foucauldian (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) concepts of power-knowledge, discourse, and subjectivity as the theoretical foundation of my research, I imagine and create new discursive openings for community college students, leaders, and institutions. As an academic leader in a North Carolina community college, I recognize that each discourse I problematize is vital for the community college's mission. I spotlight the damaged-centered framing inherent in community college discourse with some anxiety. Nevertheless, I push forward with the remembrance that my goal is not to reject or discard foundational community college discourses, but to open the damage inherent within them so that community college discourse might be reinscribed in a new, disruptive, anti-damage way.

My inquiry extends McNeely's (2000) post qualitative work by deconstructing the normative discourses of community college. Thinking with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) makes visible the complicity of power-knowledge within the discursive practices of dominant community college discourses and how these power-knowledge relations produce particular community college subjectivities. While I acknowledge a paucity of post qualitative inquiries specific to community college inquiry, I am unconcerned with establishing a literature gap and arguing that this work will fill it. "Gap" narratives around theoretical frameworks and analytical approaches indicate staticity and that post qualitative

scholars can follow a prescribed method to build upon what is already known. An onto-epistemology of continuous becoming declares that this is not the case at all. Therefore, I deploy a post qualitative approach, *thinking with theory*, that casts away “method,” inventing creative space to engage with multiple texts and ideas, embark on new lines of flights, relish conceptual flows, and concoct rhizomatic accumulations, all to challenge the outlines of what is known (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Thinking with theory allows problems and questions to be continuously reframed and rethought. Therefore, there is no “gap” to be filled, just as there is no end to the work; there is only more and next.

The implications for this work are best explained by visiting a quote by Trinh (1989) that I came across early in my engagement with poststructural readings: “You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don’t, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said” (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000). The phrase *and you will be said* was particularly striking. As I read theory and thought about what is said about community colleges, I became concerned that what is said is often centered on damage or brokenness. My willingness to do this post qualitative work of *thinking with theory* offers a deconstruction of how community colleges *have been said* through power-knowledge relations, an opportunity to unsay the damage, and an encouragement to rethink what they may become. As an educational leader, I see the potential for a new discursive frame built from disruption.

In this post qualitative study, I use thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) to interrogate how community colleges are produced by damaged-centered discourses. My purpose is to problematize normative assumptions about community colleges and to deconstruct the relationship between power, knowledge, and community college

subjectivities by plugging in Foucauldian theory, my encounters and experiences with multiple texts (television commentary, advertisements, job descriptions, and organization publications), and my analytical questions:

- What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered?
- How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses?
- How do certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions become normalized?

In the opening to this dissertation and overview of community college literature, I introduced how I am encountering certain doors, doors being the conceptual frame or metaphor for the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college students, leaders, and institutions. The ways in which these dominant discourses are at work within the community college to produce damage-centered assumptions have become invisible or, at minimum, have been ignored. In the next section, I lay out how my deconstructive work flows through assemblages, or frames for the ideas that emerged through thinking, reading and writing. Each assemblage puts into relationship multiple occurrences to analyze how power-knowledge relations within discursive practices are producing community college subjectivities. The purpose of my work is to deconstruct damage-centered assumptions about community colleges. My ultimate goal is to refuse damage so that community college discourse is produced by a framework of disruption.

Arrangement of My Dissertation

The organization of my dissertation emerged during the writing and evolved based on the ideas opened by thinking and co-reading Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity and multiple texts such as television commentary, advertisements, job descriptions, and organization publications. My work is arranged into large sections or frames called assemblages. Throughout my analytical work, I found it necessary to disrupt my assemblages with personal stories, called *sidelights*. These sidelights narrate where my thoughts sparked and share stories of my own encounters with the effects unfolding from and folding into dominant discourses.

Assemblages

Assemblages are used in my work to frame each large section. Use of this term follows a post qualitative approach of entangling new ideas and questions as they emerged during my thinking, reading, and writing. In other words, structuring my work into assemblages opens the possibility for anything that emerged in the thinking and writing to be assembled with theory. This created a process inquiry where theory was responsive to the ideas that were erupting (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). A second purpose for using the term assemblage is the subtle reminder that a door is assembled in relation to its frame. My dissertation consists of five assemblages: Opening, Student, Leader, Institution, and Reframing Community College Discourse.

Assemblage One: Opening

The opening assemblage comprises three parts: encountering doors (part one), theory as threshold (part two), and my analytical toolbox (part three). In part one, encountering doors, I include a review of community college education, my relationship to the inquiry, a

summative review of the literature, the purpose and significance of my study, summary, and rationale for poststructural theoretical framework, appropriateness of post qualitative inquiry, organization, and dissertation goals. I focus on poststructuralism as my theoretical framework in part two, theory as threshold (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Components include key foundations of poststructuralism, principles and assumptions, Foucault's (1977, 1980, 1982) theories of power-knowledge, and Foucauldian discourse analysis (Foucault, 1970). Within my analytical toolbox, the third part, I discuss post qualitative inquiry, its fundamental principles, and thinking with theory as my analytical approach.

Assemblage Two: Student

Through opening two discursive doors, *deficit-shame* and *competition*, I analyze the subjectivities normatively associated with community college students. I plug in popular media (film, television, and social media) with my first analytical question: What are dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college as damage-centered? Entangling popular media and existing community college scholarship makes visible the discourses that are working to produce community college students. Co-reading the work of Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) addresses the second analytical question: How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses? Finally, by returning to popular media and existing scholarly literature and thinking with Foucault's theories on discourse, I address the third analytical question by making visible how certain subjectivities of community college students become normalized.

Assemblage Three: Leader

The flow of this assemblage will follow that of the student assemblage. However, in this assemblage, the leader subjectivity is deconstructed by plugging in a presidential job

description, community college leadership competencies, and the first analytical question: What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college as damage-centered? Interweaving presidential job descriptions and existing community college scholarship illuminates the discourses that are working to produce community college leaders. In the leader assemblage, the discourses that I open are *masculinity* and *mission/aryism*. Like within the student assemblage, my thinking with the work of Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) addresses the second analytical question: How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses? By returning to the presidential job posting and existing scholarly literature and thinking with Foucault's (1970) theories on discourse, I address the third analytical question by exposing how certain subjectivities of community college leaders become normalized.

Assemblage Four: Institution

In this assemblage, I deconstruct the institutional subjectivity by plugging in legislative and regulatory positions from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) with my first analytical question: What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college as damage-centered? Engaging multiple texts including media, the AACC priorities, a 2022-23 state budget, and existing community college scholarship reveals the discourses that are working to produce the institutions. In this assemblage, the discourses of *junior and community* fully emerge. By thinking with the work of Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), I address the second analytical question: How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses? Returning to the media, legislative and regulatory positions, and existing scholarly literature, and thinking with Foucault's theories on discourse, I address the third

analytical question by making explicit how certain subjectivities of community colleges become normalized.

Assemblage Five: Reframing Community College Discourse

In part one of the final assemblage, I dismantle damage and close normalized community college subjectivities. Using Foucauldian theory, I revisit the significance and implications of my analytical questions in a move that refuses damage as imagined by Tuck (2009). Part two of the final assemblage, framing new doors, crosses the threshold of alternative discourses and disruptive practices. In framing new doors, I share my dissertation's contributions to community colleges, inquiry, and educational leadership. Lastly, I offer areas for future inquiry that surfaced during my inquiry.

Sidelights

*My initial description and explanation of sidelights is presented differently (in italics) to show the emergence of these stories and to illustrate the subtle shifts in my own subjectivity. Sidelights are the term for the windows on the sides of doors (Visualization 1). In my work, sidelights are figurations of the ideas that allowed me to "peek" through the discursive doors. In seeing what was "on the other side," I knew the doors had to be opened. The sidelights also represent parallel positionalities as I move in and out of my own subjectivities while writing. My sidelights are inspired by Christina Sharpe's (2016), *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Sharpe uses the metaphor and materiality of "the wake" to*

show how Black life is haunted and produced by slavery. Sharpe offers a way forward by activating multiple representations of the “wake” and repeatedly returning to wring out the possibilities in their excesses. In keeping with my study of the community college, I replaced

Visualization 1

A door with sidelights on each side



“the wake” with “the open door” and extracted excesses from multiple door types (Dutch-door, glass door, revolving door, etc.) and “door’s” deferred meanings (opening, barrier, entranceway, threshold, portal, access, and opportunity). These excesses were generative, unplanned, and rhizomatic as they appeared differently even when I had previously imagined how they might take shape. I quickly saw that my ideas would not be confined to only door types (e.g.,

Dutch-door, etc.). As ideas emerged and language slipped, excess meanings accumulated through what doors represent (e.g., opening, barrier, etc.). Throughout my work, the sidelights are written in italics and disrupt the text to illustrate my own encounters with openings and closings. Additionally, some sidelights are presented with visualizations of the doors that inspired me and other sidelights are shared without visualizations so that space may be left open for multiple imaginings.

In the next section, theory as threshold (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), I elaborate on the ways in which poststructuralism as a theoretical framework opens up new ways for me to

problematize how damage-centered discourses are producing community colleges. I detail key components of Foucault's theories of discourse (1970) and power-knowledge and the subject (1977, 1980, 1982), and discuss the limitations of my study.

Part Two: Theory as Threshold

As my theoretical framework, poststructuralism provides the theory, language, and urge to interrogate how power-knowledge moves within commonly accepted community college discourses. For poststructural scholars, discourse is bound to power relations—we know that certain “truths” only make sense to say and do within the rules or practices of discourse. Therefore, when discourse becomes common sense, power has become so naturalized within language usage that we fail to see how it works and moves. The challenge for poststructural thinkers is to identify accepted truths, interrogate how they are linked with power, knowledge, and subjectivity, and make known power’s influence. As Bové (1990) explains, poststructuralism provides entrée into a form of discourse analysis that aims to describe the “surface linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations, and the modern state as these intersect the functions of systems of thought” (as cited by St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). The potentialities outside normalized discourse remain unintelligible and impossible until poststructural discourse analysis opens the door to the reconceptualization of accepted “truths.”

The thinking and reading that moved me to a poststructural theoretical perspective have crossed multiple poststructural theoretical and conceptual frameworks, including critical feminism, Foucauldian theories, and problematization. It is impossible to cast aside these influences, and the ideas that I have gathered from my reading will appear throughout my writing. However, the theories that have primarily guided my thinking are Foucault’s (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity. These concepts will serve as the warp threads upon which my research is woven.

To allow Foucault to guide my analysis, my approach is a post qualitative, *thinking with theory* inquiry (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) that plugs in Foucauldian theories of power-knowledge to think differently about dominant community college discourses. I chose to think with Foucault because his theories explain how power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to produce particular subjectivities. This perspective deploys power as a constantly moving and circulating relation and enables an analysis of knowledge as an effect of power (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). In this framework, power and knowledge articulate one another in discursive practices—and the practices I deconstruct are entangled discursive fields that produce what is normative about community colleges.

Discourse is a collection of ideas and meanings situated within sociohistorical context that order reality in certain ways (Cheek, 2008; Saltman 2018). Again, in this work discourse (singular) represents the overarching discourse of community college whereas discourses (plural) describe the multiple intersecting discourses that produce the overarching community college discourse. Foucault tells us that our goal is to reflect on unexamined ways of thinking and consider how discourses (both overarching discourse and multiple intersecting discourses) are constituted (Bacchi, 2012). The goal is to make noticeable the discursive practices that define the discourse and undermine the discourse's assumed status as "true" or "real." This allows for a deconstruction of how the discourse is produced and what or who the discourse is producing. Foucault's theories explain that certain things, such as subjectivities, emerge and become normative through our practices (Bacchi, 2012). Discursive practices have authoritative components (the formations—exclusions, controls, and rules) and legitimating components (the reasons—power and knowledge relations of differentiation, privilege, marginalization, and regulation). As such, it is "through practices

[that] we are constituted as particular kinds of subjects” (Bacchi, 2012, p. 3). The overarching question guiding my analysis is how do damage-centered discourses produce community colleges; and therefore, the discursive practices that constitute community colleges (students, leaders, and institutions) as particular subjects are where I situate my work. In the following sections, I place the fundamental tenets of poststructuralism into relationship with my analytical questions:

- What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered?
- How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses?
- How do certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions become normalized?

This part of my work, theory as threshold (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), begins to think my analytical questions with Foucault’s theories on discourse (1970), power-knowledge relations, and subjectivity (1977, 1980, 1982) and, in doing so, elaborates why poststructuralism provides the threshold in which to do this deconstructive work.

Poststructuralism: Key Principles and Assumptions

Poststructuralism, with a fundamental tenet that reality is not what it seems, is a contested term, challenging to locate, explain, or contain. As a philosophical response to structuralism, I find it best to situate an explanation there. Structuralism is a theoretical perspective derived from seventeenth-century rational thought that deploys contrasts and categorizations for interpretation and analysis (St. Pierre, 2000). These contrasts and categorizations have become historically contextualized terms within our language. For

example, in childhood we quickly learned the difference between good and bad. As these terms are used, we shape our social world. And in turn, our language shapes who we are.

Structuralism's beginnings can be traced to Ferdinand Saussure, who looked at elements of language (words) and divided them into two parts: the sound of the word (*signified*) and the concept the sound represents (*signifier*) (St. Pierre, 2000). Collectively, the signified and the signifier are called *sign*. Saussure recognized that the relationship to other terms defines terms, and difference is often used as the delineator. A key poststructural thinker, Jacques Derrida, later expanded upon Saussure's idea that meaning lies in difference (St. Pierre, 2000). This differential construction of meaning between signs allows poststructuralists to theorize that meaning is unstable.

To illustrate Derrida's fundamental idea of difference, imagine this conversation between two early homebuilders: *Person 1: "What is that?" Person 2: "I know it is not a wall. Let us call it a **door**."* The association between door the word and door the concept is arbitrary, based on perceived gaps between door and wall, and suggests uncertainty. For Derrida, this allows meaning to slip between concepts and terms, resulting in blurred boundaries between signs. Other poststructural literary critics later expanded on Derrida's idea of slippages by introducing layers of signification (Barthes & Lavers, 1972). In layered signification, meaning is not determined by a concrete reality but instead is deferred to additional layers of meaning further down the signification chain (Barthes & Lavers, 1972). Continuing my example, I can illustrate that the meaning of the term *door*, which our two builders would have defined as an *opening*, may be deferred in layered signification as:

*an **entranceway**, commonly moving on hinges or in grooves;*

*a moveable, usually **solid barrier** for opening and closing;*

*a doorway or **threshold**;*

*a **gateway** making an entrance or exit from one place or state to another;*

*a **portal**;*

*a means of admittance or **access**; and*

*an **opportunity**.*

The door's deferred meanings are embedded throughout my work to remind the reader of the ways in which language slips and also how ideas unfold and fold into the discourse of the open door.

Derrida (1970) illustrated that language is founded on difference (a gap or absence between signs). Therefore, Derrida set out to critique structures, such as language, that are held together with assumptions of presence, commonality, and identity (St. Pierre, 2000). He called this analysis deconstruction. Deconstruction is a critique that intends to dismantle metaphysical and rhetorical structures, not to reject them, but to reinscribe them in different ways (St. Pierre, 2000). The purpose of deconstruction is to break apart what is assumed, look at what holds the assumption together, make visible what it produces, and rebuild it in new ways. In deconstruction, the meaning of old words may be deferred in endless ways to say what cannot otherwise be said so that existing language does not limit what it is possible to think (Belsey, 2002). Deconstruction desires to push against determinism and attempts to see beyond taken-for-granted language (e.g., discourse) (St. Pierre, 2000). The goal is not to cast judgment on the discourse, as that would be a critical rather than a deconstructive move, but rather to examine how language creates our relationships with the world and one another.

In poststructuralism, there is no meaning outside of language, and because meaning is conveyed via language, language is a source of social values (Belsey, 2002). A fundamental poststructural tenet is that language transmits knowledge and normative values and constitutes culture and discourse. As linguistic phrases, narratives, and discourses are repeated, we reproduce existing knowledge and culture and reaffirm the norms of the generations that precede us. The repetition of discourses produces a contextualized reality that, with further repetition, becomes naturalized. When discourses become normal, we cease to see the power embedded within them. As Belsey (2002) writes, “In this sense, meanings control us, inculcate obedience to the discipline inscribed in them” (p. 4). My poststructural work focuses on the relationship among discourse, power, knowledge, and subjectivity, and how power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to discipline the community college world.

At the core, poststructuralism seeks to make visible power relations that create subject positions (e.g., community college student, leader, and institution). In poststructural power relations, all parties determine what is normal by repeating certain discourses and discursive practices. Poststructuralism seeks to make these relations visible because power moves through discourses that do not look dangerous; instead, these discourses are often perceived as acceptable or standard and are, therefore, “invisible.” As these “invisible” discourses are repeated and normalized, certain groups (students), persons (leaders), and institutions (community colleges) internalize these rules and fashion their subjectivities from them (Weedon, 1987/1997). In higher education, for instance, students are not coerced into societal roles. Instead, they are taught that their lives should go in particular directions, such as “selecting” a college transfer major rather than a career requiring technical education, or

vice versa. These discourses create differentiations that produce and perpetuate certain ways of being by restricting and constraining what types of subject positions are available.

Following my example above, certain students are predestined for professional careers through college transfer pathways, whereas, “other” students are directed toward vocational trades.

Furthermore, the social values produced by discourses have material effects that are visible within our institutions. For example, hegemonic neoliberal values of students as consumers have buttressed a discourse of business in higher education. Ramsey (2020) outlines the consequences of neoliberal language and reminds educators that discourse matters.

For years, college and university administrators have increasingly used the language of business, backed by neoliberal contentions and policies, to talk about higher education. Our students are ‘customers.’ Administrators demand ‘data-driven’ assessments and eschew education goals that can’t be quantitatively measured with supposed ease . . . They talk about synergy, agility, best practices, core competencies, entrepreneurship, and SWOT analyses. I could live the rest of my days without ever hearing the word ‘leverage’ again. (para. 2)

The consequence is that consumeristic language has become common sense in higher education; students see themselves as customers who have paid for a service, the public sees education as an industry with goods to deliver, and educators see themselves as managed managers.

The material effects of a neoliberal discourse were spotlighted when COVID-19 forced students from the physical classroom to the virtual setting—students demanded partial

or whole tuition refunds while lobbying complaints to administrators and the media that methods of instruction dictated by the COVID-19 pandemic were “not what we paid for.” While neoliberal discourse was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Ramsey (2020) points to the Great Recession of 2008 as a critical point in advancing the consumer-based educational agenda. She writes:

We first saw these consequences in response to the 2008 Great Recession, after which business-minded administrators more strongly supported majors with very clear paths to jobs to mollify parents and prospective students concerned about future economies. ‘Cost-benefit analyses’ were used to justify extinguishing arts and humanities programs because what possible good can such majors be if they don’t make money? (Never mind the fact that this assumption is effectively challenged) . . . These tendencies encourage the public to measure our institutions primarily by ‘ROI’ and not the extent to which students left our campuses better prepared to live truly meaningful lives. (para. 6)

As evidenced by this example, “invisible” discourses such as neoliberalism produce material effects for institutions—community colleges included.

This opening assemblage of my work illustrates that the dominant discourses of the day have been shaping community college since their inception. These “original” discourses have not disappeared from our sociohistorical context; conversely, many of these discourses are continually reinscribed in often subtle ways. In consequence, multiple discourses are intersecting as ideas about community colleges are continuously reproduced. Dominant discourses already acknowledged in this work include *junior status*, *democracy*, *Christianity*, *vocationalism*, *neoliberalism*, *transformation*, *deficit*, *competition*, *masculinity*,

professionalism, mission/aryism, and consumerism. I imagine there are many more. Using poststructural discourse analysis, my work makes visible how power-knowledge relations inherent within the discursive practices of dominant discourses produce the material effect of damage-centeredness within community college subjectivities. In the next section, I take up the key Foucauldian (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) principles and assumptions that are fundamental to my work: discourse, power-knowledge, subjectivity, and discursive practices.

Discourse

Discourse is defined as a “collection of ideas, meaning-making practices, institutional meanings, narratives, and legitimating practices” (Saltman, 2018, p. 72) situated within a sociohistorical context. In my work discourse, as singular, represents the overarching discourse of community college, whereas, discourses, in plural, are dominant intersecting ideas that produce the “reality” of community colleges as damage-centered. Language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power intersect within discursive fields to produce shared meaning and construct subjectivity (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). For example, a normative discourse in the United States is, “everyone should go to college” (Gándara & Jones, 2020). The multiplication of access-oriented institutions, college-access programs, and free-college policies is evidence that discourse creates reality by “converting phenomena into ‘truth’” (Winkel & Leipold, 2016, as cited in Gándara & Jones, 2020).

In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault (1970) writes, “What, then is so perilous in the fact that people speak, and that their discourse proliferates to infinity? Where is the danger in that?” (p. 52). Foucault hypothesizes that in every society, the production of discourse is simultaneously controlled, selected, reorganized, and redistributed by certain procedures (*discursive practices*) whose function is to hide the discourse’s powers and dangers, to

control its chance events, and make invisible the relationship between discourse and its materiality. Foucault (1972) elaborates on these ideas in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* when he states that *discourse* refers to knowledge or what is possible “within the true” (p. 224). In Foucault’s theories, discourses exercise formidable power relations through knowledge formation (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014).

According to Bacchi and Bonham (2014), “The term ‘discursive practice/s’ describes those practices of knowledge formation by focusing on how specific knowledges (‘discourses’) operate and the work they do. Hence, discursive practices are the practices of discourse” (p. 174). Therefore, within discourses, knowledge is formed through the interaction of discursive practices. Of interest to Foucault is how the discursive practices install regimes of truth. His focus was not on the *things said* in terms of their content or linguistic structure, but instead on how power-knowledge relations work to make the *things said* legitimate and meaningful (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014). In a Foucauldian analysis of discourse, what is deconstructed is not what is thought or said per se, but the discursive practices (exclusions, controls, and rules) that are taken-for-granted constituents of discourse, and therefore knowledge. As Foucault (1972) writes, “Knowledge is that of which one can speak in a discursive practice . . . there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge it forms” (p. 183). It is the space between what can be said and what is actually said that discursive practices, and the power-knowledge embedded within them, are at work (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014). In Foucauldian theory, these discursive practices are complex sets of relations that are intrinsic in the formations of *what* people say (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014). As such, discourses are practices subject to disruption through an analysis of power and knowledge relations.

Power-Knowledge

Power (precisely, how power relations produce subjects) is a particular focus for Michel Foucault. He writes, “Power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised . . . it only exists in action” (Foucault, 1980, p. 89). Foucault challenges Marxist conceptions of classic, juridical power, which considers power a commodity that one can possess and transfer through acts such as cession or contract (Foucault, 1980). Instead, Foucault sought to deconstruct how power brings subjects into existence and how power establishes itself as relational (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Saltman, 2018; Taylor, 2011). In Foucauldian theories, power circulates. It is never localized, never in one’s possession, never appropriated as a commodity. Foucault (1980) writes:

Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. (p. 98).

Individuals are constituted by power and are, at the same time, the agents of power.

However, there can be no exercise of power without the availability of “truth” discourses that operate through and by this power-knowledge association (Foucault, 1980). Foucault (1980) introduces the term "pouvoir-savoir," which translates to power-knowledge, to illustrate that power and knowledge are inextricably connected, rather than divided and separated. Therefore, power-knowledge is linked in my work with a hyphen rather than indicated with a binary representation such as a forward-slash or solidus. In community college, “truth” discourses often resonate damage, producing power-knowledge relations that produce certain, limited subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and

institutions. As Foucault (1980) states, “We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (p. 93). Power and knowledge are the nexus of Foucault's works; in short, knowledge, which bears the effects of power, subjects us to certain ways of living and dying. When analyzing power, Foucault (1980) tells us not to ask why certain people want to dominate, but instead to ask how subjects are slowly, progressively, and materially constituted through the power-knowledge relations within discourses.

Foucault's (1977) work focuses on two levels of power-knowledge relations: *biopower*, which through conformity to social norms and expectations, produces and manages populations, and *disciplinary power*, which centers on the body as a machine. In my work I draw from Foucault's (1977, 1978) theories of biopower and disciplinary power to reveal the ways in which the normative discourses of community colleges produce and manage certain subjectivities (e.g., students, leaders, and institutions).

Biopower

Foucault (1978) makes visible the work of *biopower* (often interchanged with the term *biopolitics*). Biopower differs from disciplinary power in that biopower works on a macroscale through the state rather than through institutions (Taylor, 2011). In biopower and biopolitics, life is regulated. The focus is on the species' body and processes such as reproduction, level of health, and life expectancy, with all the conditions, such as standards of living, that cause these to vary. Foucault (1978, 1978-1979) writes that the supervision of these processes is effected through a series of regulatory controls, which he called *biopolitics of the population*. These regulatory processes may be visible as manipulation of life itself (genetic engineering) or by access to different income and living standards (e.g.,

hierarchically positioning different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic groups, and genders). The effects of biopower's regulatory processes can be seen in how educational discourse actively produces particular types of students (subjects) whose interests align with states and industry (Saltman, 2018; Taylor, 2011). For example, capitalism requires a population of compliant, single-skill workers for low-paying jobs. Often these subjects walk through the community college's open door for job training. On the other hand, emotionally intelligent, creative problem-solvers are needed for leadership roles. These individuals may be enticed by dominant discourses into the subjectivity of community college transfer and/or university bound. The effects of power-knowledge relations working within discursive fields produce who is selected for each type of life.

Foucault was concerned with how such discourses came to be, how they became normative, and how they are continuously rewritten to produce power-knowledge effects. Saltman (2018) provides one example of how power-knowledge are co-opted by “expert” industries authorized to produce one “truth” discourse of education: “Economists, business people without educational expertise, test makers, publishers have become increasingly authorized to educate the broader public about educational values, mainly through the lens of profit-seeking” (p. 52). Profit-seekers have been given the authority to speak the “truth” of educational reform (Pearson, for example) and the ideas education repeats have increasingly drawn from the vocabulary of business (e.g., data-driven management, return on investments, key performance indicators, etc.). Saltman (2018) elaborates poignantly:

What makes someone a good teacher? Inspiring curiosity and creative thought in students? No, raising numerical test scores. What makes somebody a good student? A disposition for reasoned judgment and dialogue, for relating claims to truth to

historical power struggles and social and ethical matters? No, scoring high numerical test scores. The very idea of what it means to live a good life . . . gets defined through assumptions of these . . . ‘regimes of truth.’ (p. 52)

As these ideas are reinscribed by “experts” they become normative and the power-knowledge effects within dominant discourses are continuously in circulation to produce certain subjectivities.

Following Foucauldian (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theory, “truth” discourses are working to produce populations of subjects through biopower. In education, dominant discourses about community college are sustained through discursive practices, and such practices work to produce groups of students, leaders, and the community college themselves in very different and very particular ways. For instance, working-class, poor, or academic underachieving students may be encouraged into military services and/or vocational careers with potential health consequences (welders, lineman, first-responders, etc.) (Saltman, 2018). Meanwhile, professional-class, academically successful students are often encouraged to apply for university and fulfill their lives with safe, secure professional work. The effects of biopower are tangible for students’ socioeconomic chances, standards of living, and life-long opportunities. Insidiously, biopower does not require coercion. Instead, through discursive practices, students learn that their lives are meant for specific directions. The power-knowledge relations within these discursive practices are hidden and, therefore, any good or bad fortune has to do with students’ own abilities rather than the social structures and historical patterns that privilege certain groups (Saltman, 2018; Taylor, 2011). As these discourses and their practices interpolate students into subject positions, they become populations who perform to subjugate themselves further. The consequences of their

“choices” are often lifelong and may be multigenerational (e.g., long term health effects, generational poverty).

Modern institutions (schools, family, police, military, etc., community colleges included) operate within these net-like spheres of power-knowledge relations. On an individual level, disciplinary power is working through institutions to position community colleges as the subjects of discourse (e.g., the subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions). At the same time, population-level discursive practices articulate what is “true” about these groups. According to Foucault (1977, 1978), the consequence is that the language of our institutions segregates and differentiates hierarchies, effectively guaranteeing unequal power relations of dominance and the effects of hegemony.

Disciplinary Power

Foucault (1977, 1980) lectures and writes on the coevolution of power and society since the seventeenth century. In feudal societies, power was formulated as the sovereign's right over life and death. Power functioned through signs of loyalty to kings and lords that included rituals, ceremonies, taxes, pillage, hunting, war, etc. Since the classical age, changing Western societies brought into being a form of power that exercised itself through social services and social production. Consequently, power had to gain access to the bodies of individuals, to their behavior, their attitudes, and their works (Foucault, 1977). This power, *disciplinary power*, centered on the body as a machine: instructing, optimizing its abilities, using the body's force, increasing its usefulness and its docility. Foucault (1977) called this procedure of power an *anatomo-politics of the human body*. He tells us that disciplinary power is “a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies” (Foucault, 1977, p. 104). Unlike

sovereign power, disciplinary power is dependent on simultaneously increasing subjected forces and improving the force and effectiveness of that which subjects them (Foucault, 1977).

Foucault posits that modern institutions discipline “deviance” through judgment and surveillance (Taylor, 2011). Judgment is the practice of measuring, comparing, categorizing, and ranking against a norm or homogenized standard. Surveillance involves watching individuals in order to judge them. Saltman (2018) elaborates on Foucault’s concepts of power:

In the classical age, Foucault explains, power was wielded in specific places where examples were made—spectacles of punishment on the body like public executions.

In the modern age, power is everywhere, seamless, networked, and involves everyone, operating through surveillance and connected to life instead of death. (p. 41)

In the institution of education, judgment and surveillance are easily recognizable. Educational discourse compares students to one another and then uses instruments produced by discursive practices to differentiate students by their varying levels of conformity. As students turn surveillance inward, they begin to regulate their bodies into societal norms (Taylor, 2011). We can look at examinations for a specific example. Students are examined for how well their performance aligns with discursive norms (academic and/or physical). They are then awarded a letter grade that normalizes an expectation of who a student should be. When students “fail,” they are looked upon as not upholding the standard (grade of C or higher). As students continue to “fail,” they begin to internalize narratives of their deficit

until they consider themselves a failure. The maleficence of these power relations for Foucault is that the “normal” is internalized so successfully.

As explained previously, educational discursive practices position students, leaders, and institutions as subjects of discourse. Continuing my example, students are not coerced into societal roles, yet discourse does not allow students to act autonomously. Instead, discourse narrates a student’s agency. Furthermore, agency is *always already* contextualized by an “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2010)—dominant sociohistorical and economic discourses that underwrite American society. The effect is that educational discourse opens certain doors to discipline students’ lives in specific ways. Successes, or lacks thereof, become visible as self-narration—self-subjugation—rather than the invisible power-knowledge relations within educational discursive practices that privilege certain groups over others. Therefore, Foucault’s (1977, 1980, 1982) theories of power-knowledge are important to my study because they reveal the ways in which power-knowledge relations operate within discursive practices to enable and promote the dominant discourses of institutions, such as community colleges, to produce and sustain certain subjectivities.

Subjectivity

Subjectivity is how we identify ourselves and our places in the world (Weedon, 1987/1997). In my dissertation work, I deconstruct how certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions have become normalized. St. Pierre (2000) tells us that, “According to Althusser, subjects are constructed as they are recruited by the dominant ideology to be used and inserted into the social economy wherever the state desires” (p. 502). This recruitment is what Althusser (1971) calls *interpellation* or *hailing*, leading Althusser to

propose that “individuals are *always-already* subjects” because they are born into ideology (p. 176). At any moment, a subject is subjected to and positioned to conform by the power-knowledge relations produced by ideological discourse and is also positioned as “a site for a range of possible forms of subjectivity” (Weedon, 1987/1997, p 34). Dominant discourses have shaped my own leadership subjectivity. For example, “masculine images” are taken for granted as the desired conception of leaders (Mitchell & Garcia, 2020). Therefore, I am subjected to and positioned to conform to norms associated with masculine traits, such as always being in control of my emotions or leading with logic. At the same time my choice to embody or resist a masculinity discourse makes possible a field of subjectivities. I do not attempt to hide my femininity and, as an authentic leader, I frequently share stories of myself and my family. However, masculinity discourse does hail me so that in these conversations I am careful not to undermine my “professionalism” by becoming too emotional. This double-move in the construction of subjectivity creates subjects with agency to interpellate prevailing discourse while simultaneously subjugated by that same discourse and its discursive practices (St. Pierre, 2000).

Discursive Practices

The subject does not exist outside of discourse, but is an unstable, dynamic, productive effect of discursive practice (St. Pierre, 2000). In other words, subjectivity is normalized through power-knowledge relations within discursive practices. According to Foucault (1970), the forms of discursive practices enacted through power-knowledge relations to produce subjectivity are exclusion principles, control procedures, and discursive rules.

Exclusion Principles

One means in which power-knowledge operates is external discursive practices that Foucault (1970) calls “principles of exclusion” (p. 52). These exclusion principles include prohibition, division and rejection, and “will to truth.”

Prohibition. The first principle of exclusion, prohibition, limits what we have a right to say. Foucault (1970) states, “We know quite well that we do not have the right to say everything, that we cannot speak of just anything in any circumstance whatever, and that not everyone has the right to speak of anything whatever” (p. 52). Those who are privileged as having the “right to speak” are considered *experts* or *authorities*, and what they say or write are considered *expert knowledges* (Foucault, 1978). But discourses are not neutral, instead, they reflect and reproduce the points of view inscribed through the expert’s ideologies, beliefs, and traditions (Allan et al., 2006; Weedon, 1987/1997). When thinking with my third analytical question of how certain subjectivities become normalized, plugging in Foucault’s thoughts on prohibition makes visible how often experts or authorities outside of the community college speak on the community college’s behalf. This reduces the agency of community college students, leaders, and the institutions themselves, and perpetuates the power-knowledge relations that produce community college subjectivities contextualized by damage. Further, the community college’s own expert texts can be so mired in damage-centered assumptions that the discourse community colleges produce about themselves limits alternative subjectivities.

Division and Rejection. A second procedure, division and rejection, creates opposition and judgment. Foucault (1970, 1982) provides an example of these differentiations or oppositions in the division between reason and madness. Reason is

positioned as the rational, and therefore, the madman's words are annulled. Foucault (1970) would suggest that they are perhaps annulled *because* they have the power to utter a hidden truth or suggest a new perception. In analyzing how power-knowledge relations work, the goal is to locate power's position and point of application, and the methods used. Instead of looking from the side of rationality, Foucault (1982) suggests looking to the irrationality or the oppositions created. Examples of these oppositions in community college discourse include deficit/success, vocational/academic, woman/man, victim/savior, junior/university, and community/global. Typically, these differentiations place the privileged half of the binary in the first position, which effectively marginalizes the "other" side of the binary. Because my work seeks to disrupt these assumptions, I have reversed the typical subject positions. One of the most prominent examples of differentiation in higher education are the dividing practices that sort students by the varying levels of deficit or success. As these societal norms of success, goodness, and academic fitness (intelligence) are internalized, students begin to regulate themselves into certain predetermined categories (one example from my work is community college versus university bound).

“Will to Truth.” In a third procedure, which Foucault (1970) calls the “will to truth” (knowledge), he highlights the opposition between true and false. Since Plato, the discourse of knowledge has produced the range of objects to be known, the functions and positions of the knowledgeable subject, and how knowledge is reinvested for material effects (Foucault, 1970). The “will to truth” is reproduced by a system of knowledge practices such as pedagogy; books, publishing, and libraries; what societies deemed historically intellectual; and the modern-day privileging of science (Foucault, 1970). However, for Foucault, the most profound way the “will to truth” is reinscribed is by how knowledge is put to work, assigned

meaning, shared, and credited. He writes: “All that appears to our eyes is a truth conceived as a richness, a fecundity, a gentle and insidiously universal force, and in contrast we are unaware of the will to truth, that prodigious machinery designed to exclude” (Foucault, 1970, p. 55). As a result, we accept knowledge as truth and fail to see how knowledge is in relationship with power. My second analytical question addresses how power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses. One means in which power-knowledge is working within community college discursive practice is how the expert knowledge of corporate neoliberals are privileged as “truth” discourse over the local knowledges. The discursive practice in operation puts forth certain things as “truth” or knowledge, and the power relations producing that knowledge as “truth” disappear. As a result, the subjectivities of global-corporate experts and community colleges as institutions in need of saving become normalized. When thinking and writing with this analytical question, one should bear in mind that all discourses are underwritten with the “will to truth” discursive practice; thereby, as a reminder to myself and the reader, “truth” appears in quotations throughout my work.

Control Procedures

Other means in which power-knowledge relations control and demarcate discourses are internal discursive practices; in other words, the discourses exercise their own control (Foucault, 1970). These procedures include commentary, authorship (which intersects with expert-authorship discussed above), and discipline. Foucault (1970) tells us that they work to avert the unpredictability of the discourse’s appearance.

Commentary. The first control procedure at work is commentary. Commentary does two things: it edifies the discourse by further establishing its primacy, and it returns to the

discourse to say what was not said. In this way, commentary is a paradox saying both what the text has already said and what has never been said. One of the texts I repeat in my analytical work is from the opening of the Primetime Emmy Award-winning television show *Community* (Harmon et al., 2009). This show's commentary is saying what has never been said, and also what everyone thinks but sometimes does not say. In essence, the commentary of the show is perpetuating community college students as damaged under the guise of comedy and humor. The key ramification of commentary is not what is said differently when the discourse is repeated, but the establishment of the discourse as an event upon which to return.

Authorship. The second control procedure is authorship, which limits chance, and opportunities for knowledge creation, by the play of an identity composing the work within the context of the author's collective works (oeuvre) and in the period in which the author exists. Foucault (1970) writes, "The commentary-principle limits the chance-element in discourse by the play of an identity which would take the form of repetition and sameness. The author-principle limits this same element of chance by the play of an identity which has the form of individuality and the self" (p. 59). Through the control procedure of authorship, the author is given the individual authority and agency to speak and write the discourse. As a control procedure this limits discursive mutations (so to speak), because scholarly inquiry requires that new ideas be constructed on top of foundational knowledge (e.g., literature reviews). In community college texts and literature, "transformative" ideas are constructed on top of existing ideologies, thereby, controlling new forms of discourse and different frameworks for subjectivity.

Discipline. The third control procedure, discipline (branch of knowledge—this is not discipline in the sense of Foucault’s (1977) theory of discipline and surveillance), also stabilizes certain discourses as acceptable. Discipline is “defined by the domain of objects, a set of methods, a corpus of propositions considered to be true, a play of rules and definitions, of techniques and instruments” (Foucault, 1970, p. 59). All this, he states, creates an anonymous system at the disposal of anyone who wants to or can use it. The user's validity is linked with the discipline, while the discipline provides the requisites for constructing new statements. In the educational hierarchy, academic disciplines and the academy are often placed into the privileged subjectivity of rule makers for acceptable knowledge. Often, certain disciplines are seen as the “real” academic disciplines within the community college. These differentiations produce differences in how the public perceives college transfer, general education, and liberal arts versus Associate in Applied Sciences technical program areas.

Foucault (1970) summarizes how these internal control procedures are intersecting power relations at work:

We are accustomed to see in an author’s fecundity, in the multiplicity of the commentaries, and in the development of a discipline so many infinite resources for the creation of discourses. Perhaps so, but they are nonetheless principles of constraint; it is very likely impossible to account for their positive and multiplicatory role if we do not take into consideration their restrictive and constraining function. (p. 61)

In short, control procedures work to constrain ideas into already accepted discursive fields.

These procedures are at work within community college discourse; and they are also working

within the scholarly discourse of the academy to determine what is acceptable inquiry. Because these ideas are so inherent in our systems and structures, it is difficult to move completely beyond these control procedures in scholarly work. However, in an attempt to move beyond the constraints of discipline, to entangle ideas, and to erupt something new, my discourse analysis is a post qualitative approach that is unbound from conventional research methodologies.

Discursive Rules

Finally, Foucault tells us that the third group of discursive practices (discursive rules) determines the conditions of a discourse's application by imposing regulations upon the individuals who hold the discourse and, thus, preventing everyone from accessing them. In this manner, discursive rules simultaneously regulate the discourse and the subjects of the discourse (Foucault, 1970). These rules or regulations include the necessary qualifications of the speaking subject (differentiation that restricts who can engage with a discourse), privilege of the author's voice (expert authority), speech rituals (traditions that solidify privileged meaning), doctrinal allegiance (recognition of the same "truth" and acceptance of certain rules), and the social appropriation (hierarchies) of discourse, all of which are linked and work collectively to control who can enter the order of discourse. I do not attempt to open each of these in detail. These rules are interwoven with the exclusion principles and control procedures opened above. Instead, I share an example of how Foucault (1970) understood social appropriation in education:

Although education may well be, by right, the instrument thanks to which any individual in a society like ours can have access to any kind of discourse whatever, this does not prevent it from following, as is well known, in its distribution, in what it

allows and what it prevents, the lines marked out by social distances, oppositions and struggles. Any system of education is a political way of maintaining and modifying the appropriation of discourse, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry. (p. 64)

I believe that Foucault is saying that just as discourses regulate what is socially normal, discursive rules makes acceptable who can “take up” certain educational discourses as their own.

Discourse Analysis

My purpose for this work is to bring to light how dominant discourses produce community college subjectivities. Following Foucault, I look to how discursive practices (exclusions, controls, and rules) operate through power-knowledge relations to ensure that community colleges conform to established norms. And how, through conformity, community college students, leaders, and the institutions become the subjects of damage-centered discourse. Foucault's work comprised a critique of discourses that shape modern society, including discipline and punishment, sexuality, criminality, and madness. In laying out his strategy for analyzing these discourses, Foucault accounted for the procedures that he identified in *The Order of Discourse* by requiring a resolve to question our will to truth, to acknowledge discourse as a series of events, and to discard the sovereignty that the signifier has over materiality (Foucault, 1970).

In keeping with these requisites, Foucault’s discourse analysis followed two sets of principles. The first, the “critical” set, tries to articulate forms of exclusion, limitation, and appropriation (i.e., discursive practices: exclusions, controls, and rules) by showing how they formed, how they have been changed and displaced, what they have constrained, and how

they have been evaded. The second set of principles, the “genealogical” set, are grounded in suspicion and critique, working to make visible how a series of discourses come to be, how they are woven into and exist despite systems of constraints, the ways in which they are normative, and what conditions allow for their inscription and reinscription. In my work, I follow Foucault’s approach by first articulating the dominant discourses that have shaped and continue to shape community colleges in order to address my first analytical question: What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered? My next moves make visible how these discourses are continuously established through the power-knowledge relations within their discursive practices, taking up the question: How do power-knowledge relations work within the discursive practices that enable and promote these dominant discourses? Finally, I analyze how, as a result of these power-knowledge relations, certain community college subjectivities are normative to engage the question: How do certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions become normalized?

Effects of Discursive Practices

Discursive practices have the authoritative components of exclusions, controls, and rules. These components are enacted through legitimating power-knowledge relations to produce the effects of differentiation, privileging, marginalization, and regulation. Therefore, the effects of discursive practices are inseparably interwoven and entangled with relations of power-knowledge. Because of this entanglement, language in my analysis that creates distinctions between the effects of discursive practices and power-knowledge relations gives way to overlaps and wavers.

The particular effects of discursive practices enacted through power-knowledge relations illuminated in my analysis are differentiation, privileging, marginalization, and regulation. Differentiation is a form of judgment that works through dividing practices such as binaries and oppositions. Privileging is a strategy of judgment and regulation that establishes preferred subject positions, hierarchical classification schemes, and the status of expert or authority. Marginalization is the “other side” of the privileged/marginalized binary. Marginalization appears in my analysis when subjects are disqualified and devalued. Finally, regulation produces social stratifications. Regulation is visible on the individual level through disciplinary power (judgment and surveillance) and population level through biopower (regulatory processes). As further entanglements of effects of discourse, biopower, disciplinary power, and discursive practices are interwoven power-knowledge relations at the levels of population and individual subjectivities. For example, discursive practices produce biopower and disciplinary power by regulating what we think and say. The ones who benefit from these dominant discourses remaining in a place of primacy are those who are in the preferred subject positions (e.g., universities, men, corporations).

In my work, I interrogate how community college subjectivities are produced by discursive practices of exclusions, controls, and rules. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) principles of connection and multiplicity, I deconstruct dominant discourses across three subject assemblages: the community college student, the leader, and the institution. My ultimate goal is to refuse damage-centered discourse by making visible how power-knowledge relations are operating through discursive practices and, thereby, opening opportunities for discursive frames that center on disruption. To conclude the discussion of my theoretical framework, in the next section I return to a discussion of the strengths of

poststructuralism as my theoretical framework and also address the skepticism associated with poststructural work.

Poststructuralism as My Theoretical Framework

Poststructural thinkers, such as Derrida and Foucault, believe that founding our knowledge on limited structures (such as language) privileges one term over another. Within the inherent limitations, there are opportunities for resistance. An onto-epistemology of uncertainty rejects metanarratives inherited from the Enlightenment (such as truth and progress) and seeks to deconstruct the discourses we have privileged. Saltman (2018) defines discourse as a vast collection of ideas and discursive practices that create meaning. He then highlights the crux of why discourse should be challenged with his following statement: “As a social construct, the self is ‘spoken’ by discourse” (p. 72). The point to be made is that our subjectivities are constituted by discourse, and, yet poststructural theorists make clear that discourse is fundamentally conditional and vulnerable (Lather, 2006).

With poststructural analysis, I deconstruct dominant community college discourse to make evident the assumptions and ambiguities in which we operate. I deconstruct how certain discursive practices (exclusions, controls, and rules) uphold certain effects of power and knowledge (differentiation, privileging, marginalization, and regulation), and, thereby, construct and constrain possibilities for certain subject positions within the community college and our communities. My purpose is to trouble the overarching damage-centered community college discourse by making visible how intersecting, dominant discourses produce preconceived notions of what it is possible to be. Poststructural theory compels me to challenge community college discourses, not to portray the work of community college as

a bad faith effort, to posit idealized solutions, or to silence opposing voices—but to open up spaces for new ways of acting (McNeely, 2020).

I chose poststructural theory because it provides the concepts and tools needed to deconstruct the discursive practices of intersecting community college discourse and ask what is at stake when community college embodies the damage-centered assumptions inherent within the power-knowledge relations in operation. My work makes visible the productive effects of power-knowledge relations within the discursive practices of community college discourses, deconstructs how the subjectivities constructed by these power-knowledge relations have become normative and accepted, and questions how said subjectivities can be refused.

Critique of Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is not interested in finding meaning or “truth.” Since meaning cannot be found and confined, meaning is always deferred, and the work is never finished. With deconstruction, the “myth of finitude explodes” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 483), so any new idea presented in this work must, in turn, be deconstructed. Poststructuralism is often critiqued because, as work unfinished, it does little to propose solutions. However, the theoretical framework’s best contribution may be unique inquiry and reflectivity into unquestioned truths. For this purpose, poststructuralism demands a deconstruction of ideas that other theories dare not question.

St. Pierre (2000) draws my attention to another poststructural criticism. She states that humanism, yet another discourse, is understandable because of its familiarity, whereas poststructuralism is often labeled as unintelligible and difficult to read. This designation of difficulty feels like deterrence, making the reader wary of mental stretching while

documenting that there will be little gain for the mental and time commitments required. As a strategy against intellectualism, language and knowledge that challenge us are rendered unclear, thereby encouraging a casting aside for more productive pursuits. I mention this particular critique of poststructuralism with intention. Only what is easily understood is pursued and, therefore, the easily intelligible, the normative, the seemingly natural are privileged as truth (St. Pierre, 2000). This power-knowledge relation has the potential to work within my own work to silence my ideas and limit their influence.

Finally, I cannot use poststructural theory to make claims of correctness, reliability, validity, or other standards associated with scientific inquiry. If positivist respectability is what you seek, then read no further. My purpose in thinking with theory is not to stake a position or identify the “real problem,” but instead to explore the limitations and exclusions of the system I am within. The goal is to open up community college discourse so that community college students, leaders, and institutions have an opportunity to unsay what has been said.

This work is not done without anxiety. I am fearful of focusing too heavily on damaged-centered discourses and thereby causing the reader to forget that my ultimate goal is to close the door on (i.e., disrupt) damage. At the same time, I am ethically bound to make visible what is going on. St. Pierre (2019) writes, “At some point, what ‘cannot be thought and yet must be thought’ (Deleuze & Guttari, 1991/1994, p. 60) is no longer optional but an ethical obligation” (p. 5). Since the beginning of my doctoral journey, I have come to realize that this has been the work I was called to do, and my respect for community colleges insists that this deconstructive work be done with passion and compassion. Foucauldian poststructuralists will stop with deconstruction, but this work is personal to me, and I am

compelled to go one step further and ask how community colleges will write the alternative discourses of their choosing. In the final assemblage of this dissertation, I cross the threshold from damage-centered discourse to disruptive discourse in order to open a door to expanding community college subjectivities.

Poststructural Critique of the Literature

The existing literature on community colleges is grounded within positivist and interpretivist paradigms, frequently producing studies that explore data-driven improvement practices or enhance our understanding of the experiences of community college students and leaders (particularly presidents). These works contribute to the voluminous body of community college scholarship; however, conventional humanist research is limited by a convenient, preexisting process to follow, a framework with well-identified steps, and codes and categories in which researchers can easily slot their findings—all of which tend to control the outcomes of the study (St. Pierre, 2019). In my dissertation, I cast aside these prescriptions in order to open up community colleges to something entirely new.

In this assemblage, I introduced my theoretical framework, poststructuralism, discussed its fundamental principles and assumptions, and its strengths and criticisms. The aim of my poststructural work is to name the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered, to make visible the ways in which power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses, and to deconstruct how certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions become normalized. To do this work, I use a philosophically-informed approach: *thinking with theory* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). In the next assemblage, I introduce thinking with theory, describe the key post qualitative principles and assumptions

necessary for my work, and explore the implications of my analytical approach for community college discourse.

Part Three: My Analytical Toolbox

To open up to the unthought, I deployed a post qualitative process called *thinking with theory*, which Jackson and Mazzei (2017) explain as plugging in theoretical concepts with what is normative within a subject to create new thought. The *thinking* can transverse disciplines, entangle ideas, and push the outlines of what is known in an ontology of infinite becoming. My inquiry created new assemblages of thought as I deconstructed normative community college discourse. The thinking in my dissertation was emergent, and as such, I disrupted my writing with *sidelights* of the unfoldings, connections, and accumulations—openings and closings—that I observed during my research and writing. I use the term disrupt with intention as these experiences were disorienting, forcing me into a new and different thought pattern. This said, I did not seek to write a traditional dissertation; my writing was conceptual in which the deconstruction evolved during reading and thinking with theory and discourse.

Thinking with Theory

Jackson and Mazzei (2017) describe the analytic, thinking with theory, as a way of inquiry that is unpredictable and emergent, solidifying as thinking and reading with theory is done recursively and with a desire for the new. There is no prescribed method or analytical recipe. Instead, thinking with theory weaves theoretical and conceptual frames with all kinds of texts to rework concepts, concoct innovative approaches, and create novel assemblages, thereby opening our minds to the previously unthought or thought impossible. An attempt to codify thinking with theory is, as Jackson and Mazzei (2017) state, “ruined from the start” (p. 717). Nevertheless, for the purpose of the dissertation, I attempt to explain the unexplainable, at least in as much as required to understand the moves I used to deconstruct community

college discourse. The goal of thinking with theory, and my goal working within and against community college discourse, is to shake off structures (methodologies and discourses)—to get rid of the old, the normative, and the *this is the way things are done around here* prescription.

The way we have done community college research, past and present, focuses on positivist, data-driven modes of research for increasing student success and qualitative studies to understand the typical experiences of community college students, faculty, and leaders. Little attention has been paid to how power and knowledge produce certain community college subjectivities of the student, the leader, and the institution itself. The discourses that produce these subjectivities needed to be deconstructed to see how power and knowledge relations are at work. To quote Christina Sharpe (2016), whose style of inquiry inspires my thinking and writing:

Despite knowing otherwise, we are often disciplined into thinking through and along lines that reinscribe our own annihilation, reinforcing and reproducing what Sylvia Wynter (1994, 70) has called our ‘narratively condemned status.’ We must become undisciplined. The work we do requires new modes and methods of research and teaching . . . (p. 13).

Thinking with theory, as *undisciplined* inquiry, distances itself from conventional research and works to disrupt methodological vocabulary derived from humanist history (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). This is accomplished by untethering from conventional ontological and epistemological frameworks and the use of “new” terms that are more descriptive of this fluid and emergent analytical process. Certain signifiers, such as “analysis,” are present in post qualitative inquiry with the acknowledgment and caveat that

we are confined and burdened by our language. However, in thinking with theory, analytical terms have been disrupted and repositioned within post-foundational frameworks for “strange new uses” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 15). Postfoundational is a term used to capture poststructural, posthuman, post qualitative onto-epistemologies collectively. In thinking with theory, nothing is given primacy; instead, everything (encounters and experiences with texts, theory, concepts, selves, affects, histories, lives, and so on) is entangled (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). As an entanglement, thinking with theory does not follow a method; instead, it plugs in concepts, invents approaches, and uses analytical thought to assemble something creative, disruptive, and new. With this analytical approach, I put into assemblage analyses of discourse, figurations of doors, and sidelights to narrate where my thinking sparked and erupted. Further, I use language differently so that my signifiers are descriptive of post qualitative inquiry. For example, my use of *encounters and experiences* illustrates how the plugging in of multiple texts and Foucauldian theories caused me to think with *astonishment* (Jackson, 2017; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

Jackson and Mazzei (2017) describe thinking with theory as a process of analysis that is emergent and immanent. The work begins in the middle and generates its next steps; as such, the work is never done. The hope is that the next iteration, the next episode of thinking with theory, will exceed what was before so that there is no beginning and no end. Like the conceptualizations it creates, the analytical approach is in the process of always becoming. Researchers interested in deploying thinking with theory must reconcile that this work cannot follow a linear, logical sequence. It is not even cyclical, although repetitions to extract excesses are recommended to tackle the work of thinking with theory. Just as the work may begin at any point, it may take off in any direction. Suddenly, and seemingly without

warning, a word, a text, a thought, or story may trigger an inflection, and the analysis may change. To show how these inflections moved my work in different, new directions, I include personal stories called *sidelights*. This created a form of inquiry that is a dynamic, rhizomatic, and entangled process of reading, thinking, noticing, and doing with theory.

Consequently, a significant part of my work involved reading theory. In my study of the normative discourses of community college, I engaged Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity. Foucault's theories gave me the language and ideas *to think* the new and *to do* beyond the status-quo. To be clear, theory is not privileged over other texts (e.g., media). Instead, all texts (theory, discourse, media, etc.) enter an assemblage with equal agency where all texts are thought together on a "plane of immanence in any 'analysis' that they undertake" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 733). In practice, this looks like reading theory while activating multiple texts and my analytical questions. In my inquiry, I co-read theory and community college discourse: news articles, social media, film, television; existing research and scholarships; job descriptions and marketing advertisements; American Association of Community Colleges legislative and regulatory priorities; and narratives I hear in my role as academic dean, which I collected in a journal. Co-reading multiple texts with my analytical questions in mind puts theory to use to deconstruct how community college discourses work, to make visible what these discourses produce, and to open what might become unsettled as damage-centered discourses are disrupted (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). In the following sections, I explain how theory is put to work in thinking with theory.

Thinking with theory attempts to "put to work philosophical ideas and various theories" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 720). After reading a letter written by Eve Tuck

(2009) titled “Suspending damage: A letter to communities,” I began to think about how community college discourse is often framed from a position that centers on damage. This position makes normative the status of lack and brokenness. To open up potentials for escaping damaged-centered discourse, I put theory to work deconstructing community college discourse. The goal is to make visible how damage is centered, how it was brought into existence, and how it functions within the community college.

Theory is a necessity. In thinking with theory, theory is used similarly to its use in the modern humanities, as a referent for the philosophical questions of what counts as knowledge, who gets to decide, and what is constituted as “real.” The intention is not to exhaust all possibilities or determine correctness, but to open up previously unthought approaches to thinking that can situate and resituate whatever or whoever is being thought about. In the case of my inquiry, what is thought about are the status-quo discourses surrounding community college. Jackson and Mazzei (2017) tell us that it is their view to use theory to “shake us out of the complacency of seeing/hearing/thinking/feeling as we always have, or might have, or will have” (p. 720). In other words, theory gives me language and ideas to explore the new and *to do* beyond what is normative. Framed in this way, thinking with theory is my analytic for thinking *and doing* with theory; it is praxis.

The theories to use are “transdisciplinary” in the sense that although they are philosophical, they are supple and able to cross boundaries (into social sciences, for example) to erupt what we have assumed is known. These “transdisciplinary” theories provide us with the language to ask new questions and make previously unthought knowledge visible. For my inquiry into community colleges, I chose to think with Foucault’s (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity. Thinking with Foucauldian

theories led me to deconstruct how power and knowledge relations function with, in, and between discourses to produce whom we are becoming as students, leaders, and institutions. As I was reading, thinking, doing, and becoming with theory, questions emerged which dispersed my thought toward different questions and knowledge “open[ing] up the possibility of different modes of living . . . not to celebrate difference as such, but to establish more inclusive conditions from sheltering and maintaining life that resist models of assimilation” (Butler, 2004, as cited in Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). Theory, in this inquiry, situates knowing and being as always becoming and in process.

The figuration of the dynamic threshold is where Jackson and Mazzei (2017) locate theory work and their relationship with the practices of thinking in their research encounters.

We explain that in a threshold, things enter and meet, flow (or pass) into one another, and break open (or exit) into something else . . . The threshold incites change, movement, and transformation of thought in qualitative inquiry. For a moment, in a threshold where thinking happens, everything and everyone becomes something else.

(Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 721)

The liminal space offered within a threshold provides a site for problematization.

Furthermore, the liminal space can be crossed or opened onto something new when the thinking reaches an intensity threshold sufficient to produce an effect (i.e., new thought).

Thus, a fundamental concept of thinking with theory is that the effect of crossing one threshold opens another, ad infinitum. Threshold, a deferred meaning of door, is used in my work to represent a dynamic crossing over. And, in my work, as one door was opened and crossed, I found that there was always another door waiting to be opened.

The purpose of this type of inquiry is to set things in motion, and one must take care not to fall into the traps of generalizing, naming themes, and identifying patterns that work to close in on something representational. Instead, the goal is to open up the door to new thought. The use of thinking with theory keeps things moving and becoming. It is always in the middle, always within thresholds, always where the motion is located. As Jackson and Mazzei (2017) write, “thinking, in a process methodology, emerges into and continues through *potentialities* of creativity” (p. 722, emphasis in original). Thresholds are when potential energy becomes kinetic energy creating productive force. In this new analytic, thinking is the productive force, and the dynamics (e.g., excesses, accumulations, and connections) are used to open up differences.

As discussed above, analytical questions emerge during reading and thinking with theory and other texts. For example, thinking and writing about community college discourse while reading St. Pierre’s (2000) poststructural feminism, Foucault’s theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity (Foucault, 1970, 1977, 1980, 1982; Taylor, 2011), writings on damage-centered frameworks (Tuck, 2009; see also Baldrige, 2017; Khoja-Moolji, 2019), Sharpe’s (2019) “In the Wake,” Jackson and Mazzei’s (2017) “Thinking with Theory,” and other texts helped to “threshold” the becoming of my inquiry. As I read, the theories moved within me. At times they would accumulate and evolve, and at other times, they would scatter, creating new rhizomatic connections that opened door upon door of interactions and ideas. The dynamism within this threshold showed me that reading theory could open my thinking about community college discourse in ways I would otherwise never have considered. And, using the “potentialities of creativity” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 722), discourse, theory, the figurations of doors, texts, images, visualizations, and sidelights

were placed into dynamic assemblages which opened up new ideas. Now, thinking with theory has become reflexive, and I find myself engaging in theoretical interactions with anything and almost everything. Because there is no beginning or end to this work, my ideas were *always already* in process, and I realized that thinking with theory within community college discourse was work that I was called to become.

Key Principles and Assumptions

Thinking with theory assumes an onto-epistemology of becoming. This section brings forward key principles and assumptions of a thinking with theory analytical approach including decentering rationality, deconstruction, and encounters and experiences. The aim of thinking with theory, according to Jackson and Mazzei (2017), is against postpositivist and interpretive ways of researching that result in extensions of what we already know and, therefore, “limit interpretation, analysis, and meaning-making” (p. 722). The approach is not interested in what researchers “discover” or what participants “mean.” Instead, thinking with theory desires to deconstruct “how” we are produced and open up what “we do.” In this section, I open up post qualitative principles and assumptions on rationality, deconstruction, and analytical encounters and experiences.

Decentering Rationality

Before decentering rationality can be adequately explained, it is essential to attempt a foundational explanation of how poststructuralists view rationality. I will freely admit that adjusting my view of rationality has been the biggest challenge in making the poststructural turn. I expect many community college stakeholders, who may become the readers of this work, will also struggle here.

Humans began to recognize reason as the source of knowledge during the Age of Enlightenment in the seventeenth century, leading scholars to privilege knowledge consequent of the study of truth (Crotty, 2015). Truth assumed a certain standard of rationality underwritten by “unified, transcendent human reason” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 486). In other words, human reasoning espousing scientific principles and objective reality decides all knowledge claims. Reason, in the words of St. Pierre (2000), became a “grand narrative that defines humanism’s discourses and does so by claiming to stand outside those very discourses and the practices they produce” (p. 486). For those new to the term, humanism refers to an essential and universal quality shared by everyone (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017).

Poststructuralism, underwritten on the assumption of deferred meaning, rejects anything deemed objective, essential, or universal. As Lather (1990) tells us:

Conceptions of reason and logic are not innocent. Standards of rationality have functioned historically to impose a definition of human nature from whence we deduce common sense. It is in breaking out of commonsense that we escape existing rationality, the exercise of power disguised as reason. (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 486)

Therefore, poststructuralism questions the reason that we use, its effects, dangers, and limits (St. Pierre, 2000). Reason is not universal, transcendent, or perfect—it, like all other things, is situated. Reason is produced within discourses that privilege certain statements while silencing and excluding others (St. Pierre, 2000). This does not mean that we give up on reason or become irrational; it just means, paraphrasing Spivak (1993), that we put reason into its rightful (humanistic) place.

Post qualitative inquiry disrupts conventional research's humanistic presuppositions about reason and scholarly inquiry. As Jackson and Mazzei (2017) state, "a humanist view of research is predicated on a language that searches for stable, coherent meanings and origins of things—the essence of the 'thing itself' that is out there, objective, waiting to be perceived" (p. 723). Thus, humanistic signifiers evoke an essential nature that stabilizes meaning and orders things into subject positions. This applies to all things, including the vocabulary used in traditional inquiry methodologies. Signifiers such as identity, research, and data, contain implicit assumptions in conventional research. Post qualitative inquiry, such as thinking with theory, makes very different assumptions producing a new analytic for inquiry that is different in every way. New practices are enacted: no more coding, no generalizable characterizations, and no taxonomy. Thinking with theory produces a way of doing that is not centered on data analysis in a particular stage (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). Instead, thinking with theory is an entirely new analytic produced by the epistemological and ontological assumptions of doing and becoming. In decentering the grand narrative of rational humanism, post-foundational assumptions about truth and the subject are possible.

Deconstruction

The purpose of post qualitative inquiry is deconstruction, and I deployed thinking with theory to deconstruct the normative discourses surrounding community colleges. I hone in on deconstruction as the paradigmatic purpose because, as Burman and MacLure (2011) write, "Perhaps the most important proposition of deconstruction is that our dealings with the world are *unrelievedly textual*" (p. 286, emphasis in original). Furthermore, poststructuralism accepts that the world and our positions in it are already written; therefore, my inquiry

analyzed how damage-centered community college discourse has already “written” community college into certain subjectivities.

Notably, our written and spoken world has assumed a nebulous yet surprisingly unyielding contract between signs and meaning that creates common binary pairings such as truth/fallacy, rational/emotional, man/woman, scholar/worker, academic/vocational. There is always hierarchy within these pairings—one term represents an ideal while the other represents something lesser than and subordinate (Burman & MacLure, 2011). Deconstruction interferes with this hierarchy by putting the terms under pressure to expose their arbitrary construction.

Like thinking with theory, deconstruction defies categorization as theory, methodology, or method. Burman and MacLure (2011) ask the question, “Can deconstruction be a ‘method’ of research?” (p. 288). They answer that Derrida would say “no.” To call it one or another (method or theory) is to create another opposition, another separation, and “deconstruction is always inextricably tangled up with whatever is its object” (Burman & MacLure, 2011, p. 288). Additionally, like thinking with theory, deconstruction cannot be reduced to a series of procedures that can be externally applied. St. Pierre (2019) tells us, “Deconstruction is not necessarily intentional—it is what ‘happens’ (Derrida, 1993/1994)—and categories like the research process, the interview, the field, data, data collection, and data analysis simply fall apart” (p. 3). Intentionality removes the unpredictability that is inherent in post-foundational deconstructive work.

Encounters and Experiences

St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) problematize data collection in post qualitative inquiry when they write, “Collecting data presumes we’ve already determined what counts as data” (p. 715). These concerns are reinforced with a discussion on troubling data:

Rather than saying, on the one hand, that data are ‘givens’ that we collect and code (induction) or, on the other hand, that everything is data (deduction), [Brinkman] suggests we think of data as any material we use to think about an astonishment or breakdown in one’s understanding (abduction) of life events, big and small. In this approach, there can be no line between life, research, theory, and methods because research is part of the life process. (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 717)

St. Pierre (1997) destabilized data by opening up the division between life and research in her use of transgressive encounters and experiences. Transgressive encounters and experiences include emotional experiences, in which through theorizing her participants St. Pierre theorized herself; dream encounters, which provides a canvas to reproduce data differently; sensual experiences, which brings materiality and physical locality into relationship; and responses, which emerge as reactions to participants and peers. In post qualitative inquiry, *data* as a term falls apart (St. Pierre, 1997). As an undisciplined, non-methodological way to conduct inquiry, there is no preexisting data collection method. Data collection itself is problematic when viewed with a post-foundational lens because the signifier collection assumes that data exists separately from human beings and can be possessed or owned (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). Additionally, analytical encounters and experiences can be lived. The journaling that I did during my dissertation work about my own encounters and experiences with community college discourse became disruptive stories that layered upon each other and spilled over into the analytical texts. These stories, which I am calling

sidelights, narrate how theory in communion with everything I was noticing (my encounters and experiences) forced my thinking in new, and often *astonishing*, directions.

In post qualitative inquiry, no one source of knowledge is given primacy over another. Burman and Maclure (2011) write: “*See the world, your data, and yourself, as texts, with all that that implies*” (p. 288, emphasis in original). Therefore, my encounters and experiences, texts from popular and scholarly sources, discourses, Foucauldian theories (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), and my analytical questions are thought together on the same plane of immanence so that community college discursive practices can be opened for disrupting and rethinking in entirely new ways.

Challenging Methodological Traditions

As elaborated throughout the analytical toolbox section, a *thinking with theory* process of inquiry is always in motion. “Foucault wrote that he used no preexisting methodology, which he then *applied* in his research. Instead, he made it up as he went” (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 2, emphasis in original). Many readers of this work may be appalled by the thought of “making up” an approach as the research is conducted. I admit that once, I, too, would have closed the door on the possibility of this work after reading that single statement. As discussed previously, knowledge, constructed during the Enlightenment, has created a very concrete perception of what the academy accepts as “real” research (i.e., good research requires either the scientific method or highly prescriptive qualitative research methods). Readers who are uncomfortable with the disruptive ideas posited by this work can easily find comfort in their onto-epistemology of humanistic rationality.

As a recovering post-positivist (post-positivism exposes an onto-epistemology that relies on rationality and reason to discover an objective “truth”), I have learned how tough it

is to escape my training. But Elizabeth St. Pierre, the pioneer of post qualitative inquiry, reminds us that we must become *anti-method* to engage with this work because a thinker with method creates only what the method allows. She writes:

Following Derrida, deconstruction does not reject what is deconstructs. Rather, it overturns and displaces a structure to make room for something different. So post qualitative inquiry is not a rejection of qualitative inquiry or any other preexisting social science research methodology. It's something different altogether and cannot be recognized and understood in the same grid of intelligibility as those methodologies. (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 3)

That my work might be disparaged as nonsensical, unintelligible, or indulgent is, as St. Pierre might say, “the risk of the new.” In response, I ask that readers remember that my onto-epistemological goal may be different altogether from theirs.

I also fear that some readers will invoke circular logic fallacy as a way to critique and dismiss my analysis. Circular logic is when the conclusion is used as evidence to show that the very conclusion is *true*. Holding theory, texts, and discourses in equal priority within an assemblage may provoke questions on how ideas circulate within the inquiry. However, in response to this potential critique, I again return to the onto-epistemological assumptions of post qualitative inquiry and ask the reader to recall that “truth” is not at all what we seek. The purpose of thinking with theory, specific to my inquiry, is to enter into assemblages of theory and discourse to deconstruct how intersecting discourses create the realities community colleges recognize. I take seriously the ontological and epistemological assumptions that ground and limit me and ask the reader to recognize that I seek to trouble both what counts as

knowledge and reality and how such knowledge and reality are produced (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017).

A question often asked of all social research is, “How does one know the work is *good*?” This question speaks to validity as defined by the social sciences and the relevancy of the work to current social conditions. Validity of a method is often used to determine if the work is indeed “good,” but validity is unthinkable in post qualitative inquiry. In this way, post qualitative inquiry is linked more closely to the humanities than social sciences. St. Pierre (2019) explains:

[Post qualitative inquiry’s] standards of excellence are more like those of art and literature and history and philosophy and the sciences than those of the social sciences. What makes a poem good? What makes a painting good? Why does a philosophy take hold? What makes mathematics elegant? In any event, given that every post qualitative study is different, generalities about its goodness are not possible. (p. 5)

Furthermore, Foucault would challenge the term good as a divisive discursive practice. However, I will put forth a response to the question, “How does one know the work is good?” in the form of another question: Does the work move your emotions with the realization of new possibilities and open you to the unthought? This is what doing the work did for me, and my hope is that this should stir up the same reaction for the readers.

Thus far in the analytical toolbox section of assemblage one, I introduced thinking with theory. This work included an explanation of theory and thresholds, and an elaboration of the key principles and assumptions of thinking with theory: decentering rationality, deconstruction, and analytical encounters and experiences. I also shared how thinking with

theory challenges methodological traditions. The final section of my analytical toolbox, and final section of assemblage one, places thinking with theory into the context of my inquiry. In doing so, I present my analytical questions, *astonishments* (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014), and analytical approach of plugging in.

Thinking with Theory for Community College Inquiry

My post qualitative thinking with theory inquiry (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) plugs in Foucauldian theories of power-knowledge and dominant community college discourses and more. Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories offer an explanation of how power-knowledge relations work with discursive practices to produce certain subjectivities. As the paradigmatic purpose, deconstruction makes visible how discourse is produced and what or who discourse is producing. My goal is to make noticeable the discourses that frame community colleges as damage-centered and undermine those discourses' assumed statuses as "true" or "real." Inspired by Sharpe (2020), I wrote this dissertation differently using the "door" from the open door community college discourse to conceptualize the rhizomatic connections between Foucauldian theory and community college discourse. These doors are the sections of my analytical work. As companions to the doors, I share personal stories called *sidelights* (the architectural term for the windows on the sides of doors) that allowed me to glimpse what needed to be opened.

In alignment with a poststructural analysis of discourse, theory is the analytical tool used to deconstruct how community college discourses produce normalizations. In other words, theory exposes how common sense and status quo discourses allow some ways of thinking while excluding, limiting, or undermining others (Burck, 2005). As discussed previously, I define discourse as a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, stories, ideas,

and language that work as a collective to produce our world. In this work, I open how an overarching community college discourse is produced as damage-centered by multiple intersecting discourses. Specifically, I deconstruct how dominant discourses are kept in circulation by power-knowledge relations within discursive practices. This is important work because discourses produce community college subjectivities (e.g., leader, student, and institution) by shaping how subjects make sense of their world and constraining the consequences and limitations of their actions (Burck, 2005).

Therefore, in this study, I use a thinking with theory inquiry (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) to interrogate how community colleges are produced by flows of power-knowledge within the discursive practices of dominant discourses. My purpose is to problematize normative assumptions about community colleges and to deconstruct the relationships among subjectivity, power-knowledge, and damage-centered discourse by plugging in Foucauldian theory and multiple texts (television commentary, advertisements, job descriptions, and organizational publications) and the following analytical questions:

- What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college as damage-centered?
- How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses?
- How do certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions become normalized?

In the section below, I explain the encounters and experiences that produced “astonishments” in my thinking with theory analytical approach. In the final section of this assemblage, I explain the action taken in thinking with theory: *plugging in*.

Astonishments

As discussed previously, in thinking with theory, the concept of data, as used in humanist research methodologies, is unthinkable (St. Pierre, 2019). Instead of relying on conventional forms of data, I include lived experiences: my encounters with the deconstructive process, multiple texts, Foucault's theories (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), and my analytical questions. These encounters and experiences caused me to think with "astonishment" (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014) about community college discourses.

In my dissertation, I created assemblages of astonishments that include representations of community colleges on social media and television; existing research and scholarship on community college discourses; community college job descriptions and marketing advertisements; American Association of Community Colleges legislative and regulatory priorities; theoretical texts such as Foucault's theories of discourse, power, knowledge, and subjectivity (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982); my own experiences as a community college dean; and my analytical questions. By plugging in these encounters and experiences, I made apparent how dominant discourses intersect to produce community college as damage-centered, how power-knowledge are at work within discursive practices, and how certain community college subjectivities have become normalized.

Representations of community colleges in social media and television helped me identify how community college entities (students, leaders, and institutions) are normatively presented in popular culture. Media spaces reach the broadest American audience and, therefore, greatly impact how Americans understand community college. These representations equipped me to engage with my first analytical question by naming what is often said about community college. I read these texts alongside Tuck's (2009) work on

damage-centeredness and Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity to see how power-knowledge relations are working through the discursive practices of normative discourses to produce community colleges in certain ways.

Current research and scholarship on community college discourse from publications such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Community College Review* helped me address each analytical question. Articles from these publications illuminated the assumptions made within community college literature that underlie the production of damage. I returned to Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity to see how power-knowledge relations operate within discursive practices to produce community colleges in certain ways. Thinking with theory alongside these texts aided my identification of intersecting discourses that produce community colleges as damage-centered, as well as made visible the normative subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions that are produced and reflected within the scholarly literature.

I plugged in community college job descriptions, marketing advertisements, American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) legislative and regulatory positions, and my analytical questions. Job descriptions and marketing advertisements are specifically for the recruitment of leaders and students, so it was important to analyze these texts to see how competing and intersecting discourses are at play to "hail" (or interpellate) community college students and leaders. Analyzing the AACC legislative and regulatory positions highlighted how the leading national community college organization articulates its institutions through discourses of damage.

Finally, as a community college academic dean, I thought with each analytical question from the positionality of someone being produced by the discourses and power-knowledge relations at work. From June 2022 to December 2022, I kept a journal about the discursive practices I encountered in my work and life. I had this dissertation topic in mind for some time and paid attention to statements made both within and outside of my institution. These discursive practices and power-knowledge relations continue to circulate; therefore, my formal journal entries of astonishments are an accumulation of prolonged observations. These observations include comments made during faculty interviews, conversations with students and faculty, new faculty orientations, and more. I present these narratives (in italics) as *sidelights* embedded throughout my dissertation.

The *sidelights* are styled after Christina Sharpe's (2016), *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Sharpe uses the metaphor and materiality of "the wake" to show how Black life is haunted and produced by slavery. Sharpe offers a way forward by activating multiple representations of the "wake" and repeatedly returning to wring out the possibilities in their excesses. In keeping with my study of the community college, I replaced "the wake" with "the open door" and extracted excesses from different door types (glass door, revolving door, Dutch-door, etc.) and door's deferred meanings (opening, barrier, entranceway, threshold, portal, access, and opportunity). Through the figuration of the open door, I tell stories of my own encounters with the effects unfolding from and folding into dominant discourses.

Analytical approach

Plugging in is the doing of thinking with theory. This activity produces new ways of thinking as connections are continuously made and unmade among multiple texts. Jackson and Mazzei (2017) write:

In our thinking with theory, we urge an activation of multiple texts . . . data that are always already from everywhere . . . As a practice of activating, or thresholding, always in-between (Gale & Wyatt, 2009), we advocate ‘plugging in’ of ideas, fragments, theory, selves, affects, and other lifeworlds as a nonlinear movement, always in a state of becoming. (pp. 727-728)

The act of plugging in is a doing, or deconstructively an undoing, which in alignment with post qualitative ontology, Jackson and Mazzei (2017) present as *becomings*. They explain how *becomings* work when thinking with theory and I follow this description with how *becomings* unfolded in my dissertation project (presented in italics):

1. All encounters and experiences are held together on the same plane of immanence. *In my study, there is no privileging of texts or theory. All astonishments are thought in assemblage together.*
2. The work is immanent because our analytical questions emerge from our thinking. Therefore, we cannot preclude analysis with research questions. *Three analytical questions emerged in my inquiry that guided my thinking. At any point in time, these analytical questions could have changed or led to additional questions based on the emergent nature of thinking with theory. And, indeed, after noticing what was emerging, I changed my first analytical question from “what are the intersecting and competing discourses that produce community colleges as damage-centered” to “what are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered.” My analysis revealed that there are many dominant discourses that intersect and that their interwoven power-knowledge relations*

amplify damage-centeredness. Other disruptive shifts in my thinking are shared in my sidelights and I saved unexplored ideas for the final dissertation chapter.

3. The work asks us to repeatedly return to the text to wring out all meanings. *Texts, including images, are repeated across assemblages. With each return these texts are remade and reused in new ways so that new insights were opened. A new insight that emerged as I repeatedly returned to my text and theory is how discourse, discursive practices, power, and knowledge all flow in and through the production of subjectivity. Thus, language was added to my second analytical question to clearly reflect this entanglement. My second analytical question evolved from “how do power/knowledge relations work within dominant discourses” to “how do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses?”*

The work does not consist of steps or sequential methods; rather, there are potential moves to make in a perpetual process of becoming. For my analysis, I used this process of *becomings* to plug in to an assemblage Foucauldian theory (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), my analytical questions, and my encounters and experiences with multiple texts.

Concluding Assemblage One

In my post qualitative dissertation, I used thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) to interrogate how community colleges are produced by damaged-centered discourses. In the following assemblages, I problematize normative assumptions about community colleges and deconstruct the relationship among power, knowledge, and community college discourse by plugging in Foucauldian theory (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), multiple texts, and my analytical questions. This process inquiry revealed the dominant discourses that intersect

to produce community college as damage-centered, exposed how power-knowledge relations work within the discursive practices of dominant discourses, and made visible how certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions have become normalized. As we cross the threshold to the next set of assemblages, my work moves from my first encounters with doors, theory as my threshold, and post qualitative inquiry as my analytical toolbox into a “thinking with theory” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) analysis of six community college discourses: Deficit-Shame, Competition, Masculinity, Mission/aryism, Junior, and Community. These discourses, within three different frames (Student, Leader, and Institution), are presented as doors so that their damage-centered assumptions may be opened, and ultimately closed.

Sidelight - Why Doors?

I remember the morning as if it were yesterday. I was on my way to work at our local community college. I have two choices on how to get there—I can take the highway with fewer curves or the backroad, a scenic drive that, for about half of my travel time, follows the river. The back-road shaves two minutes off my commute, and I chose the fastest way since I was running a bit late. I think a lot in the car, and

*this morning I was thinking about a paper due in my qualitative research class. I had just read Christina Sharpe's, In the Wake, and I was pondering if it would be possible to use a figuration, as Sharpe did with the wake, in my own work. As I approached a less traveled country road that led off to the left, I noticed a sign anchored to the ground by a metal pole hanging from chains that had left rust-color stains down the sign's face (Visualization 2). Printed on its white background were bold, stark black letters that read: **Open***

Door Missionary Baptist Church. I had already

written about the community college's open door mission in my class papers, and it dawned on me at that moment that the open door was a Christian discourse. I pondered the implications of Christian scripture as the community college's primary mission, and I later

Visualization 2

The Open Door Missionary Baptist Church sign



learned that indeed the phrase, Behold, I have set before thee an open door from John the Revelator, is said to have inspired the community college's open door.

I had not realized the fullness of my connection between the Christian open door and the community college open door on my drive to work that morning. But I did begin thinking about doors. I thought about the opening and closing of doors, the door's inseparability from the community college ad/mission policy, and how the position of either open or closed has implications for the opportunities available to community college students, leaders, and the institutions themselves. I thought about opportunity as one of door's many deferred meanings; in other words, how we often use an open door to mean opportunity itself. I thought about different kinds of doors: Dutch doors, glass doors, password-protected doors, and so on. I began to envision that with different door types, certain groups may be allowed access or insight into what is behind the door. Finally, I thought about how with every door is the action of opening and closing.

My thoughts stalled here. Opening/closing, opening/closing, open door mission or . . . closed door mission? Suddenly it hit me that discourses, such as the community college's open door discourse, open and close opportunities, and that sometimes even though the door appears to be open, it can actually be closed for some. By the time I reached the stoplight two miles beyond that simple little church sign, I was ready to grab my notebook (always handy) and write down these thoughts. The door, as my conceptual and metaphorical framework for community college discourse, was born, and as my thinking opened, my fledgling dissertation began to write itself.

ASSEMBLAGE TWO: THE STUDENT

Sidelight - Barriers

A door is a barrier. I share the words of John the Revelator, which are said to have inspired the community college open door: “I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.” The description of the door as open indicates that the barrier is removed.

Community colleges embrace the idea of the open door ad/mission because it illustrates that educational barriers, and barriers to upward socioeconomic mobility, have been removed. Anyone, regardless of their strength, can cross the open door threshold. This imagery creates the illusion of a single open door providing access to all for all. My experiences as a community college leader tell me this is an oversimplification. Instead, I find that the community college has many different doors and the forces guiding us to them and through them are often invisible. These thoughts played in my mind, and I began to wonder if students have the agency to choose the doors they will “open.” I further pondered my role in these “openings” and “closings” as a community college leader.

Community College Students

Inherent to the open door mission of the community college system is that students enter with varying levels of college readiness (Salvador, 2014). In addition, the open door concept is closely connected to ideas of educational opportunity and democracy (Townsend & Dougherty, 2006). As such, the open door mission is not only community college policy but a symbol of the American ideal that anyone, regardless of educational background,

household income, or demographics, has the opportunity to improve oneself and one's social standing (Townsend & Dougherty, 2006).

These ideals are reflected in the comments of Salvador (2014), a Vice President of Student Affairs at a large community college when she writes:

I immediately fell in love with the mission of community colleges, the diversity of their student body, and the focus these institutions have on their communities' economic and workforce strength and development. It was clear . . . that community colleges share a priority on breaking down economic and social barriers relating to postsecondary education. Those of us who work in the field are continually humbled by the life journeys of the students who are able to pursue their education. It is our responsibility to serve students the best ways we can. (p. xiii)

Salvador intended to praise the community college mission, yet her comments bring forward several dominant discourses that intersect in the production of the American community college student subjectivity. First, she talks of falling in love with the mission, indicating *confusion* about the community college's purpose until she learned it by working in the institution. Her use of the words *love*, *humbled*, and *responsibility* hints at a greater, *missionary*-like purpose. Her language illustrates how the community college's role in shaping society has been produced by an economic, workforce, *vocational* discourse. Salvador emphasizes the community college student's socioeconomic barriers to postsecondary education created by *deficit*. When she writes of community college students' life journeys, she alludes to community college students having difficult or deficit circumstances in the phrase "*who are able* to pursue their education." And when she writes that it is "our responsibility to serve," a *heroic* discourse surfaces.

Currently, 1,043 open door ad/mission community colleges in America serve 10.3 million credit and non-credit students (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2022a; 2022b). Of the 6.2 million credit-earning students enrolled, 65 percent are part-time, 60 percent are women, 56 percent identify as non-white, and 22 percent are under age 22. Additionally, 29 percent of community college students are first-generation college attendees, 15 percent are single parents, eight percent are non-U.S. citizens, and 20 percent are students with disabilities (AACC, 2022a). Mainly due to the community college open door ad/mission, community colleges serve the most diverse student populations in the higher education sector. About the open door institution, Cohen et al. (2014) write:

Of all the higher education institutions, the community colleges contributed most to opening the system. Established in every metropolitan area, they were available to all comers, attracting ‘new students:’ minorities, women, people who had done poorly in high school, those who would have otherwise never have considered or been able to afford further education. (p. 33)

Those who would otherwise have never. Throughout my dissertation, I return to this phrase time and again to illustrate how the power-knowledge relations embedded within the damage-centered discourses of community college are constantly circulating. For the past 50 years, the open door ad/mission policy for students who otherwise would have never considered or would have never been able to afford higher education has fulfilled the junior college’s consecrated goal of open access.

My poststructural analysis of damage-centered community college discourses thinks with Foucault’s (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse and power-knowledge relations to trouble how community college subjectivities (e.g., students) become normalized

by discursive practices. Foucault (1982) identifies the ways human beings are transformed into subjects. One method is that beings are positioned as an object to be studied and improved upon, which in turn produces a being as a subject. Students are positioned as objects to be studied and improved upon in conventional data-driven research and performance indicator analyses. The second way is by *dividing practices* such as binary labels. Students are differentiated and sorted into categories such as male/female, college-ready/remedial, academic education/vocational training, etc. The third method is self-subjugation or how beings turn themselves into subjects (Foucault, 1982). As normalizing discourse circulates, students accept the lure to become a certain limited way of being based on the subject positions allowable by the discourse. State institutions, including community colleges, objectify students, divide students into groups, and entice them into self-subjugation through a composite of power and knowledge.

Self-subjugation is the product of power and knowledge relations. Foucault's theories of power follow three central assumptions (Allan et al., 2006; Foucault, 1982). First, power is exercised rather than possessed. Rather than analyze who possesses power, Foucault's interest lies in how power (and knowledge) relations produce certain subjects. Second, power flows. Decentralizing sources of power (e.g., removing the focus from sovereign power to power relations within society) means that power flows are understood as no longer linear and hierarchical. Third, power-knowledge relations are at work to produce subjects rather than repress or control them. Allan and colleagues (2006) draw from Foucault when they describe institutions as predicated on knowledge that supports differential classification schemes (e.g., deficit/whole, junior/senior, technical/academic). Normalizing dichotomous ways of thinking and their discursive practices is an effective means of social control because

the subjects internalize these ways of understanding the world and our position within it (Allan et al., 2006). The binary schemes above (e.g., deficit/whole, etc.) are intentionally flipped to challenge these discursive normalizations.

The purpose of the student assemblage is to use a poststructural analysis to address my three analytical questions: What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered? How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses? And how do certain subjectivities (e.g., student) become normalized? In this assemblage, I analyze how discursive practices and power-knowledge relations produce particular subjectivities for students. Opening with my first analytical question, I trouble two dominant, damage-centered discourses that intersect in the production of community college students. The discourses that I deconstruct have already appeared in this work: deficit-shame and competition. To structure my writing, the student assemblage consists of two doors, each representing a discourse that I open to a thinking with theory analysis. I use my analytical questions in these sections as guideposts for my writing. This work interweaves Foucault's theories of power-knowledge with scholarly texts and community college discourse to make visible the intersecting discourses that are positioning community college students in specific pathways. Additionally, I provide insights into how power-knowledge relations are working within the discursive practices of these discourses to produce certain student subjectivities.

As I go about this work, I spotlight discourses from popular television and social media. I selected these particular texts because they are accessible to most Americans, and even though they do not fit what Foucault (1978) would call "expert" texts, they are indicative of commonsense community college assumptions. These texts also make visible

how discourse permeates everything; for it is in everyday practices that discourse is revealed (enabled) and furthered (promoted), even (perhaps especially) in popular media. I also include examples of marketing campaigns produced by community colleges to entice students through their open doors in each analysis. These texts are important because they reveal how community colleges are reproducing discourses of damage as they attempt to recruit students. Within each analysis, I share stories from my own experiences that further highlight how certain dominant discourses position community college students into damage-centered subjectivities. I rely heavily on academic literature to provide the discourse's sociohistorical contexts since a Foucauldian discourse analysis is concerned with "situatedness"—or the events, beliefs, and values that allow certain things to be said and others to be silenced (McNeely, 2020, p. 67). I read these materials alongside Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge and subjectivity. Plugging in (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017), or reading these texts together, made visible how power-knowledge is working within the discursive practices of dominant discourses to normalize certain subjectivities of community college students.

Door One

Opening the Deficit-Shame Discourse

Sidelight - Double Doors

When I started writing this “door,” the title was “opening the deficit discourse.” However, as I wrote, thought, and truly began to deconstruct the discourse of deficit, I came to see that another intersecting discourse was at work . . . shame. I felt that the shame discourse reflected the emotion of being positioned as deficit; therefore, shame is even more intrinsically connected to damage. So, I changed the title of this section. After completion, I now see that the dominant co-discourses of deficit and shame are co-producing one another and the community college student subjectivity. Therefore, two damage-centered discourses, deficit and shame, are opened together in this section. They are double doors (Visualization 3).

Visualization 3

Double doors



Deficit

Deficit discourse creates specific points of view and perceptions of what is normative, appropriate, and even desired in higher education contexts. As a flow of marginalizing power-knowledge, the discursive practices within deficit discourse operate to narrowly put the responsibility for deficiencies (e.g., not attending university, needing a second chance) onto the students within the community college, ignoring that students and communities are

always already embedded in larger sociohistorical and economic structures. As such, deficit discourse reifies stigmas about community colleges and students who attend them—*loser college for remedial teens, twenty-something dropouts, middle-aged divorcees, and old people* (Harmon et al., 2009). *Those who would otherwise have never*. Stigmatized community college students are forced into distorted, damage-centered views of their subjectivity, while simultaneously being subjugated by a discourse of deficit. In this double door, I open the discourses of deficit-shame. These analytical questions guide my writing and thinking: What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college as damage-centered? How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses? And how do certain subjectivities of community college students become normalized? Probing through the lens of what Foucault (1970) calls “principles of exclusion,” I examine how procedures of division and rejection are deployed to construct the community college student subjectivity (p. 52). Thinking with the metaphor of the double door, my analytical moves reveal how power-knowledge relations of differentiation and marginalization work within deficit-shame’s discursive practices of division and rejection to normalize damage-centered assumptions.

The opening paragraph of Munsch and Kelsay’s (2015) chapter titled, *Who Are Our [Community College] Students*, says this:

What do Halle Berry, Queen Latifah, Eddie Murphy, Nick Nolte, and Shawntel Smith have in common? Each graduated from a community college . . . Graduates from community colleges go on to careers as bankers, politicians, actors, newscasters, teachers, welders, and automotive technicians, among many other occupations. (p. 57)

Even a chapter in a book written for readers who work in and support community colleges had to begin by making a case that community college students are successful. Maybe I have not done enough reading, but I do not recall encountering a justification for the success of students who attend universities. Normalized discourses use the exclusionary principles of division and rejection to produce the differentiation that university students are successful, whereas community college students may or, more likely, may not be. This deficit-based thinking about community college students and the quality of community colleges as institutions repeatedly underwrites how community colleges are produced in American discourse through divisive and marginalizing power-knowledge relations.

Discourses, in Foucault's view, are ways of constituting power-knowledge relations, and together with normative social practices, discourses form subjectivity (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982). In the work of Foucault, the discursive structure of subjectivity is integrated into a theory of language and power-knowledge. According to Foucault, we not only think and produce meaning with discourse, but our bodies and thoughts also do not have meaning outside of discourse, and how we are constituted is always part of a more comprehensive network of power-knowledge relations (Weedon, 1987/1997). By plugging in Foucauldian theory and what is normatively said about community college students, the productive effects of hegemonic discourse, which most people take for granted and which underwrite our conceptions of common sense, social meaning, and ourselves, can be uncovered (Weedon, 1987/1997). Because power-knowledge relations are constantly in tension, Weedon (1987/1997) reminds us that it is only possible to see whose interest a discourse serves at a particular time by looking at the discourse in operation (i.e., the discursive practices).

What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college as damage-centered? And how do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses? Arriving at the first two analytical questions of my study, I open the door to reveal two dominant discourses intersecting to produce community college students as damaged and to bring to light their power-knowledge relations of differentiation and marginalization. I first look at how discursive practices are operating to enable and promote dominant discourses in the opening lines of the Primetime Emmy Award-winning television show *Community* (Harmon et al., 2009). As the show starts, words appear on the screen: “Greendale Community College - Three blocks from your home” (Harmon et al., 2009). Then, the season one/episode one title sequence begins with a bumbling dean giving a welcome address to a sparse, disinterested group of students standing around a courtyard: “What is community college? Well, you’ve heard all kinds of things. You’ve heard it’s a loser college for remedial teens, twenty-something dropouts, middle-aged divorcees, and old people keeping their minds active as they circle the drain of eternity.” The title sequence ends with the main character telling an instructor of questionable integrity, “If I really wanted to learn something, I wouldn’t have come to a community college” (Harmon et al., 2009). *Community* writer, Dan Harmon, reportedly based the show on his own experiences attending Glendale Community College in California. In addition to winning a Primetime Emmy Award, the show also won the 2012 Critic’s Choice Award for Best Comedy Series. It is well-known that comedy is often funny because it is relatable. Within the hyperbole of comedy (television or otherwise), people recognize “truth discourses” that they may have experienced themselves. As a result of caricatures in the show’s narrative, little effort is required to see how a damage-centered “truth” discourse of deficit operating

within the show's commentary provides an opportunity to alienate community college students through division and rejection. Foucault (1970) tells us that commentary edifies the discourse by reestablishing its primacy. Through caricature (Weedon, 1987/1997), the control procedure of commentary and power-knowledge techniques of differentiation and marginalization, divide and categorize community college students as deficit, and the status quo damage-centered discourse is maintained.

Deficit discourse represents people or groups in terms of absence, lack, or failure—deficiency (Fogarty et al., 2018). In the commentary of *Community*, the language of lack is apparent in the use of terms such as loser, remedial, dropout, middle-aged, and old. Desirable binary terms such as winner, intelligence, success, and youthful are implicated as lacking from the typical community college student profile. And the writers drive home community college as deficit-based when they say, “*If I really wanted to learn something, I wouldn't have come to a community college [emphasis added]*” (Harmon et al., 2009). Within three minutes and 15 seconds, under the guise of comedy and humor, show writer, Dan Harmon, has positioned community colleges, their students, and the faculty and leaders as lacking and failures—deficient. As I think with Foucault (1982), I look at how the control procedure of commentary establishes the discourse as an event upon which to return and, therefore, how

the power-knowledge relations of division and rejection work within this discourse to perpetually objectivize the subject (community college students) as deficit.

This deficit-based discourse is not only revealed in popular comedic television

Image 1

Your "hire" education marketing campaign



shows. Another example of deficit discourse and its associated power-knowledge relations of differentiation and marginalization can be seen in the “Your Hire Education” marketing campaign (Image 1) created by a large community college system (APCO Worldwide, 2022). The advertisement, produced for social media and highway billboards, was premised on a student’s failure to succeed in their first attempt at higher education. This advertisement features a photograph of a late-20s to early-30s-year-old woman, and these words are printed in large, bold font: **“SECOND CHANCES. Community colleges can help you get yours.”** Again, assumptions of failure are produced through the exclusion principles of division and rejection when the advertisement’s creators choose to make explicit a first/second dichotomy. As a result, the essentialized, damage-centered discourse perpetuated to society is that many community college students are “twenty-something [female] dropouts.”

Of course, dropping out of high school or college is not the only reason a potential community college student would be discursively positioned as needing a second chance. Students may have life experiences such as pregnancy and birth, a family death, marriage, etc. that force them to stop their educational pursuits. Life experiences are not valued within higher education because they distract from progress towards educational attainment. The power-knowledge relations within this advertisement differentiate between life experiences and education, and marginalize life experiences as secondary (*those who would otherwise have never*).

Another potential reason for a second chance is that many community college students were once employed in local industries and businesses, such as textiles and manufacturing, that were forced into large-scale layoffs as corporate production shifted overseas. Neoliberal discourse produces multiple community college subjectivities. For

example, the ways corporate power works to normalize the community college will be opened in the institution assemblage. In this assemblage, I focus on student subjectivity. My experiences as a classroom instructor teaching “second chance” community college students have shown me that “second chance” students attending the community college for “retooling” often outperform their “first-chance” classmates. Unfortunately, power-knowledge relations within the exclusionary discursive practice of rejection and the control procedure of discipline (branch of knowledge) marginalize work and life experiences as external to higher education, and as a disciplinary effect of power, Americans judge the affected individuals as failures rather than acknowledging the constraints of economic structures and systems. An alternative perspective is, at most, an afterthought, and when Americans think of community college students, it is with the assumption that they have failed out of higher education in the past or have derailed their lives in some way that requires recovery. There are more hidden messages within this narrative of “second chance” and recovery, including drug addicts or alcoholics, or even second chances for those who have been incarcerated. Moreover, the term “retooling” hints that community college students are instruments to be trained for a specific function. These hidden narratives intersect to underpin the framing of the community college students as damaged, and the positive experiences and attributes of community college students are often diminished. Within these ideas, the power-knowledge relations of differentiation and marginalization intersect with and amplify the regulation of second chance students into the student subjectivity of second place and second class.

Thinking with Foucault shows that even the ways that community colleges measure student success is a discursive practice that works to diminish “second chance” students.

Foucault (1982) tells us to look to “banal facts” (p. 779) to find hidden ideologies. Major performance indices cohorts, such as system-level performance metrics and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), are concerned only with the data collected for first-time students. First-time is “a student who has no prior postsecondary experience attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level” (IPEDS, 2022). It could be said that community colleges are measured by how successfully they educate and graduate “first-chance” students. This is yet another way that dominant discourse is furthered in everyday discursive practices—community college students are divided and rejected by power-knowledge relations of differentiation and marginalization as those who matter and those who do not.

Most “first-chance” students, those with no prior postsecondary experience, are recent high school graduates. As such, high school juniors and seniors are the targets of educational campaigns supporting enrollment at community colleges. Unfortunately, deficit-based discourse often underwrites these narratives as well. To illustrate, I share a “public service announcement” to all high schoolers recently posted on a popular social media site for teachers (Teacher Goals, 2022). It read: “It’s okay to go to a Community College!!! Don’t let people make you feel bad!! It’s [sic] saves money and there’s nothing to be ashamed about!!” While I certainly support the message that it is okay to go to community college (although the word “okay” seems lukewarm), the more prominent narrative is the need to name that students may feel shame in attending community college.

As intersecting discourses, shame is closely linked to deficit. The deficit-shame double discourse is evident in my retelling of an experience shared by a community college executive. The story begins with an everyday trip to the local grocery store. As the executive

was in the checkout line, she overheard a conversation between the cashier, a young woman of the same age, and the young woman's mother. As the conversation unfolds, it becomes apparent that they know one another from the community, and that the cashier and the young woman had just graduated high school. The mother asked the cashier if she had plans to attend college in the fall. The cashier began to speak enthusiastically about her plans to pursue a career related to social work and how she would begin taking psychology and sociology classes in August. The mother was pleased and asked, "So where are you going? University of Our State or Mountain State University?" The cashier visibly deflated. With shoulders slumped, she answered, "No, just community college." As an emotional discourse, shame relates individuals to wider social groups and norms (Stearns, 2017). In this exchange, the cashier and future community college student showed a physical reaction to being related to and regulated into a wider social norm that community colleges are lesser than universities.

I explained in the double door sidelight that I only had the deficit discourse in mind when I began this section of my work. However, my analytical work revealed a second discourse at play: shame. Before I further open shame, I return to the deficit discourse to acknowledge that it is not exclusive to the community college context. Fogarty et al. (2018) examined deficit discourse surrounding the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Through the framework of critical discourse analysis, Fogarty and colleagues sought to shift the narrative from a prevalent deficit discourse to strengths-based approaches across Aboriginal and Torres Strait health policy and practice. I include their work to acknowledge that constructed "truths" based on deficit assumptions have characterized broader social relations since European colonization (Fogarty et al., 2018). As history

indicates, the power-knowledge relations within deficit discourse operate most effectively when discussion and policy become so mired in narratives of failure and inferiority that the people are seen as the problem. I do not claim or dispute that the deficit narratives of community college students are comparable to the deficit and damage inflicted on other groups throughout history. I only suggest that the discursive practices of deficit discourse operate in a way that allows individuals or groups to be “analyzed—qualified, and disqualified” (Foucault, 1978, p. 104). As an effect of power-knowledge, disqualification is made visible in body language and well-being—*with shoulders slumped*.

Shame

Drawing from Foucault (1982), I ask how discursive practices of division and rejection embedded within deficit discourse categorize individuals, attach to the student a specific identity (ashamed), and become visible as particular “truths,” which community college students must recognize, and which others recognize in them (damage-centeredness). This thinking flows from my third analytical question: how do certain subjectivities of community college students become normalized? To better interpret shame, I found the work of emotion historian Peter Stearns (2017), who looks at how shame complicates modern individual, political, and cultural relationships. Stearns (2017) tells us that constructing shame is one of the ways many groups help establish identity and enforce and reinforce desired behaviors. These ideas shadow Foucault’s (1982) theories of power relations, particularly how discipline and surveillance regulate behaviors and identities through an exercise of power called the “process of domination” (p. 787). This flow of power-knowledge, which Foucault (1970) also describes within the discursive rule of social appropriation, produces hierarchies and then maintains the differentiation of each subject

through discipline and surveillance. Thinking with Foucault (1982) opens up how the power-knowledge relations within shame are on the move through discursive exclusions and rules to produce social knowledge (the hierarchies of deficit/whole, etc.) that in turn sustains the deficit-shame discourse.

While I was co-reading Stearns (2017) and Foucault (1982), I uncovered the work of Myra Mendible (2016), whose book, *American Shame: Stigma and the Body Politic*, examines the discourse of shame through the lenses of race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Like Mendible (2016), my interest in shame is in the cultural labor (or discipline) it performs, particularly how shame enforces conformity (i.e., self-subjugation). Mendible (2016) tells us that shame is simultaneously a disciplinary and emotional experience as individuals consider wider social relationships. Shame, in collaboration with other self-conscious emotions such as humiliation, embarrassment, and guilt—all of which are emotional effects of damage-centered discourse—disciplines individuals depending on group standards, such as hierarchical binaries of good/bad (Stearns, 2017). According to Foucault (1980, 1982), conformity to group standards is a regulatory effect of power that produces knowledge internalized in the construction of one's sense of self.

In order to experience shame, the being needs to be aware of its own self and of discursive group norms. Without this awareness, there can be no failure to conform to norms of goodness, no sense of deficit or failure to live up to social expectations. Shame is a productive emotional discourse whose power-knowledge relations are made visible when the self learns it is deficit in some preconceived social expectation (Stearns, 2017). Thinking with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) makes visible how power-knowledge relations within the discourse of shame discipline the self to conform to certain ways of being. The

productive effects of discipline and regulation often discredit and dishonor (i.e., marginalize) community college students. I am intentional with my word choice; credit and honors are signifiers normally bestowed on academic or university graduates.

Parenthetically, the work of Stearns (2017) includes a brief discussion on Freud, stating that Freud “was notoriously uninterested in shame, dismissing it as a ‘feminine characteristic’” (p. 2). Freud was instead interested in guilt. I include Freud’s interest to draw attention to a masculine/feminine binary that is also *always already* at play within social discourses. In the leader assemblage, masculinity discourse is further opened. Returning to guilt—while closely related to shame, guilt does not cause the pain and intensity of shame (Stearns, 2017). Guilty people acknowledge they have acted against societal standards, and they make the desired reparations. Unless the act is repeated, feelings of guilt are relatively quickly resolved. Freud’s association of shame with the feminine is interesting because guilt/shame mirrors the masculine/feminine binary. Both masculine and guilt are more desirable.

Freud’s categorization of shame as a feminine characteristic seems ridiculous; however, if there is a “truth” to it, it may be worth remembering that 60% of community college students are female. Shame, unlike guilt, emphasizes self-abasement (Stearns, 2017). In other words, a shame discourse perpetuates that the self is at fault. Following Foucault (1978-1982), my analysis makes visible how the power-knowledge relation of judgment within deficit and shame discourses produces the community college student subjectivity as deficient, “second chance,” at fault, and damaged. These productive effects of differentiation and marginalization may be visible in the body language and bearing of community college students. Stearns (2017) writes, “The shamed person tends to shrink, characteristically seeks

to hide, because of the emotional dilemma involved” (p. 4). *With shoulders slumped [by shame], she answered, “No, just community college.”*

The effects of exclusionary discursive practices within deficit-shame discourse produces specific stigmas about community college students through power-knowledge relations (e.g., differentiation and marginalizations) that sustain damaged-centered discourse. Stigma is defined as an identifying mark or characteristic of shame (Merriam-Webster, 2022d). In other words, stigma is a means of normalization through the power-knowledge relation of marginalization within shame. Community college stigmas are addressed by Chen (2022) when she identifies seven often-repeated myths about community colleges and the students who attend them:

Myth #1: Students attend community college because they were not accepted to four-year universities.

Myth #2: Community colleges are only for people who want a vocational-technical job.

Myth #3: No one successful goes to community college.

Myth #4: Obtaining a community college degree is less valuable than a university degree.

Myth #5: Most community college students are older, with full-time jobs.

Myth #6: It is difficult to transfer from a community college to a four-year university.

Myth #7: Community college students cannot make it in a four-year university. (para. 3-27)

Mendible (2016) draws on the foundational, anthropological work of Erving Goffman (1963) to contend that stigmatizing shame undermines claims to normality and cultural citizenship.

According to Goffman's definitions of stigma, the type at play in these normative discourses is the stigma of association "with membership in a reviled or outcast social group" (Mendible, 2016, p. 10). This shaming, called stigmatizing shaming, produces its object into an underclass or subgroup that is irredeemable (Mendible, 2016). The result is an expulsion, literal and figurative, that casts the individual or group into the dominant ideology of *damage*.

Recalling from *Assemblage One*, St. Pierre (2000) explains Althusser's theories on how subjects are recruited or enticed by the dominant ideology. Althusser (1971) calls this recruitment *interpellation*. Co-reading Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) and Althusser's (1971) theories makes visible how community college students are interpellated by the power-knowledge relations of differentiation and marginalization that are continuously on the move within these the dominant damage-centered discourses of deficit and shame. At the same time that these discourses are invisibly recruiting subjects, community college students are entangled in a web of power and knowledge as discursive practices (such as the perpetuation of differentiation in deficit language of community college marketing campaigns) that produce students into a normative, damage-centered subjectivity (St. Pierre, 2000). The double-move of interpellation and subjugation through deficit-shame discourse creates significant pain and damage, making the deficit-shame subjectivity very difficult to escape.

Returning to the social media post: "It's okay to go to a Community College!!! Don't let people make you feel bad!! It's [sic] saves money and there's nothing to be ashamed about!!" I am reminded of a comment a university professor wrote in a colleague's doctoral program recommendation letter: "[Joe] has trouble writing probably because he started his

education at a community college.” Unfortunately, the grammatical error in the social media post undermines the message that it is okay to attend community college because of the discursive association between a shameful lack of writing skills and community college attendance. Of even more concern, the university professor’s condemnation of community college education reinforced a deficit-shame discourse that my colleague recounts even well beyond his attainment of a Doctorate in Philosophy. Reading Foucault (1982) with the text shared by my friend Joe makes visible that power and knowledge are once more being exercised through the “process of domination” (p. 787). In Joe’s case, the professor differentiated the university as superior and reminded Joe of his deficit-based subjectivity of community college student through the surveillance of his writing.

Differentiation entangles the discursive practices of division and rejection in a web of power-knowledge relations to mark the “value” of each person (Foucault, 1982). In these examples, community college students are marked as inferior, lacking, or damaged. These productions are critical to the continuation of certain common-sense narratives, such as the superiority of those students who go immediately to university. I admitted in the opening assemblage that I had the grades to be accepted into a university after high school. I did not even consider that the local community college might be a good fit because I considered myself someone ready to go to college. I did not develop this idea on my own; it was part of common-sense knowledge and thinking. Power-knowledge relations that produce discourse and “rules” about who attends community college worked to discipline and regulate me into the subjectivity of someone who did not belong there.

Following Foucault’s (1982) theory of disciplinary power, deficit-shame discourse relies on a web of discursive practices (division, rejection, categorizations, hierarchies, and

commentary) to establish identity and reinforce desirable behaviors (Mendible, 2016).

Without awareness of this knowledge on the part of the individual, there is no sense of failure or damage. In this way, deficit-shame discourse is the vehicle for power-knowledge relations of differentiation, marginalization, and regulation that align community college students against others (e.g., university students) and draw literal and figurative boundaries between community colleges and universities that center community college students in damage. The productive effects of these double discourses are made visible as stigmas, body language (with shoulder slumped), in the comments of university professors, and in social media advertisements intended to attract students into the community college.

To conclude the deficit-shame double discourse section, I draw attention to the cultural, discursive, humanist, and commonsense assumptions among Americans that we are free to push open the doors of our choosing. This guarantees that we look to ourselves for our successes and failures rather than to the structures and systems and discourses that we are born into. When we fail, we subjugate ourselves as different, irrational, and incapable of processing a particular “truth” that leads to success, or if not a “truth,” a secret that others already know. Statements, such as *students attend community college because they did not get accepted to four-year universities* and *no one successful goes to community college*, produce and normalize a damage-based discourse about who becomes a community college student (e.g., those who have failed, need a second chance, have educational deficits, *those who would otherwise have never*).

What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college as damage-centered? Thinking with my first analytical question makes visible that as deficit discourse subjugates students as failures, shame self-subjugates students into a damage-

centered subjectivity. In this double door, I opened the discourses of deficit and shame to deconstruct how these intersecting discourses are everywhere: from the discursive fields of television to social media to grocery store check-out lines to community college recruitment materials. How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices (exclusions, controls, and rules) to enable and promote dominant discourses? Following this second analytical question, my work reveals that as the power-knowledge relations (differentiations and marginalization) within these discourses (deficit and shame) are reproduced in surrounding discursive fields, they narrowly position community college students into a damage-centered subjectivity. How do certain subjectivities of community college students become normalized? Finally, thinking with my third analytical question, I troubled how the double discourses of deficit and shame dominate ideas about community college students and therefore sustain a community college subjectivity centered in damage.

Door Two

Opening the Competition Discourse

Sidelight - Swinging Doors

In Western movies, there is the inevitable scene where the gunslinging cowboy's silhouette is backlit by the setting sun as he reaches out and pushes open a swinging saloon door. All heads turn to see if the newcomer is friend or foe. The dusty air thickens with tension. Competition, either in five card draw or a shoot-out, is coming.

My grandmother had one of these swinging doors in her house. It divided the space between her tiny galley kitchen and the hallway. One of my favorite activities as a kid was to set that door in motion. I loved the creak of the hinges as it moved back and forth. The sounds of thap, whap, whap. What stands out to me about swinging doors is that they never let you forget there are two sides. At my grandmother's house, if we were unaware of who was on the other side or what they had in their hands (perhaps our dinner), we could create all sorts of chaos. The other thing to remember is that a swinging door can swing both ways.

Multiple Missions and Discourses

The overarching question guiding my analysis is, *how do damage-centered discourses produce community colleges?* Thinking this question with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) led me to wonder if the multiple missions of the community college perpetuate a competition discourse that tacitly contextualizes the student subjectivity through damage. Competition, after all, is assumed to produce a winner and a loser. Before I open this idea further, I briefly return to the community college's history to establish how multiple missions unfolded.

The first community college, Joliet Junior College, was conceived as a transfer institution designed to relieve the University of Chicago's burden of educating eighteen and nineteen-year-olds (Bailey, 2018). Once students completed their junior-level general education coursework at Joliet, they would transfer to the University of Chicago for their upper division courses. This model allowed students time to mature, and only those truly ready for advanced studies would matriculate to the university. William Rainey Harper, President of the University of Chicago, said during an 1894 speech, "The time will come when the work of the freshmen and sophomore classes will be carried on away from the university grounds" (Boyer, 2010, p. 107). Serving as a junior institution to screen those capable of university transfer may have been the original mission of the community colleges; however, this mission soon expanded.

After World War II, the growth of the community college sector exploded, and community colleges began to adopt the critical function of educating students to go directly into the workforce after completing a certificate (less than two years) or associate degree (Bailey, 2018). The vocational prong of the community college mission introduced local pathways to employment for nurses, office workers, police officers, firefighters, and manufacturing workers, among others. And when short courses through occupational and community education became part of the community college curriculum, community colleges expanded to serve millions of students every year in non-credit programs. Clearly, the mission of community colleges has grown to include multiple facets. The transfer mission, however, continues to be a primary component of the community college purpose, with eighty percent of entering community college students saying they want a bachelor's degree (Bailey, 2018).

To date, the state legislative code authorizes a community college mission of academic transfer preparation, occupational education, workforce training, developmental education, and community service (Cohen et al., 2014). These multiple opponents within the community college mission inherently create competition (Ayers, 2017; Vaughan, 1991). As alluded to above, when thinking about the multifaceted community college mission, I began questioning how the discursive practices and power-knowledge relations within a competition discourse divide community college students. Foucault (1982) tells us that discursive practices of division are ways our culture produces beings into subjects. Dividing practices within the community college literally creates divisions (or departments): academic/vocational, credit/non-credit, curriculum/continuing education. Certain positions within these binaries are given privileged status: academic, credit, and curriculum have been historically privileged over vocational, non-credit, and continuing education. My experiences as a community college leader and educator have caused me to question how the power-knowledge relations within dividing practices normalize certain student subjectivities. Power is keeping the competition discourse on the move through discursive practices such as division and rejection. This awareness forces me to propose that the competition between multiple missions and discourses produces damage-centeredness.

In my inquiry, I chose to broaden how academic and vocational mission discourses have been problematized by analyzing an overarching discourse of competition. I made this decision in part because my analytical work builds upon the work of another scholar. McNeely (2020) used post qualitative inquiry and Foucauldian theories to effectively argue that vocational and neoliberal ideologies have increasingly become the winning community college discourse. McNeely (2020), using the words of Scott and Marshall (2015), defines

vocationalism as “an educational philosophy or pedagogy claiming that the content of the curriculum should be governed by its occupational or industrial utility, and marketability as human capital” (p. 7). Vocationalism and neoliberal transformative ideas have caused community colleges to narrow their missions to the making of *workers* (McNeely, 2020). The purpose of my work, and post qualitative work, is going beyond and extending McNeely’s (2020) study. Therefore, instead of being concerned with the prevalence of vocationalism, I draw attention to the competition discourse between vocationalism and academics to make visible how power-knowledge relations are circulating through discursive practices to produce community college students.

How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses? And how do certain subjectivities become normalized? In thinking with my second and third analytical questions, this door opens the competition discourse to trouble how vocational and technical training is divided against and in competition with academic education, and thus, how swinging flows of power and knowledge normalize community college student subjectivities. My first move is to deconstruct competition discourse in order to fully open this discourse as damage-centered. My next move deconstructs how power-knowledge relations operate within and between the discursive practices of vocational and academic discourses to enable and promote dominant damage-centered discourse. And in the final section of this door, I make visible how the damage-centered community college discourse regulated my own student subjectivity as university bound.

Competition

In the American lexicon, competition has become so normalized by economic and political philosophy that we do not often pause to question it. To see “how we have been trapped in our own history” (Foucault, 1982, p. 780), Foucault tells us that we must know the historical conditions that motivate our concepts. Following Foucault’s guidance, I was led to *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Critique of Competitive Society* by critical scholar Andrew Douglas (2019). Revisiting W. E. B. Du Bois’s views on competition in America allows Douglas (2019) to show how the pursuit of competitive advantage has historically encouraged the exploitation of racial and other (damage-centered) differences. Douglas (2019) tells us that while competition has always worked in the institutional and cultural discourses of the United States, it was not until the 1930s that competition was fully normalized within American society. The depression era economic crisis pushed bipartisan market reformers to actively encourage states to advance private-sector competition. At the same time, the horrifying political domination occurring in pre-World War II Europe justified a political belief that structured competition could prevent fascism (Douglas, 2019). As these competitive market principles were widely adopted, a new American economy arose with ideals that foreshadowed contemporary neoliberal ideology and modern meritocracy. Douglas’s (2019) critique draws upon Foucault’s (1977, 1980, 1982) ideas about the early neoliberal movement in his Collège de France lectures: “For the neo-liberals, the most important thing about the market is not exchange . . . the essential thing of the market is elsewhere: it is competition” (p. 7). The point to be made by W. E. B. Du Bois and Foucault is that our neoliberal-capitalist society’s social and organizational discourses perpetuate hypercompetitive behavior.

Thinking with Foucault's (1982) theories of subjects and power reveals that competition inscribes loss and deficit onto some individuals or groups, while others are divisively written into subjectivities of winners and success. To phrase it bluntly, the danger of competition discourse is that we need a "loser." The ideas of W. E. B. Du Bois brought to my attention that competition is a "White world" idea (Douglas, 2019, p. 20), where power-knowledge relations create winners and losers, thereby predicating colonial discourses of European's superiority and Other's deficit. Douglas (2019), in perfect alignment with Foucauldian theory, writes:

If divisions between the successful and the rest could be cast as perfectly natural, perfectly consistent with a liberated humanity, then a freely competitive society would seem poised to remain a rather damning place for people of color and others historically subjected to the weight of competitive disadvantage. (pp. 1-2)

Disadvantage returns my attention to *deficit*. Unsurprisingly, deficit and competition discourses have intersected throughout American history, allowing power-knowledge relations to normalize that there are "losers"—*those who otherwise would have never*, those with *little strength*, and those that can be marginalized and oppressed.

But, again, my intention is not to compare the marginalization of community college students to the historical oppression of people of Color; instead, I share Douglas's (2019) work to emphasize that the discourse of competition, like the deficit discourse behind door one, allows individuals or groups to be "analyzed—qualified, and disqualified" (Foucault, 1978, p. 104). Drawing more deeply from Foucault (1978), I deconstruct the competition discourse as a productive effect of biopower. Biopower is concerned with longevity, public health, life and death, and population productivity (Taylor, 2011). Biopower, wielded

through institutional disciplinary practices, produces discourse or “truths” about subgroups within the population and hails these subgroups to conform to prewritten societal norms. For example, competing discourses of vocationalism and academia compare students to one another and differentiate students based on their levels of conformity. As students internalize these norms, they turn the effects of power-knowledge relations inward and subjugate themselves towards a specific societal, educational, or industry standard. An example given in *Assemblage One* is how disciplinary power and biopower produce a population of compliant workers for capitalism (Saltman, 2018).

On the other hand, emotionally intelligent, creative problem-solvers are needed for leadership roles. The power-knowledge relations of differentiation, privileging, and marginalization working within competitive discursive fields select who is produced for each type of life. The effects of these relations “determine life chances, standards of living, and opportunity” (Saltman, 2018, p. 53). As with all relations of biopower (also called biopolitics), the concern is that power-knowledge relations have “uncontrolled power over people’s bodies, their health, their life, and death” (Foucault, 1982, p. 780). Phrased differently, the concern is not as much the discourses themselves; the concern is that the discursive practices enacted through power-knowledge relations within the discourses are closing students’ agency while students concurrently walk through the community college’s “open door.” At the population level, these effects are producing large groups of technically trained, docile individuals prepared to step into the entry-level positions necessary to sustain a capitalist society. These differentiations establish hierarchies that allow individuals and groups to be appropriated into certain categories or classes (e.g., docile, trained workers versus creative problem-solving leaders). Following Foucault, the effects of biopower

become visible as groups are regulated into certain vocations that are inherently more dangerous and bear threats to health and life. These power-knowledge effects also work to maintain social stratification by limiting upward social mobility and keeping classes firmly in their places.

Thinking with Foucault (1982), I propose that the swinging motion of competition discourse makes invisible how the power-knowledge relation of differentiation works to regulate students into limited or “closed-door” subjectivities. Motion invokes ideas of chaos and a desire for the swinging or motion to stop. This is analogous to the desire that educators have for students to choose a major or career pathway—to be static, stop moving, stop swinging between career ideas. In other words, to get settled in place and expediently progress to a credential and the world of work. These discursive practices of division and rejection produce the differentiation of either/or between educational pathways. Students are either in one discourse or they are out. These power-knowledge relations actively discourage multiplicity while regulating students into a closed or settled subjectivity.

Returning to the discourse of competition, inherent within competition are assumptions of fair play, evenly matched teams, and that today’s winner could be tomorrow’s loser. In other words, competition discourse perpetuates there is always the potential for the outcome to swing either way. This normalization makes space for false narratives of choice, which maintains as common sense that students have the agency to choose the direction in which they will go. Silenced by the “justifiable” differentiations of competition (winner or loser), a “both-and” discourse is prohibited. The choice becomes either/or which means that certain doors (academic education or vocational training) are opened or closed based on divisions and rejections of students’ educational abilities. This is

an effective, invisible way for the power-knowledge relations within competition to regulate students into certain subject positions (e.g., a student seeking technical skills only). I return to and rephrase a thought from earlier: *Do students have the agency to open doors to any subjectivity?* Thinking with Foucault, it is apparent that the discursive practices within the competition discourse are so efficient at privileging an either/or discourse that student subject positions become narrow and limited.

My next move goes deeper into the competition discourse with a deconstruction of the power-knowledge relations within two competing facets of the community college mission: vocational and technical training/academic education. My purpose is to make visible how certain student subjectivities are normalized (opened) through the power-knowledge flows of differentiation and regulation while other subjectivities are closed and locked.

The Vocational Discourse

In order to deconstruct a discourse of vocational training, I return to the “Your Hire Education” marketing campaign initially brought forward in door one (APCO Worldwide, 2022). The campaign’s creators thought it clever to replace the word “higher” with “hire.” The campaign’s goal is to instill in the minds of future students that a community college education guarantees job placement. However, when thinking with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), certain power-knowledge relations of differentiation (dividing practices) and regulation (the need for workers) become visible. First, the word “higher” is replaced by “hire.” Higher education is no longer part of the mission of community colleges; instead, the community college’s only purpose is differentiated job training. As demonstrated in this statement by prominent community college scholars, the normative vocational discourse has consumed the community college mission: “[The] explicit goal [of community college] is to

provide open door, relevant occupational education, and training to a diversified workforce, thereby, reflecting the combination of responsiveness to employers' skill needs and students' concern for employment" (Jacobs & Worth, 2019, p. 167). The belief that higher education should serve multiple purposes and provide opportunities for professional and personal development has been erased from the community college mission.

Instead, the dominance of neoliberalism within vocational discourse privileges workforce training and short-term credential completion, and thereby, pressures and incentivizes community colleges to train

and "graduate" more students. I used

"graduate" in quotations because often these

graduations are from one-semester

certificate-level credentials rather than two-

year degrees. Neoliberal agenda makes clear

that community colleges are the job training

institutions for American capitalism. Deficit discourse intersects with the discourse of

competition when the populace's lack of job training becomes a narrative centered in

community college deficit: *community colleges need improvement*. My analytical questions

helped guide my writing and thinking and thus, I now see these dominant discourses of

deficit and competition intersect on billboards paid for by the TX Association of Business

and sponsored by Complete College America in 2011 (Fain, 2011). One such billboard

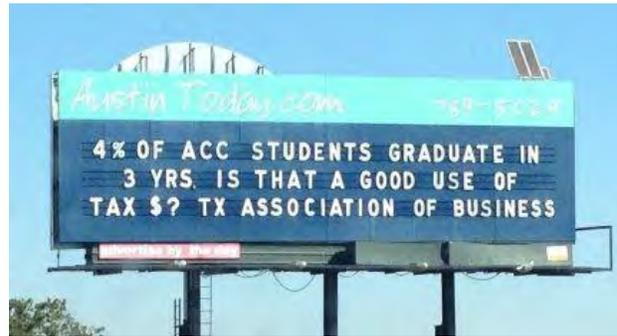
(Image 2) read: "4% of ACC students graduate in 3 yrs. Is that a good use of tax \$?" A

Community College (ACC) fought back with the reminder that the statistic is misleading

because it only indicates the success, or lack thereof, of first-time (or "first-chance")

Image 2

Billboard in Texas that shames community college for completion rates



students. In response, the TX Association of Business said that no matter how the data are sliced, these results do not meet business and industry needs (Fain, 2011).

President Obama agreed and called for an additional ten million college graduates by 2020 in order to meet American workforce demands (Bailey et al., 2015). This prompted the Lumina Foundation, one of the largest private funders of postsecondary reform, to proclaim that “. . . by 2025, 60 percent of the U.S. population would have high-quality postsecondary credential or degree” (Bailey et al., 2015, p. 7). Since that statement, the amount of money designated for postsecondary achievement has been historically unprecedented (Bailey et al., 2015). Private organizations that have invested their “expert knowledges” into community college reforms include the Ford Foundation, which funded the Bridges to Opportunity project; Complete College America; and Lumina Foundation’s, *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count (ATD)*; among several others (Bailey et al., 2015; Fain, 2011). Interestingly, Lumina Foundation’s selection of “*Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count*” as the title for its completion policy further illustrates community college’s positionality as damaged. *Community colleges count* implies that community colleges have historically not counted and that the millions of students who graduated from these damaged institutions have been discounted. *Those who would otherwise have never*. Someone else must have thought the same, because now their website only reads: *Achieving the Dream* (Achieving the Dream, 2020).

Drawing from Foucault’s (1978) concept of biopower, I can bring to light how the dividing discursive practice of “winners” or “losers” maintains the regulatory effects of either/or educational and career pathways (i.e., vocational workforce training or academic education). As I argued above, the workforce or “hire” education has conquered the multi-

faced comprehensive community college mission and thus has prohibited multiplicity by privileging an either/or discourse. In this current era of community college history, vocationalism is positioned as the “winner.” As such, the *hire* education discourse materializes in agenda, policy, and practice— another double-move that simultaneously inscribes the vocational discourse onto community colleges, while establishing vocationalism as the dominant prong of the community college mission. Workforce development becomes the theme of political agendas, governmental policy, and funding campaigns, and the strength of the workforce becomes an index for the strength of society (Taylor, 2011). As a measure of societal fitness, the discourse of vocationalism becomes a regulatory effect of biopower; to maintain a robust, competitive, “productive” society, community colleges have become the job-training institution of higher education, and the community college student is often narrated into technical curricula with short-term completion.

I recently witnessed how the competition discourse between academics and vocationalism regulates subjectivity. In this case, the target audience of the discourse was incoming community college students, but as a consumer of social media, I experienced that the discursive practices within competition are equally effective on me. Innocently scrolling through social media, I saw a beautifully filmed series of community college students (*workers*) in action (Kellogg Community College, 2021). This film quickly grabbed my attention, and I recall thinking, “Wow! I would like to do this!” The thirty-second video begins with the camera following a student in a welder’s helmet. As the student begins a weld, fire shoots from the end of a wand and sparks fly. Next, we see a series of students cutting metal in a machining shop, working with a motor control system simulator, and operating a robot. The series ends with more shots of welders in action and the voice-over

says: “Receive hands-on training, in real-world environments. No traditional classes required!”

Thinking with Foucault makes visible that there are some hidden, and not so hidden, discursive practices working within this video to regulate community college students into the subjectivities of trained workers. Most obvious is the “will to truth” exclusion principle that sparks always fly in vocational (trade) classes. “Will to truth” puts forth certain things as knowledge or “truth” and the power producing that knowledge disappears under the guise of commonsense or authority. The power-knowledge relations of differentiation and marginalization embedded within the competition discourse underwriting this message implies that academic classes, or even the “bookwork” inevitable at specific points within these courses, are dull and unnecessary and not “real-world” skills. These messages intersect with anti-intellectualism to control students’ expectations of what these educational disciplines should be—always hands-on, always exciting. The productive effect of these differentiating and marginalizing power and knowledge relations is that community college education as skill training only. This regulates community college students’ identities as future workers in need of workforce credentials (McNeely, 2020). My experiences tell me that these messages are subconsciously internalized across all community college subjectivities. As a community college leader, I have participated in several conversations with vocational education instructors about the necessity of including writing assignments (as part of our college-wide general education learning outcomes) in community college classes intended to teach hands-on technical skills. At the individual level (disciplinary power), the effects of differentiation are felt when a worker is passed over for a promotion because their incident reports are riddled with writing errors or when university professors make

statements in recommendation letters that poor writing skills are part of the community college student subjectivity. At the population level (biopower), the effects of marginalizing general education (writing, reading, critical thinking, problem solving, information literacy, etc.) may be felt when groups of people make life, health, and democratic decisions based on false narratives and erroneous assumptions.

A reading of Foucault's (1978, 1980) theories of biopower reveal that the discourse of vocationalism is working to produce community college students into docile workers for entry-level jobs. A functional society, after all, demands that these positions are filled. Through this lens, the workforce/academic divide created by a competition discourse can be posited as an effect of the biopolitical distress generated by the need to replace an aging workforce. An aging workforce causes the government two significant concerns: (a) there is a sapping of the workforce strength, and (b) geriatric care requires an increase in medical resources (i.e., medical staffing—notably, community colleges are distinguished for certified nursing assistant, practical nursing, and associate degree nurse education). According to Taylor (2011), who also draws from Foucault, “at the biopolitical level, these issues need to be managed” (p. 48). The contemporary emphasis on vocationalism, when viewed with theories of biopower, becomes a biopolitical strategy for managing the health and productivity of America's populations. The productive effect is that community college students are enticed into short-term training credentials to meet workforce demands.

Again, I draw from my experience working with a community college to posit that the productive effect of differentiation within the competition discourse is felt inside the community college. Vocational instructors and general education (transfer) faculty compete for enrollment and funding for their classes. Disciplines and faculty are sorted into divisions

that many community college employees assume have greater or lesser value. Outside the community college's "open door," this competition is mirrored at the state and national levels as legislators and private organizations vie for funding to improve and transform community colleges. These ideas are important within the competition door, but they suggest a turn toward institutional subjectivity, and, for now, my focus is on how community college students are subjugated by damage-centered discourse as subjects exploitable by a neoliberal workforce (McNeely, 2020). *I know thy works*.

To reiterate how the discursive practices within deficit and competition intersect to divide and reject community college students, I return to the "Your Hire Education" campaign and make visible an additional power-knowledge relation at play. If the "cleverness" in the word choice is lost on someone, 'hire' appears to be misspelled. This play on words normalizes a deficit or marginalized community college subjectivity. These power-knowledge effects were experienced by Joe when his professor wrote, "[Joe] has trouble writing probably because he started his education at a community college." This professor indicates that students who complete all four years at a university are superior to those who began at community college—*those who would otherwise have never*.

A return to W. E. B. Du Bois reveals that in 1903 he publicly critiqued Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" speech asserting that vocational education would provide a greater economic advantage to Blacks than the advantage of earning a college degree (Morehouse College, 2019). Clearly, the power-knowledge relations at work in the competition between vocationalism and academics has long been circulating within educational and social discourse. However, as "hire" increasingly displaces "higher" in the modern community college mission discourse, a Foucauldian critique makes visible how

community college students, already subjugated as damaged by deficit-shame discourse, are increasingly interpellated by neoliberal competition into the limiting subjectivity of workers.

A discourse of competition maintains flows of power and knowledge that work as differentiation (higher versus hire), privileging (hire over higher), and regulation (either hire or higher) to produce community college students into either a vocational or academic (often transfer) subjectivity. Modern neoliberal discourse currently positions “hire” education as the “winner;” however, inherent within competition discourse is the normative assumption that the door swings both ways. *Thwap, whap, whap*. And, as Foucault (1982) makes clear in his theories, power-knowledge relations are not a zero-sum game; instead, they are a web of “action upon action” (p. 789) continuously at play. Therefore, the next section takes up the academic discourse as the “other side” of the discursive door.

The Academic Discourse

Academic education refers to theoretical knowledge taught and learned through general education coursework. The academic curriculum has historically enjoyed a privileged status within the knowledge hierarchies of education. After all, eighty percent of entering community college students say they want a bachelor’s degree (Bailey, 2018). Moreover, the high enrollment and relatively low cost (no expensive technical equipment) of running general education courses have given transfer or academic education a place of prominence within the community college mission. However, in American educational discourse, swings in what is privileged are common. An idea that I have heard in recent interactions with community college stakeholders is that prioritizing four-year degree transfer pathways closes the door on students who have struggled with traditional education (i.e., stoic classrooms, standardized assessments, and curriculum that is not aligned with job-ready skills). Such

proponents of vocational education will likely argue that after decades of privileging academic education over job-skill training, the current emphasis on workforce education is a discursive swing towards a more comprehensive mission. This is where the competition within community colleges becomes heated, and a discourse of competition is sustained.

As some community college scholars have grown increasingly concerned about the implications for democracy, they have spoken out on the importance of general education outcomes such as critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and information literacy. The points made are well taken. O'Banion (2021), promoter of the widely adopted learning college philosophy, champion of critical thinking, and President-CEO of the League for Innovation in the Community College, wrote in an opinion piece for *The Hechinger Report* that states, "If our education system hopes to fully prepare citizens for our democracy—for a just society that supports equally the social and economic imperatives of the nation—a liberal education must be supported as strongly as job training programs" (para. 3). The value of liberal education is undisputed in educational theory largely because liberal or general education exposes students to ideas and opportunities that help them visualize possibilities, identify their dreams, and fulfill their goals. Liberal education creates a society of thinkers. Thinking with Foucault's (1977, 1980, 1982) theories of power-knowledge relations propels me to propose that as differentiation (higher versus hire), privileging (hire over higher), and regulation (either hire or higher) continue to shift the community college mission toward vocationalism, the competitive debate on whether the community college's purpose is to fulfill the neoliberal agenda of making workers *or* educating individuals for a democratic society and lifelong wellbeing will only gain in intensity.

Returning to Competition

The exclusionary discursive practices of hypercompetitiveness and social divisiveness embedded in contemporary neoliberalism (Douglas, 2019) are enacted through power-knowledge relations within the mission discourses of the American community college. Cohen et al. (2014) confirm that the discursive effects of the competition discourse have shifted colleges' missions towards workforce training.

[Community college] has always been an avenue of individual mobility; that purpose became highlighted as greater percentages of the populace began using college as a way of moving up in class. The emphasis in higher education on providing trained personnel for the professions, business, and industry also became more distinct. Admittedly, it is difficult to identify the students who sought learning for its own sake . . . perhaps students whose purposes were purely nonvocational were rare even before 1900. But by the last third of the twentieth century, few commentators on higher education were even articulating those purposes. Vocationalism had gained the day. College going was for job getting, job certifying, job training. The old value of liberal education became supplemental, an adjunct to be picked up incidentally, if at all, along the way to higher paying employment. (p. 33)

Like McNeely (2020), Cohen et al. (2014) propose that vocationalism has “gained [won] the day” (p. 33). Many scholars would justly focus there but thinking with Foucault demands that I deconstruct the mainstream discourse. I argue that the competition discourse, producing winners and losers within the community college mission, is the major undercurrent at work. Foucault (1982) would call this production the “strategy of struggle” (p. 225). He tells us that anytime there is struggle (i.e., competition), power-knowledge relations will engage in

confrontation that produces inevitable, perpetual, dynamic, and reversible conflict. Even if (or when) the dominant discourse shifts, its associated power-knowledge relations give rise to new regimes of “truth” and new struggles for resistance (McNeely, 2020). Thinking with Foucault (1982) exposes competition as a dynamic, unavoidable, and reversible relationship—*the door swings both ways*. Through the interplay of continuous competition, both discourses hope to impede the power-knowledge relations that the other discourse is advancing a “truth” (McNeely, 2020).

In seeking to uncover the productive effects of competition between academic and technical education, I found the work of Ferm (2021) insightful because it brings an alternate perspective to the discussion. Ferm (2021) showcases how Swedish vocational students thought about different types of knowledge (vocational and academic) and how these thoughts produced their own identities. Ferm (2021) acknowledges that theoretical (academic) and practical (vocational) are often presented as dichotomies in a hierarchy (i.e., theoretical/practical), where theoretical knowledge is more valued than practical knowledge. In alignment with Foucauldian terminology, she calls this dichotomy the “academic/vocational divide” (p. 1). At the societal level, the academic/vocational divide relates to class and gender, with vocational education positioned as producing “working-class students for a working-class future” (p. 2). The ideas of social division parallel McNeely’s (2020) work on how the community college mission has increasingly narrowed to vocationalism and how community colleges are now in the business of producing workers.

However, Ferm (2021) brings a novel consideration into the problem. She cites the work of several scholars when she says, “Efforts to overcome the status differences by integrating different types of knowledge still tend to place greater value on theoretical

knowledge by expecting it to strengthen and complement practical knowledge, and never the other way around” (p. 5). Until Americans stop comparing academic and vocational discourse and appreciate each for what they are, potentials for “deep, advanced, and continuous learning” (Ferm, 2021, p. 5), the competition discourse will wage on. As the power-knowledge flows within competition “swing both ways,” discursive practices are at work to maintain exclusionary either/or dividing practices and thereby regulate students into limited or close-door subjectivities (either vocational training or academic education). Thinking with Foucault (1982) makes visible how discursive practices with competition discourse normalize the assumptions that students attend community college for either technical training (currently the most prevalent) or transfer education. As discursive practices, hypercompetitiveness and social divisiveness further sustain a discourse of competition and community colleges are perpetually reinscribed as damaged.

As I open the final piece of the competition door, I spotlight how damaged-centered discourses, such as deficit-shame and competition, intersect to produce students. First, I circulate among my own subjectivities by stepping into the sidelight–Dutch doors—and then I move into an analysis of a certain subjectivity of college students—those who are university bound.

Sidelight - Dutch Doors

I have always been intrigued by Dutch doors. As a kid, I imagined that when I was grown with a house of my own, my sunny little kitchen would come with a yellow Dutch door that opened onto a beautiful cottage garden. I was very intrigued by how the top half of the door could be opened to the goings-on on the other side, but, at the same time, the bottom could stay closed to anything unwanted. The closed bottom of a Dutch door maintains a

separateness. With Dutch doors, only those positioned high enough to see through the other side know that the door can be pushed open. Only those who can see over the bottom half know there is something on the other side to access.

In thinking about Dutch doors, I realize that only certain people are positioned to see the other side. In education, the “other side” can be several spaces or pathways, but here I use the “other side” to represent the mysterious and illustrious university. The Dutch door allows those in a specific position to see and open the university option while maintaining pre-built structural boundaries that exclude “those who would otherwise have never” (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 33). Likewise, I suppose the second half of the door, regardless of whether you consider the “second half” as the top or bottom, could instead be opened. In thinking of the Dutch door this way, I can visualize how, for me, the power-knowledge relations of academic discourse kept the community college half of the higher educational door closed while opening the half that allowed access to a certain student subjectivity—university bound.

Certain Student Subjectivities

My third analytic question asks: How do certain subjectivities become normalized? Thinking with Foucauldian (1977, 1980, 1982) theory, I am reminded that power-knowledge relations produce individuals. For example, Foucault posits that institutions are built upon a way of understanding social relations that supports dichotomous classifying schemes (e.g., man/woman, healthy/sick, normal/damaged). He argues that as these ways of thinking become normalized, we internalize these “truths” as we position ourselves in our social world. By these means, discursive practices are enacted through power-knowledge relations that produce subjects into certain positions. By reading and thinking with Foucault’s (1982)

ideas, I can point to how the power-knowledge relations within the discourses of deficit-shame and competition worked to produce me into a certain student subjectivity—university bound.

I never considered that the open door community college would be a good fit. In terms of belonging to a place or space, “a good fit” is a discursive practice with tightly knit power-knowledge relations intended to produce specific exclusionary effects. My academic fitness closed the door to attending community college—I did not consider becoming a community college transfer student, and I certainly did not consider a two-year vocational degree. I was in the top ten percent of my high school class; I did the extracurriculars; I even received a university scholarship. Dividing practices within the discourse of competition produced the idea that I was an academic success (a winner). This idea positioned me “high enough” to see over the closed half of the higher education Dutch door; in other words, I saw the university as a possibility and for me it was the only possibility. I did not come to these ideas alone. Through normative discourse about what constitutes academic success, I was positioned outside of the status-quo, deficit-based, community college discourse that transfer students who attend community college need more time to mature before they can succeed at university. My high school coursework, extracurricular activities, association memberships, and friendships, were flows of power-knowledge relations (e.g., differentiations, privileging, and regulation) that discursively sorted me into a university-bound subjectivity. As a result, I never questioned where I was meant to be.

I share this about myself for two purposes. The first is to reiterate my positionality as someone who was always certain they were university bound. I can only write from my own subjectivity and, therefore, I am aware that my perspective of how these discourses produce

subjectivities may perpetuate problematic power-knowledge differentiations. The second purpose is to acknowledge that I drew from my own experiences when choosing to illustrate a divisive effect of damage-centered discourse, the production of those “ready” for university and those who are not.

The discursive practices of damage-centered discourse that divide bachelor’s degree-seeking students from university-bound and community college transfer students have been in play since the creation of the Joliet Junior College. The idea that community colleges are a holding space for those not quite ready for university is reflected in the application of a “cooling-out” function to community colleges (Jamrogowicz, 2014). To better understand the sociological concept of “cooling out,” I draw from the work of Nancy Acevedo (2020), who examined the college choice process of Latina/o/x students. In her work, she found that community colleges either warm up students for transfer or cool them out, moving them away from their transfer aspirations. During “cooling out,” community college students are introduced to alternative options or encouraged towards a substitute goal. A critical perspective asks if this function is intended to help community colleges meet their vocational goals and maintain social stratification (Acevedo, 2020).

A reading of Foucault (1982) tells us to look at how power is exercised and what happens when it is exerted. Within the “cooling out” concept, power-knowledge relations of differentiation, marginalization, and regulation are working through discursive practices such as division and rejection to position community colleges as the solution to the “truth” that not everyone is destined to attend and succeed in four-year colleges. Nonetheless, some students enter community college and attend a four-year university. Others attained a credential sufficient enough for gainful employment. This is explained by Jamrogowicz (2014) in the

statement, “Higher education progression reflected a reality where brighter students accomplished bigger things and went on to more enhanced lives” (p. 23). Returning to my own experiences, the power within academic discourse produced a self-knowledge that I was a “brighter” student who was “big enough” to see over the higher education Dutch door. The power within these differentiations and marginalizations produce a commonsense knowledge that, of course, bright students who work hard academically will have successful lives. However, thinking with Foucault makes visible that these differentiations are effects of power that produced the divisive knowledge that my successes were the results of my own self-determination and natural abilities. Alternatively, as in the example of the “cooling out” function, power simultaneously produces a differential knowledge that not everyone will be successful in higher education. This knowledge is then used to discursively sort students into those who are university bound and those who are not. Jamrogowicz (2014) seems to imply that the “cooling out” function has become an antiquated practice. However, Acevedo (2020) argues that these power-knowledge relations are still on the move. Perhaps Acevedo (2020) is correct, after all the “cooling out” subtext resonates in community college discourse when low completion rates are “justified” by the idea that most unsuccessful community college students were probably never truly college material (Jamrogowicz, 2014).

Community colleges respond to concerns about completion in multiple ways, usually beginning with a reminder that with the open door ad/mission policy, graduation rates are an unreasonable measure of community college success. One damaging normalization perpetuated through dominant discourse is that community college students have different or “inferior” educational attainment goals. Following Foucault, I can locate how community college students negotiate this subjectivity through a “network of social, material, cultural

and power relations” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 50). For example, power relations stay on the move when students defy cultural expectations by enrolling without intentions of graduating from community college. After all, students can easily transfer to university before completing the 60+ credit hours required for associate degree completion. Other students may negotiate their community college subjectivity through the material practice of cherry-picking particular courses for personal enhancement or to support a particular career goal. These students have no interest in meeting the sociopolitical expectation of graduation within three years. Moreover, many more students negotiate the web of social and power relations that produce their subjectivity by refusing society’s normative standard for higher education, the bachelor’s degree. The continuous strategies of struggles within discursive practices are power-knowledge relations that help students negotiate their own community college subjectivity.

To craft the conclusion of door two, I return to the ideas that illuminated my analysis of power and knowledge relations within the competition discourse—swinging doors and the Dutch door. In considering how both of these doors worked, it became clear that the primary discursive practice operating through power-knowledge relations to produce community college students is division and rejection. In thinking about the motion of swinging doors, their inherent two-sidedness, and the ever-present potential to get smacked by whatever is on the other side, I came to see how the discourse of competition within the multi-faceted community college mission positions vocational training and academic education as binaries or oppositions. In thinking about how the door swings, I was able to open up the idea that as the dominant social and economic values of the day shift, there is the potential for the door or dominant discourse to “swing both ways.” As power and knowledge flow, what is privileged

today has the potential to be marginalized tomorrow. In thinking about the Dutch door, the dividing practice changes from the back-and-forth horizontal movement of the swinging door, to a vertical differentiation that clearly privileges a higher status or position. After all, Dutch doors were invented for farmhouses; their function was to keep out undesirable things (the farm animals, mice, etc.) with the top-half being open to fresh air. As ideas merged in my mind, the Dutch door became a metaphor for university admission where those who are marginalized as deficit are kept out, and the fresh, first-chance, bright minds are able to see the university as a space they may enter.

The work of this door is to deconstruct how a competition discourse shapes the agency of community college students. My analytical moves required that I re-read Foucault (1982), which reminded me that power-knowledge relations create subjects and, in creating subjects, power and knowledge are sustained. As such, the effects of power-knowledge relations within the discursive practices of the competition discourse ensure that students believe their lives were meant to be lived in certain directions. When competition between missions demands a “winner” and a “loser,” community college students may be enticed into a certain subjectivity and may self-subjugate as different and incapable of achieving the successes of the other groups (e.g., academic, transfer/university bound, etc.). Successes, or deficits, become a narration of *thy works* rather than power-knowledge relations privileging certain groups and certain discourses over others. This door, the competition discourse, opened how the competing missions of vocational, technical training and academic education normalize a damage-centered community college student subjectivity. In the final section of the student assemblage, I showed how dominant discourses produce community college student subjectivities by allowing certain students to access certain educational doors. As I

cross the threshold into the following assemblage, I leave the student subjectivity and move towards an analysis of how dominant discourses are intersecting to produce community college leaders.

Sidelight - Assembling the Doors

I find myself struggling to organize this work. As I think about the best ways to section my writing, it becomes more and more clear to me, and anxiety-producing, that I cannot section it at all. Each discourse I plan to problematize influences the production of another discourse that may come earlier or later in this work. Further, the subjectivities I have selected as assemblages are being produced by all the same intersecting discourses. Saying that the deficit discourse, for example, only applies to students shuts out how deficit is also producing our leaders and our institutions. The goal is to open doors for discourses to be deconstructed in assemblage with subjectivities, but with each discursive door I open, another is waiting to be opened, and another, and another. As I worried about this, I began to try to force an organized way to construct this work, yet all I could see in my mind were white doors floating in blackness. When I “stood” in front of a door, I realized that the door must be opened to see what came next.

However, when my mind's eye looked upon the doors from a different angle—an angle above and looking down—I could see that the doors were aligned like dominos. And when I think about each subjectivity (student, leader, and institution), sometimes the doors have different nameplates, such as competition, deficit, junior, etc. But sometimes, as I rotate the subjectivities through my mind, a discourse will appear on the door over and over again—deficit, deficit, deficit. This work is impossible to untangle and construct using right angles, straight lines, and precise measures. My doors bend and twist, arrange and rearrange. There are moments when I want to close all the doors and walk away. I have learned that fear and anxiety mean an invisible discourse is working within me that I have not consciously recognized and named. I ask myself what this discourse might be. Perhaps it

is a scholarly discourse attempting to subjugate my dissertation into a certain, accepted way? Perhaps it is a credibility discourse? If the writing is too disorganized and the thoughts seem random, my ideas can be easily dismissed as nonsense, deficit, unprofessional, and junior. The door can be closed and locked. As far as assembling my work, all I know to do is continue to write.

ASSEMBLAGE THREE: THE LEADER

Sidelight - Glass Door

I broke a glass door once. I cannot believe that I am sharing this story, but if I do not write what I know, then this work loses its integrity, and I know that I did this. My parents know it too, and my grandparents and my brother; it was a much talked about episode of anger, and I had to pay the consequences literally. The door had to be replaced. I must have been in high school and my dad told me I could not do something. I do not remember at all what that something was; I only remember flying out of the house with bare feet, turning towards the glass storm door, and shoving it shut with all my might. The glass shattered into hundreds, maybe thousands, of pieces and fell all around me. When my anger ended, I was embarrassed, cut up, and in significant debt.

Thinking of my glass door breaking episode makes me appreciate the female leaders who have broken glass ceilings, particularly female community college presidents and poststructural feminist scholars. Like my experience with shattering glass, I imagine there were times they were embarrassed or cut up, and I feel sure they paid a large price for their work. I am thankful for the spaces they opened and grateful that the leader assemblage can build upon their work.

The work of these women leaders should never be discounted, but I have learned while doing this work that breaking discursive doors must be done time and again. Because

Visualization 4

A door with broken glass



our root humanistic ideologies remain relatively unchanged, discourses, unlike glass, may be broken in one statement and reformed in the next.

Side note to the sidelight: The door pictured (Visualization 4) is not the door I broke; however, I share this picture because searching for a good visual opened the insight that broken doors are quickly repaired and how, similarly, broken discourse can be easily reformed.

Community College Leadership

Community college leadership discourses have followed the same historical trends and social influences that have affected broader community college discourse. From the birth of Joliet Junior College in Illinois in 1901 (Cohen et al., 2014) to the advent of modern community colleges in the 1960s, leaders of community colleges embodied prominent characteristics from the discourses of the day. Twombly (1995) shows us how, over the four eras from 1900 to the 2000s, community college leadership competencies shifted based on perceived leadership needs embedded in the broader societal and educational discourse. Twombly shared that the first period from 1900-1930s was an era in which the “great man” persona was a requisite of community college leadership. The second significant period, from the 1940s-1950s, yielded a time when community college leaders sought to establish the community college’s independence from secondary schools. The third era, the expansion period of the 1960s-1970s, required community college leaders who had strong, dominating styles necessary for the type of political leadership needed to secure financial support for establishment in so many counties across the states. The final era explored by Twombly, between the 1980s and the 2000s, recognized that funding and enrollment became a

requirement for the open door, and community college institutional models and leaders shifted to a business discourse emphasizing efficiency and strategic planning.

Since the late-1990s and early 2000s, leadership discourse has continued to shift. Student demographics changed with the Great Recession, with more adults turning to community colleges for retooling, and colleges shifted their curriculum towards community development and workforce programming. As a result, community college leaders, particularly Presidents, are expected to understand and work to meet the *vocational* needs of business and industry (McNeely, 2000). In the same era, O'Banion (1997) introduced the paradigm of the learning college, which many community colleges across the nation readily embraced. Conceptually, this paradigm calls for shared leadership or dedication to organizational learning so that all will be responsible, based on understanding, participation, and accountability (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). In addition, the learning college paradigm opened the door for the discourse of *transformational* leadership. Transformational leadership is most effective when the leader is empowering others. Typical attributes of a transformational leader are a belief in teamwork and shared decision-making, a strong personal value system, and communicating an inspirational vision (e.g., *visionary*) (Eddy, 2010).

The overarching question guiding my analysis in this assemblage is: How do dominant discourses produce community colleges as damage-centered? Dominant discourses reflect and construct reality because of the power-knowledge relations at work within them. In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault (1970) tells us, "Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized" (pp. 52-53). Eddy and Khwaja (2019)

acknowledge this power-knowledge dynamic and challenge community college scholars to question the discursive practices that keep women from thriving as leaders. They write, “When the status quo favors masculine norms and practices over acceptance of women, even when women write on leadership, no change occurs in how we envision the individuals who can lead community colleges” (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019, p. 70). Their work does recognize the emergence of alternative voices; however, they posit that leadership exemplars and models determinedly normalize a singular focus on the ideal worker with characteristics typically associated with men. Eddy and Khwaja (2019) suggest that leadership discourse has shifted from blatant masculinity and hero narratives to the subtler play of power-knowledge within the discursive fields of ideal worker norms. This is an example of how discourses are contextualized, shifting, and evolutionary, yet the power-knowledge relations embedded with them are still at work to maintain the same systems of dominance and oppression—the glass door, even if once broken, can be repaired and replaced.

In the leadership assemblage, I use poststructural analysis to address my analytical questions from the subjectivity of the community college leader. What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college leaders? Arriving at my first analytical question, I open two doors: the masculinity discourse and the mission/aryism discourse. In these sections, my second analytical question guides the analysis of how power-knowledge relations work within the discursive practices of these two dominant discourses to create a community college leader subjectivity contextualized by damage. In crossing the leadership assemblage threshold, it is worth remembering that damage-centeredness is the recognition that the dominant discourses perpetuated by power-knowledge relations limit the agency of some individuals or communities. Damage is socially and historically situated, and

it looks to historical exploitation and domination to deconstruct contemporary discourses (Tuck, 2009). My purpose in deconstructing community college leadership discourses is to make visible the historical domination that has perpetuated the hegemonic leadership model of a heroic man.

As I go about my analysis, I rely heavily on scholarly literature (Allan et al., 2006; Ayers, 2017; Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Khoja-Mooliji, 2019; Mitchell & Garcia, 2020; Townsend & Twombly, 2007; Wilson & Cox, 2012) to support the normalizations that I see reflected in community college leadership discourse. To make dominant discourses in the current leadership discourse visible and to show how community colleges are complicit in the production of certain kinds of leaders, I trouble two texts by reading them with Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge and subjectivity. One text is a selection of executive leadership competencies from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2018). The other is a current community college presidential job description (Fayetteville Technical Community College [FTCC], 2022). The third analytical question of my study is: How do certain subjectivities of community college leaders become normalized? And thus, I use the analytical action of plugging in (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) to open how certain masculine and heroic subjectivities become normalized as synonymous with that of a community college leader. Since one of my subjectivities is current and aspiring community college leader, this assemblage is the most personal. As Weedon (1987/1997) reminds me, everything I do signifies compliance or resistance to dominant leadership norms. To show how dominant leadership norms are positioning me, I insert multiple sidelights from my dissertation journaling experiences.

Door Three

Opening the Masculinity Discourse¹

Sidelight - Hold the Door

I return to a question I pondered earlier: Do I have the agency to open the doors of my choosing? My husband scolds me when I forget to let him hold the door open. My boys have not learned this courtesy, and since my husband was also a boy once, I am sure gallantry was not always my husband's way. My boys are young enough that they still want to hold the door closed to girls entering their spaces. They have a little clubhouse in our woods where "no girls are allowed." A password is required to ensure a girl is not trying to enter in disguise. Even at ages ten and seven, they understand that words act as exclusionary social power-knowledge. As a female community college leader, I wonder if I have the agency to open the doors of my choosing. Thinking with Foucault (1982) I know the answer depends on which words, narratives, and discourses hold the door.

The Community College Executive

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) publishes a booklet, now in its third edition, containing the expected competencies of community college leaders (AACC, 2018). The booklet states that the competencies were last revised with specific considerations. The first consideration is that student access (*open door ad/mission*) and success are the "north stars" for community colleges. The AACC (2018) states that access is no longer enough, and since 2011, community colleges have been on a *mission* to increase completion rates by 50 percent, all while enhancing quality, preserving access, and eradicating attainment gaps associated with race, ethnicity, gender, and income. The second

¹ The categories of gender in Door Three are cis-gender ones.

consideration is that leadership competencies should intentionally focus on institutional *transformation*. They write:

Two-year colleges continue to have an evolving mission with fewer resources, which requires leaders to think beyond traditional ways . . . This is coupled with changing demographics of the students who community colleges service. In order to maintain relevance, 2-year [sic] colleges must redesign educational experiences and operations to meet the needs of students in less traditional ways while still ensuring efficiency and effectiveness. (AACC, 2018, para. 2)

Lastly, the AACC says that this document guides career progression and/or improves one's current position.

I selected to include this text because it establishes the “expert” discourse on how, and therefore who, community college leaders should be. *Expert* discourse is a term coined by Foucault (1978) to illustrate how the discursive practice of authority establishes “truth.” And, in thinking and writing with my analytical question of how certain subjectivities become normalized, I notice how the discursive practice of authority produces subjectivities. *Experts* are assumed to have the right, by law or tradition, to author a discourse (Foucault, 1978). And, because discourse reflects and reproduces certain points of view, discourse is not neutral. Instead, discourse reflects the supposed experts' ideologies, beliefs, and traditions (Allan et al., 2006; Weedon, 1987/1997). In this way, power and knowledge relations enable discourses to become dominant and normalized. The AACC claims expertise; thus, their leadership competencies are viewed or privileged as the benchmark for effective community college leadership at each organizational level.

The leadership competencies covered in the American Association of Community Colleges' (2018) booklet spans the hierarchy from faculty to chief executive officer (CEO). With each job title, the AACC provides the necessary behaviors associated with key aspects of working within a community college. For this dissertation, I focus only on the executive (CEO) competencies and the aspects of institutional leadership and personal traits and attributes. As described in AACC's (2018) competencies and behaviors, a CEO is someone who can influence both external and internal relationships with relative ease, has *complete oversight* and management of the institution's performance, is *not an embarrassment*, has the *customers* at the forefront of their agenda, is *courageous* and *in control of all emotions*, and speaks openly with their *spouse/partner* about the how the presidency will impact the family. Particular words are italicized for emphasis as these are paraphrases of the CEO's descriptions. The AACC acknowledges that the competencies are comprehensive and should be viewed as aspirational. Other competencies are certainly listed and can be included and discussed, but these caught my attention and curiosity because a dominant discourse of masculinity unwrites them, and therefore, I focus here.

Discourse of Masculinity

Discourse is not what is said but is the collection of ideas that creates the conditions for what is said (Weedon, 1987/1997). The breadth of these expertly written statements establishes as normal the idea that to advance to the level of CEO and hold this position of power, perfection will be required. As a whole, these statements produce a normalizing judgment with *perfection* as the dividing practice; the onus is placed on individuals aspiring to CEO-level leadership to have their lives structured in a patriarchal fashion so that personal and family obligations will not interfere with their aspirations (e.g., husband-work/wife-

family). Often the power-knowledge relation of differentiation results in a choice between work or family, and many female leaders opt out of a binary existence of work over family (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019).

When looking for the ideas behind the American Association of Community Colleges' executive competencies, one can uncover the dominant masculine discourses of autonomy, professionalism, and consumerism (neoliberalism)—and because I have noticed how flows of power and knowledge within these discourses coalesce into masculinity, I am choosing to call the collection a “discourse of masculinity.” Thus, the normalization of masculine discourse sustains the power-knowledge relations of differentiation and privileging within these executive competencies and as a productive effect creates the attributes necessary for perfection. It is also worth noting that perfection and damage are assumed to be antithetical. As such, alternative leadership discourse which may include work-life balance, teamwork, collectivism, and femininity are forced onto the damage-centered side of the binary. Male leaders who enact teamwork and collaboration are still privileged, even as these “alternatives” are cast as weak when women enact them. Interestingly, masculinity can be bolstered by enacting teamwork and collaboration because the commentary becomes that such leaders are strong men capable of transformative, inclusive leadership. This causes me to posit that these alternative leadership discourses *heighten* how masculinity dominates. Using my analytical questions as guides, I see how power-knowledge relations are at work within the discursive practices of dominant and intersecting community college discourses to produce certain leader subjectivities and, therefore, create divisions and rejections that privilege and normalize the male executive.

Interestingly, the intersecting discourses at play in the modern hegemonic language of the American Association of Community Colleges' executive leadership competencies mirror the dominant leadership discourse of twenty years ago. Between October 2002 and October 2003, Allan et al. (2006) examined 103 articles published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Four dominant discourses emerged from their analysis: autonomy, relatedness (an alternative discourse to autonomy), professionalism, and masculinity. For discourse to be considered dominant, it must be almost completely taken for granted or naturalized. Discursive practices actively work to enable and promote dominant discourses in order to benefit those atop the hierarchy, thus, sustaining societal stratification. These dominant discourses, consistently present and resolutely entrenched in America's leadership norms, intersect to shape particular leadership subjectivities such as hero-leader, tyrant, and expert (Allan et al., 2006). In concinnity with Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity, Allan et al. (2006) trace the genealogy of these dominant leadership discourses to the enlightenment of humanism. For example, humanistic discourse influences a discourse of autonomy that shapes leaders as individuals "uniquely qualified, competent, and morally principled" (Allan et al., 2006, p. 48). This imagery of an autonomous leader aligns with colonial discourse—the right to self-determination, self-regulation, and self-government. The work of Allan and colleagues (2006) brought to light that these normative leadership discourses have not only been at play for the last twenty years, they have been at work in acts of historical exploitation and social domination for the last four centuries.

At the time of this writing, a presidential position is open at one of the community colleges in my state. The community college's website has several pages dedicated to the

2022 presidential search, including the president's job description (FTCC, 2022). In the job description, 17 essential duties are listed. I have chosen to share the duties that are underwritten by masculine discourses of autonomy, professionalism, and consumerism (neoliberalism):

- Guide the strategic vision to sustain student success and the College's drive towards excellence [*progressive*];
- Exemplify administrative integrity, set high standards for himself/herself, accept full responsibility and accountability, and demonstrate ethical, fair, honest leadership and exemplary personal qualities [*perfect*];
- Demonstrate strong communication and interpersonal skills with an ability to instill in others a passion [*strong*] for the mission and a commitment to the core values, traditions, and past successes of the College;
- Expand the resource base of the College [*neoliberal*] by obtaining additional funding through the Foundation, grants, and other alternative means;
- Expand the use of technology and other innovative tools in support of institutional success [*productive*];
- Make decisions [*individualistic*] and collaborate with faculty, staff, and other stakeholders when appropriate;
- A visible leader who is approachable and accessible to constituents internal and external to the College [*disembodied*];
- Provide direction and oversight for the College's intercollegiate athletics program and exercise ultimate responsibility [*autonomous*] for appropriate administrative and financial control of the program;

- Champion [*a hero*] the College's role in economic development and workforce preparation;
- Serve as an articulate spokesperson for the College locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally [*competitive*];
- Demonstrate political astuteness with proven advocacy skills [*champion*] and a solid understanding of local, state, and national legislative processes;
- Build partnerships with business/industry [*vocational*], educational entities, military officials, and other community groups and agencies. (FTCC, 2022, para. 3)

Weedon (1987/1997) tells us that “language differentiates and gives meaning to assertive and compliant behavior and teaches us what is socially accepted as normal” (p. 73). Of the 17 essential expectations in this job posting, 12 are written with language that overtly or covertly produces masculinity as a dominant leadership norm. These 12 (listed above) are woven into the analysis throughout this door.

In the sections below, I follow Foucault to look at how power-knowledge relations within discursive practices circulate within and among community college texts (in this case, the presidential job description shared just above) to produce a community college leader subjectivity contextualized by damage. These analytical questions guide my thinking and writing: What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college leaders? How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses? And how do certain subjectivities of community college leaders become normalized? My goal, specific to this leadership assemblage, is to show how power-knowledge relations (e.g., differentiations, privileging, and marginalization) within

damage-centered discursive practices (e.g., prohibition, division, and rejection, and “will to truth”) enable and promote dominant discourses (e.g., autonomy, professionalism, gender, neoliberal vocationalism, and deficit) by producing the subjectivity of the community college executive leadership as benefiting masculinity. *I know thy works.*

Sidelight - The Floating Door

A few houses down the road from my parent’s house is a house that is fairly nondescript except for one strange feature; on the second floor is a door that opens to “nowhere” (Visualization 5). The door floats there, ten or so feet above the ground. There is no set of steps leading up to it, no balcony it opens upon. Maybe the door was placed there with the intention of building a deck, balcony, or set of stairs, but forty years have passed with nothing more happening. The door just floats. Its position on the second floor, high above the ground, creates an obvious separateness. The door is aloof and alone. From the outside, no one can reach this door (at least not without a ladder). Inside, I hope locks bar the door. The symbolism, and “reality,” of the floating door is that if it is opened, someone will fall from their high perch.

I have been told that being president is the loneliest position in the community college. I do not doubt that this can be a “truth” as it speaks to the autonomy that is expected from whoever holds this position. As such, presidents are often positioned as floating above

Visualization 5

A floating door



the college alone and aloof. This has caused me to question if I even aspire to this role. It is not in my nature to limit relationships or keep doors locked. I am more likely to throw open the floating door and take my chances at falling or flying.

Autonomy

In the 2022 presidential job description shared previously, the essential duties listed give the new president total autonomy to make decisions in all areas, with particular attention paid to strategic plans, program oversight, and expanding resources and technology. Notice that collaboration with faculty, staff, and stakeholders is only required when appropriate. Allan et al. (2006) share that the discourse of autonomy produces a “solo leader” who has the moral and political imperative to act (p. 50). The language within this presidential job posting is one example of how community college presidential leaders have moral autonomy over the institution and the political autonomy to move forward with their plans unilaterally.

Autonomy is the right to self-govern, and in the traditional sense, it grants permission to make decisions unencumbered by sociohistorical or cultural expectations (Allan et al., 2006). An autonomous leader exhibits self-reliant, independent traits that are directed towards maximizing personal gain. Often autonomous leaders are concerned with protecting their positions, and the narratives of justifiable self-interest, personal rights, and efficiency pervade their discourse (Allan et al., 2006). According to Allan et al. (2006), these narratives coalesce into a discourse of autonomy that constructs leaders as “‘informed but not involved,’ ‘bold,’ ‘expert,’ ‘rational,’ and able to ‘single-handedly prompt changes’” (p. 49). The leadership subjectivity produced from the autonomy discourse is an individualistic, masculine, asocial, and independent leader who refrains from close interpersonal relationships (*a floating door*) (Allan et al., 2006).

Thinking with Foucault makes visible that the commonsense language of autonomy within this job posting renders *invisible* the power-knowledge relations within exclusionary discursive practices that are working to label leaders with particular characteristics. Foucault (1982) writes, “The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individuals, or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others” (p. 788). In this example, power-knowledge relations act upon what is included in, or excluded from, the presidential job description, which modifies the actions of those who self-identify as qualified or fit to apply. *This has caused me to question if I even aspire to this role.* As an effect of power, individuals are divided and sorted by perceived differences in competencies. These differentiations are simultaneously the conditions and the results of power-knowledge relations (Foucault, 1982). Through presidential job descriptions, the dominant discourse of an autonomous community college leader acts to select for and normalize (these are practices of regulation) a community college president as individualistic, rational, independent, and bold—traits which are considered discursively masculine (St. Pierre, 2000).

Sidelight - Barriers, Take Two

I was running a bit late. My kids, ages ten and seven at the time of this writing, are, well, kids. The day I “opened my first door” (the day I realized I wanted to use doors as a metaphor - reread the sidelight “why doors” for context), I was running a bit late and chose to take the shorter way to work. My kids, as they were getting ready for school that day, got into a battle that resulted in spilled cereal, a chocolate stain on my dress (yes, chocolate at breakfast), and a dog that may or may not have eaten some spillage, chocolate, a.k.a. dog toxin. In the middle of the madness, the youngest child, with tears streaming down his face because he really loves our dog, stormed into my room (his comfort place) and slammed the

door. I had to help clean up, negotiate my way back into my own room, wipe tears, change clothes, and Google, “how much chocolate does it take to kill a dog?” There were several barriers to my leaving for work, so yes, I was running a bit late.

When I finally got into the car, I chose the less traveled road instead of the interstate because it shaved off two minutes, even though it was a more dangerous route. Two minutes. Do 16 years of dedicated work really come down to two minutes? I felt it did. No, I would not be terminated over this minor infraction, but would I be considered unable to handle both leadership and family? Every sick day, every time one of my children crashes a Microsoft Teams meeting, every time I have to beg off work for a school open house or performance, there is a tiny voice inside me that asks, is this choice going to hurt me professionally? Every time I stay late, take that work call right at dinner time, or miss a baseball game for a conference, there is a tiny voice inside me that asks, is this choice going to hurt my family?

Side note to the sidelight: Both children and the dog are currently fine.

Professionalism

Professionalism is interwoven with each duty in the 2022 presidential search job description. However, it is most visible in the expectation of the president to “exemplify administrative integrity, set high standards for himself/herself, accept full responsibility and accountability, and demonstrate ethical, fair, honest leadership and exemplary personal qualities” (FTCC, 2022, para. 3). In addition to the evident professional qualities, notice the privileging of and explicit statement of the gender binary, not to mention how the discursive practice of prohibition is at play by excluding the possibility of an alternate set of pronouns.

Allan et al. (2006) recognized the taken-for-granted discourse of professionalism as an example of how power works discursively. Their interests lie with the “profession” aspect

of professionalism; profession as related to career advancement, professional development, and moving up within an organization to leadership. Their work is interesting in that they posit that the goodness of professional development has become so dominant that its tenets are rarely questioned. In every job description or position vacancy announcement, it is natural and normal to differentiate preferred or required qualifications of specialized knowledge. For example, the preferred qualifications listed in the 2022 presidential job description are “successful faculty or staff experience, prior experience in funding raising and grants management; prior experience in workforce development activities, and prior experience managing a large multi-divisional budget” (FTCC, 2022, para. 5). The power-knowledge relations that privilege professionalism work by furthering the notion that as one becomes more professional, there are more opportunities for upward mobility (Allan et al., 2006).

The dominant discourse of professionalism also includes narratives of quality, dependability, excellence, productivity, and autonomy (Allan et al., 2006). Thinking with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), I can once more see that discursive practices of division and rejection are at work to align professionalism with the status of goodness. The “goodness” assumption, as a “will to truth” discursive practice, is so deeply rooted in the social nexus of power-knowledge relations that the effects of a professionalism discourse are rarely questioned. However, with Foucault’s theories of disciplinary power, it becomes visible that these discourses include power-knowledge relations operating by discipline and surveillance to regulate ideal workers. The productive effect is leaders who are entirely devoted to work. Acker (1990) calls these subjects “disembodied workers;” in other words, leaders with no responsibilities or lives apart from work.

Discursive rules dictate and regulate who can and cannot become a leader by creating criteria that align with hegemonic norms. These discursive practices position community college leaders, particularly presidents, as having to have someone else (specifically a wife) to take care of any family and personal responsibilities (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019). When family obligations cause a worker to be late, perhaps even by only a couple of minutes, workers counter their anxiety over being labeled as unprofessional (which limits their opportunities for upward mobility) by self-discipline and self-regulation. In my case, this resulted in taking a shorter route to work even though the road is much curvier and more dangerous. Ideal worker norms, and my desire to be viewed as professional enough to one day become president, tacitly created a preference for risking a vehicle accident over arriving late to work.

Sidelight - “Slamming A Door”

As a leader one must often engage in crucial conversations. That is what we call those talks when you have to give someone constructive feedback, which is a nice phrase for saying they just are not quite meeting expectations. I have had to deliver several such talks, but one stands out in my mind. In this particular example, out of caution, I attempted to “open the door” to the conversation by just a crack. I wanted my opening to only be large enough to let the person, a man, know that not meeting expectations could no longer continue. I was very delicate—are women not supposed to be delicate, fragile, and dainty like daisies? And I was treading lightly because I knew any criticism of his work (him), however constructive, would not be well received. The opening, the crack, was my doing, and now I stood on the vulnerable side of the threshold. He demanded a follow-up meeting. I assumed he was angry; after all, he had been challenged. The meeting began with small talk

and niceties. They were effectively disarming. When the conversation got to his grievance, volatility surfaced that I had not anticipated. He blasted “the door” completely open. I was accused of malicious intentions, which reminded me of every evil female villain and every version of the word “witch.” He continued, and it was the accusation of caring about frivolous things that wrote me into the subjectivity of a nagging woman standing over a board, ironing a man’s undergarments. An invisible discourse of masculinity was used against me so discreetly, so subtly, so powerfully that I was left questioning how I could have been so horribly wrong. When the conversation ended, it felt as if a door had been slammed shut between us.

Gender

In 2019, when Eddy and Khwaja published their work titled, “What happened to re-visioning community college leadership?” they asked if the nature of gendered leadership in community colleges had changed in the twenty-five years since the foundational work by Amey and Twombly (1992) highlighted this issue. Eddy and Khwaja’s (2019) study report that women lead one in three community colleges and comprise fifty percent of chief academic officers. Following these data, which they label as “progress,” they state that this trend masks the masculine leadership norms that continue to work within community colleges today. Connecting to my analytical question of how certain leadership subjectivities become normalized, masculine leadership norms produce certain types of subjectivities in both male (how it is “natural” for men to take on these qualities as they are inherently masculine identities) and female leaders (how female leaders must take on masculine qualities to be “recognized” as a leader). Eddy and Khwaja (2019) write, “Current national discourse on community colleges continues to reflect as well as perpetuate masculine-

normed leadership that favors leaders who embody characteristics typically displayed by men” (p. 54). The effect is that an open door does not extend to community college leaders who embody characteristics typically displayed by women.

Before returning to the 2022 presidential job posting text, it is essential to pause briefly to consider the social construction of the gender divide. Allan et al. (2006) remind us that dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity create the socio-cultural constructions of men and women as gendered selves. These gendered discourses merge with heteronormative constructions of sexuality to construct men (masculine) and women (feminine) as two halves of one whole (Butler, 1990). Within discursive practices, a gender divide makes it normal for “men” and “women” to act in specific ways (e.g., how it is “natural” for men to take on inherently masculine qualities). Conversely, it is noticed if someone acts in ways that do not align with normative discourse (e.g., women who take on masculine characteristics to be “recognized” as leaders).

Following the ideas of Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), I reveal how gendered language is made invisible in the presidential job descriptions and, therefore how discursive practices, which establish as status-quo a masculine leadership subjectivity, are taken-for-granted. When this occurs, power-knowledge relations have made it *natural* to suggest that a woman is a wrong fit. In the 2022 presidential search job description, for example, phrases and words (championing; visibility to all constituents (at all times); local, state, national, and international spokesperson for the College; political advocacy; and partnerships with business and industry, military officials (this college is near a military base)) hide the power-knowledge relations at play to differentiate the president as competitive and strong (a hero) rather than someone “other than man.” Further, the executive must be always in control,

aggressive in the pursuit of expansion, a courageous advocate, and capable of building partnerships in historically male-dominated fields—traits sociohistorically associated with masculinity and desired in the qualities of a community college president. When these sociohistorical constructions are normalized as the community college executive subjectivity, women who do not embody these traits in the same magnitude as men are marginalized as naturally inferior for community college presidential leadership. *I know thy works*.

The discursive practices of community college leadership that constitute women and men as having different strengths and skills create in potential leaders' certain perceptions of their identities and capabilities (Weedon, 1987/1997). For example, Allan et al. (2006) write, "Traits that have come to characterize the dominant version of Western masculinity reveal such qualities as competitive, tough, strong, aggressive, in control, courageous, and able to withstand pain" (p. 51). These traits appear natural to the subjugated individual rather than as products of diffuse power-knowledge relations (Weedon, 1987/1997). Moreover, when women take on these subjectivities (competitive, tough, strong, aggressive, etc.), or when men act outside of these norms, there is a natural assumption of wrongness (i.e., *every version of the word "witch"*).

Having deconstructed how the discursive practices within autonomy, professionalism, and gender work to shape community college leadership as masculine, in the next section, I deconstruct the terms *executive* and *academic* to expose how neoliberal vocationalism is working within a vast web of power-knowledge relations (e.g., differentiation, privileging, and marginalization) to regulate the community college leader subjectivity to a limited way of being (masculine). My final move within the masculinity door returns to the opening of the television show *Community* to trouble how a discourse of deficit intersects in the

production of community college leaders. These moves aim to further open how power-knowledge relations are at work within the everyday practices of discourses to normalize certain masculine leadership subjectivities, and thereby perpetuate the dominant discourse of heroic masculinity.

Sidelight - Blue (Collar) Door

Until doing this work and using the metaphor of the door, I did not spend my time noticing them. Now, as I drive around town or to work, I do. Shapes often vary, some with windows and some without, the handles or knobs are quite distinctive, and the colors are more diverse than I expected. There are the red doors; I know you have seen them. There are also yellow doors, which I perhaps enjoy most but have not dared to adopt. I have noticed wood-colored doors, black doors (my own choice), white doors (of course), tan or brown doors, an orange door, and on increasingly frequent occasions I have observed varying shades of blue doors (Visualization 6). In fact, new inhabitants of my neighborhood just painted their front door a questionable shade of periwinkle. Noticing doors is my new hobby.

It is the blue doors that attract my attention as a metaphor for community college leadership trends. Interestingly, a brief run to the grocery store caused me to quickly observe three blue doors in my own small neighborhood. Furthermore, my grandmother

Visualization 6

A blue door with American flag



recently painted her front door a shade of sky-blue, which I am particularly averse to, considering it is the color associated with a university that I immensely dislike. But I digress, sort of. So, my question is: What is going on with all the blue?

If the blue-collar is the epic metaphor for technical and trade workers, then that blue-collar shade should be the color of the community college's open door. Trends that I have noticed in the last several years include an increased emphasis on vocational program marketing, shorter pathways for credential attainment, more opportunities to use prior work experience for curriculum credit, expansion of work for credit programs such as apprenticeships, increased customized training for business and industry, and federal dollars for short-term workforce credentials. In fact, a colleague who has worked their entire career in the academic division of community college was told, during an interview for a presidential position, that they did not know the community college's mission. Just like the doors in my neighborhood, community college leadership discourse is noticeably blue.

Neoliberal Vocationalism

What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college as damage-centered? My first analytical question causes me to ask if the neoliberal vocational discourse (*blue collar*) is intersecting with discourse of masculinity (*blue*) to produce community college leaders. In the final analytical move of the masculinity door, I revisit the 2022 presidential search job description and again follow Foucault's (1982) directive to look at the "banal facts." Thinking with Foucault (1982), it becomes obvious that academics are not mentioned. The only reference to education in the seventeen essential job expectations is building partnerships with other educational entities. Educational partnerships are positioned in the sentence after building business and industry partnerships indicating a secondary

importance. Further, the preferred qualifications listed make a successful faculty experience optional; yet they require “prior experience in fundraising and grants management; prior experience in workforce development activities, and prior experience managing a large multi-divisional budget” (FTCC, 2022, para. 5). This forces me to question if neoliberal discourses of competition, professionalism, corporate classism, data-driven efficiency, and progress are all intersecting with masculinity discourses to produce the community college presidency as befitting (and benefitting) a certain kind of “*all blue*” subjectivity. *All blue* is meant to illustrate both how the color blue is associated with boys and men, and how *blue collar* often represents a vocational work experience.

In the community college system where I work, there are currently 14 female presidents out of the 58 community colleges in our state (count gathered from college websites on August 23, 2022). Women are trending up; in fall 2021, my state system’s ratio of male to female community college presidents was 48 to ten. In contrast, the male to female chief academic officers’ ratio is 20 to 37 (I could not find one chief academic officer in community college directories). When looking up the definition of executive, the term equates to the power to put into action—or, agency (Merriam-Webster, 2022b). This definition re-establishes that traits such as power and action discursively associated with masculinity are requirements for executive leadership. Whereas, when looking up the definition of academic, the entry reads theoretical, not of practical relevance (Merriam-Webster, 2022a). Based on the male-to-female chief academic officers’ ratio, it seems normal for women to be academic leaders (perhaps their presumed lack of practicality or relevance makes them better suited as chief academic officers), but the executive leadership discourse continues to make male presidents normative. Furthermore, there is a trend with presidents,

and also lately with chief academic officers, that the person selected for these roles has little or no teaching experience or instructional background (i.e., never been a full-time faculty member). These trends suggest that when looking for a community college leader, the ideal candidate brings the college a more “practical” or “*blue door*” perspective than what is available in the academic faculty ranks.

Drawing from Foucault’s (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories on discursive dividing practices, I can address my third analytical question of how certain subjectivities of community college leaders become normalized. It is through practices that “we are constituted as particular kinds of subjects” (Bacchi, 2012, p. 3). All practices, including hiring practices, embed power-knowledge relations within language (e.g., a presidential job description) to establish the discourse through exclusions, controls, and rules and justify their selections (differentiations, such as: fit/non-fit, good/bad, man/woman). St. Pierre (2000) explains how these discursive practices often select men:

Historically, women have been associated with nature and men with culture; thus, the culture/nature binary. This opposition fixes women in the realm of the natural, the sensual, and the emotional [*pink*] and, conversely, men in the realm of culture, thought, and reason [*blue*]. (p. 488)

For community college leadership, the productive effect of the power-knowledge relations within these discursive practices become visible in the ratio of male to female (*blue to pink*) community college presidents.

Thinking with Foucauldian-inspired poststructural scholars (Bacchi, 2012; St. Pierre, 2000), I trouble an executive leadership discourse that prioritizes ideals normatively aligned with man’s inherent rationality (including standards, data-driven decision making,

accountability, and excellence). Noticing that characteristics associated with masculine rationality (*blue*) are also normatively associated with neoliberal vocationalism (*blue collar*) causes me to pause and question if men are more often the leaders of workforce development divisions. “*What’s going on with all the blue?*” Excluding three colleges whose information I could not find, the ratio of male to female leaders of workforce development divisions is 33 to 22 (count gathered from college websites on August 27, 2022). Men dominate but less remarkably than when looking at the executive leadership position. Of these workforce leaders, seven women hold positions that include both academic and workforce instruction under one umbrella. In comparison, three men held joint academic and workforce leadership positions. This seems to dispute the myth that women cannot handle more professional responsibility. Certainly, women are capable of more than the power-knowledge relations within masculinity discourse want us to think. I return to a question I asked earlier: *Do I determine the thresholds I will cross?* The answer depends on which discourses hold the door and how well I embody and disrupt these *blue (collar) door* normalizations.

During the writing of this section, the community college with the presidential job opening (FTCC, 2022) narrowed their search to the top two candidates: a Black woman who was a sitting president at another institution and an internal candidate, and a vice president who is a white man. Several weeks after constructing the masculinity door, I returned to add these final sentences. The president has been announced. As normalized by the power-knowledge relations within the discursive practices of the presidential job description (FTCC, 2022), the new president is the white man.

Sidelight - Entryway

Deep breath—I am full of nerves and self-doubts. A door will open for me this week—a promotion. However, not everyone will see this as a good thing. I know what some will see. In their heads, they will see and say that it is too much for me, and some may very well say it out loud. Their words will be framed in kindness and concern. I am sure I will hear that they only want me to make the best choices for myself and my family; after all, my boys are young and need an attentive mother. They will doubt that a woman can handle so much professional responsibility. Most will silently question and only their eyes will express their thoughts, but some will verbalize that a mother of two youngish boys cannot possibly handle this much.

Knowing they are having these thoughts causes me to question myself. Certain discourses, admittedly assumed ones (however, my assumptions are educated), are calling me to take up a certain subjectivity—a limited either/or way of being that I do not desire. The announcement has not even been made yet, and still, I know. I know the dominant discourses are always already at play, and even though I know how power-knowledge relations work, I still question myself. How can a woman, a mother, a 40-year-old (relatively young in our context) ‘juggle’ so much? As someone from an academic background, what does she know about workforce training? These discourses are working in me and on me, and I tremble. In anticipation, in trepidation? I am not sure. However, I am certain that even knowing what I can do, discourses will only allow for so much.

Juggle is an interesting word choice. My discourses position me in comparison with a quintessential circus entertainer—a clown. Someone not to be taken seriously, someone intended for laughter, someone whose big red shoes will surely cause them to trip over something as insignificant as a small, raised strip of wood in the door’s entryway. I dislike

this image immensely, and I remind myself that ‘juggling’ on high heels is a modern professional image. This makes me smile a bit, but the smile turns into a frown when I realize the image created is of someone just as likely to trip.

Deficit

Thinking with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), I ask how the dominant discourse of deficit intersects with a discourse of masculinity to sustain certain “truth” discourses about community college leaders. This thinking flows from my analytical questions, particularly my third question: How do certain subjectivities of community college leaders become normalized? To make visible how power-knowledge relations within discursive practices categorize the individual as deficit and attach to the self a damage-centered subjectivity, I return to the Primetime Emmy Award-winning television show *Community* to wring out more meaning (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017; Sharpe, 2016). Once more, the deficit discourse is at work in the opening sequence when the show portrays the community college dean as bumbling. As disinterested students watch, the dean struggles to stop an out-of-date boombox from continuing to play a recording of bells tolling. There are double messages of deficit: (a) community colleges cannot afford updated equipment or bell towers, and (b) the leaders of community colleges would never be leaders anywhere else. *Those who would otherwise have never*. As the dean continues his speech about what community college is, all of which is damage-centered, he ends with the acknowledgment that he is missing an essential card from his speech and asks the students for help. I return to this commentary from *Community*, because it is a hyperbolic caricature (Weedon, 1987/1997) and, therefore, an obvious example of how American public discourse produces community colleges as mired in deficit.

As an intersecting discourse, it is possible that at times deficit competes with masculinity discourses of autonomy, professionalism, and gender to produce community college leaders as “other than men” (women or non-binary). To illustrate, in 2007, Townsend and Twombly published an article titled, “Accidental equity: the status of women in the community college.” This article proposes that women are more likely to lead community colleges than other higher educational institutions (universities) because of the community college’s status as the lowest tier of higher education. They write, “By their location in community colleges, women are consigned to teach and lead in the lowest tier institution in higher education, where they still may not achieve equity with men in terms of rank, salary, and tenure” (Townsend & Twombly, 2007, pp. 208-209). Essentially, they are stating that a deficit, lower-level status makes it acceptable for women to teach and lead in the community college, and since women are not worth as much as men, women do so at a bargain price.

On the other hand, as power and knowledge perpetually circulate, deficit discourses may simultaneously intersect with masculinity discourses to contribute to the selection of men as community college leaders, particularly presidents. As institutions that are often discursively centered in damage, the power-knowledge relation of marginalization is at play to produce community colleges as needing strong leaders to champion their cause of rescue. These leaders are often expected to be in full control and capable of withstanding painful institutional transformations (Wilson & Cox, 2012). Courage and a competitive spirit are requisites for shifting community college stigmas away from *those who would otherwise have never* and creating community colleges of excellence. Many presidential job postings advertise the need for a president with a clear vision of excellence, as someone ever seeking improvement and capable of taking the college to new heights (Mitchell & Garcia, 2020;

Wilson & Cox, 2012). Flows of power and knowledge are working to privilege a status-quo assumption that community colleges are damaged and in need of saving by a hero; most often not a heroine, who would be too weak or incapable of saving the day or the college. Once more, the “truth” produced through the discursive effects of power-knowledge relations normatively align community college executive competencies with masculine, heroic traits. The ideals of strong, heroic leaders to champion the community college cause will be taken up when we cross the threshold of door four (discourse of mission/aryism).

To conclude this door, I remind the reader that thinking with Foucault (1982) makes apparent that dangerous differentiations emerge from humanistic and pathologizing rhetoric; and that these differentiations undergird a masculinity leadership discourse prevalent in community college. Eddy and Khwaja (2019), who also drew from Allan and colleagues (2006), note that traditional leadership is modeled after individuals who use power to control others, restrict their followers instead of empowering them, and set limits on change rather than supporting progress. These scholars found that these conceptions reinscribed dominant masculinity discourse rather than reinforcing ideals more aligned with feminine leadership styles. A reading of Foucault (1970, 1978, 1980, 1982) and the critical scholars who also draw from his theories (Allan et al., 2006; Eddy & Khwaja, 2019) makes visible that the power-knowledge relations within a dominant community college discourse of masculinity produces autonomy, professionalism, and neoliberal vocationalism as good while positioning connection, family, academic, and femininity as bad. Superimposed on these power-knowledge relations (e.g., differentiations, privileging, and marginalization) *always already* at play is a deficit discourse that situates community colleges at the lowest tier in higher education, thereby inscribing community colleges and their students as institutions and

people in need of saving. I propose that the intersection of such damage-centeredness within dominant discourses of masculinity and deficit produces within the community college leader subjectivity the hero-leader desideratum (Allan et al., 2006). In the section that follows, I plug in the work of Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), other critical scholars, and my third analytical question: How do certain subjectivities of community college leaders become normalized? Through this simultaneous action of plugging in, I deconstruct how the hero leader's subjectivity is produced and perpetuated through a mission/aryism discourse.

Sidelight - The Troublesome Door

Do you have in your home, or maybe workplace, a door that will not stay shut? In our house, we do. This particular door goes from my son's room into a Jack-and-Jill bathroom. Over the years, the frame for this door has shifted, and annoyingly, this door now opens of its own accord. We shut the door, and it opens. We shut the door again, and again, it opens. It is a troublesome door.

Whenever I have worried over making someone uncomfortable with this work or 'getting into trouble,' I am reminded that causing trouble is the purpose of poststructural deconstructions, and the advice always given is to write about it. So here I am, writing about it. Like the troublesome door, my doctoral journey has caused my framework to shift. The thoughts that I was once able to latch and lock will no longer stay shut. The troublesome door sidelight is written to remind the reader that this work is intended to be an act of undoing what has been taken-for-granted, and because poststructuralism is the framework, the doors almost open themselves.

Door Four

Opening the Mission/aryism Discourse

Sidelight - The Hidden Door

In the house I grew up in, there is a door that no one knows about (Visualization 7). It is hidden. If someone came into our home to look around, they would never realize the door is there. I always imagined the small room behind the door was built to hide gold, jewelry, weapons, or confidential documents . . . surely it was intended for contraband. Instead, it just held seasonal decorations and was occupied only by the occasional mouse.

The door is hidden because it serves a dual purpose: a door and a bookshelf. On the shelves of this door are dozens of National Geographic Magazines (my dad's contribution), two shelves of holiday and romance novels (my mom's contribution), and several photo albums (their joint contribution of a life built together). There is nothing extraordinary here unless you know where to look. A careful observer might eventually notice a small gold-colored door handle tucked between the books, indicating that this bookshelf could be much more. My first reason for sharing the story of this door is to illustrate that looking closely and being open to what may seem improbable was my first encounter with poststructural thought.

Visualization 7

A bookcase



The second reason I share about the hidden door is because books (knowledge) are making this door invisible. Even in my own childhood home, in a completely unexpected way, power-knowledge relations, as described by Foucault, are circulating and constantly at play. Using this example, I can illustrate how the web of relations can shift. Removing these particular pieces of knowledge (books) makes the door handle immediately visible, and anyone may open the door (Visualization 8).

Visualization 8

A bookcase door



The third and final reason I share about the hidden door is because hidden is often synonymous with classified, and classified is often an adjective for mission. In the next section, I problematize the mission/aryism discourse, which, for me, was invisible or hidden until I began to think with Foucault.

Mission/aryism

In 1973, Peter Drucker, inspired by the discourse of “mission” within religious and military institutions, popularized the use of “missioning” as a management strategy (Ayers, 2017). In the American lexicon, the term “mission” has reflected the efforts of Christian missionaries as far back as the sixteenth century Spanish missions in the Americas and has found frequency in the evangelical work of modern Christians. The concept of mission is also prominent in military contexts. Ayers (2017) references the nose art on World War II aircraft known as “mission symbols,” which reflected a team’s success at destroying an

enemy target. In 1946, the United States Educational Mission positioned educational experts under the command of General Douglas MacArthur to restructure the educational system in post-war Japan. Ayers (2017) posits that this mission to Japan may have cemented the mission discourse within educational leadership practices, and during the Apollo space missions, “mission” entered the American vocabulary as a synonym for “collective purpose.” The emphasis that modern American institutions, community colleges included, place on their mission statements speaks to the prevalence of the mission discourse in leadership and management strategies. The overarching purpose in my inquiry is to make visible how damage-centered discourses produce community colleges. I discussed the multifaceted and competing missions of the community college previously; however, there is an informal mission of community college, *missionary work*, which is often uttered with an unspoken recognition that when doing the work of community colleges, students and institutions need saving and the efforts will be war-like. Here, discursive practices of division and rejection are at work to marginalize those within community colleges, while privileging an idyllic male leader.

Missionaryism is synonymous with humanitarianism, which poststructural scholar Khoja-Mooliji (2019) has troubled, through an elaboration of Foucault's (1978, 1980) theories of biopower. Khoja-Mooliji's work centers on the production of ‘crisis’ around third-world girls. She pays particular attention to how the language of care works through biopolitics and necropolitics to render human lives as having differential value. In her work, she argues that humanitarian discourse constitutes and relies on framing third-world girls as ontologically dirty, incomplete, and imperfect representations of humanity (Khoja-Mooliji, 2019). Foucault (1982) suggests that rather than analyze from the position of rationality, look

to the irrational or the oppositions created by power-knowledge relations. By plugging in community college discourse and the work of Khoja-Mooliji (2019), the ways in which humanitarianism and missionaryism create subjectivities of “weak” and “victims” demand the opposition of something, or someone, powerful. *We need a hero*. I suggest that sustaining student and institutional narratives of deficit frame community colleges as broken and in need of salvation. How do certain subjectivities of community college leaders become normalized? Connecting to my analytical question, marginalizing the students and institutions as damaged is a power-knowledge relation that produces the differential subject position of community college leaders as saviors or heroes.

Such damage-centered discourses support the emergence of a normative and often repeated narrative within community colleges: *We are doing missionary work*. Missionary work implicates a savior, which aligns with Gleazer’s (1970) evangelical assertion of the American community college ad/mission as borrowed from John the Revelator’s phrase: “I know thy works: Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.” Examples of “hero” leadership as the traditional leadership ideal of community colleges are readily found in the existing literature. What are the intersecting, dominant discourses that produce community colleges as damage-centered? Arriving at my first analytical question, studies by Allan et al. (2006); Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006), Mitchell and Garcia (2020), and Wilson and Cox (2012) support that the discursive practices of privileging and marginalization within masculinity discourse are intersecting with a mission/aryism discourse to shape hero images of leaders fighting for their core values and beliefs. Allan et al. (2006) write: “At times, consistent with the heroic image, the leader in this discursive representation was

portrayed in mythic proportions” (p. 54). They provide examples of a dean described as a “shining star,” a president’s decision that “shook the world,” and how one institution referred to its leader as “the godliest president” (Allan et al., 2006, p. 54).

Since 17 years have passed since Allan and others (2006) published their work, such apparent examples of hero-leadership norms are not always easily visible in community college literature. However, Eddy and Khwaja (2019) tell us that even though “blatant images of the ‘philosopher-king’ and the ‘military hero’ are hard to find in community college literature . . . the ideal of leaders who walk on water and give everything to the job remains” (pp. 68-69). This is evident, particularly in rural community colleges, through the expectation that the president is accessible and visible at all times. Never being able to step out of the leader's subjectivity regulates the community college leader’s subject position to masculine ideal worker and heroic norms (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019).

Plugging in what is normatively said about community college (*we are doing missionary work*), Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discursive power-knowledge relations (i.e., dividing practices or differentiations), and critical scholarship, makes visible the intersecting discourses of mission/aryism, deficit, and masculinity that are producing community college leaders, particularly community college presidents (Allan et al., 2006; Baldrige, 2017; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Khoja-Mooliji, 2019; Mitchell & Garcia, 2020; Wilson & Cox, 2012). To illustrate, I return to the 2022 presidential search job description and the line that states that the future president should “*champion* the College’s role in economic development and workforce preparation” (FTCC, 2022). The statement seems innocuous or perhaps “banal” (Foucault, 1982, p. 779) until reading with Foucault's theories. To constitute the subjectivity of a champion or hero, something or someone must be

in opposition. These differentiating power-knowledge flows within the discursive practices of division and rejection set up binaries of champion/second place, winner/loser, best/lesser than. In the case of community college leadership discourse, these differentiations are sustained by dominant discourses such as mission/aryism that position the community college subjectivity as centered in damage. The effect of these power-knowledge relations is that community colleges are marginalized as needing a “real” champion to lead them because they are a second place for second-chance students. In the overarching discourse of the American community college, deficit, lack, and brokenness (i.e., damaged) all rely on power-knowledge relations of differentiation that require a benevolent hero.

As discussed throughout my work thus far, multiple dominant discourses are at play in the production of community college “truths.” Deficit imaging, for example, pathologizes community colleges, effectively reducing their agency while ignoring how power-knowledge relations marginalize community colleges into particular damage-centered subjectivities. As an effect of power and knowledge, individuals, groups, and other institutions are then privileged as saviors. At the community college leadership level, individuals begin believing in their power. In other words, they begin to interpellate that without any change to the structural conditions or damage-centered discourses, they can save those who are lacking (deficit). This supports the construction of leadership as having power over others and operating from an authoritative position.

I propose that the exclusionary discursive practices of *missionary work* essentialize the heroic masculine leader while reinscribing community college students as deficient, depleted, and weak. Thus, when activating multiple texts and theories, several intersecting power-knowledge relations emerge: privileging of masculinity, differentiation of a

savior/hero, marginalization by deficit—all of which are intrinsically connected to damage (Allan et al., 2006; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Foucault, 1982; Khoja-Mooliji, 2019; Mitchell & Garcia, 2020; Wilson & Cox, 2012). Furthermore, hero narratives of struggling and damaged communities are connected to broader discourses of race, class, and gender that are reflected in neoliberal moves to privatize public education (Baldrige, 2017). I discuss the re-emergence of the dominant discourses of neoliberalism in more detail within the institutional assemblage, yet it is important to draw attention here to how these neoliberal discourses are also working to produce community college leaders. As intersecting discourses, the rhetoric of masculinity, deficit, and neoliberal vocationalism open the door for the production of community colleges as damage-centered institutions needing to be saved by outside forces. Hero-like leadership narratives support these myths. The effect of these power-knowledge relations is that individuals, private organizations, and legislation emerge as heroes without anyone pausing to problematize how hidden power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to produce the community college.

In this section, I made moves to trouble the concept of mission/aryism that include plugging Foucauldian power-knowledge theories into the oppositions produced through dominant discourse (e.g., weak/strong, victim/savior). My purpose was to make explicit how certain community college leadership subjectivities (e.g., hero leaders) become normalized through exclusionary discursive practices enacted by power-knowledge relations such as differentiation. Mission/aryism is but one discourse in which power-knowledge relations operate to produce community college subjectivities. The work of the leadership assemblage is to make visible multiple intersecting discourses (e.g., masculinity, neoliberal vocationalism, deficit, missionaryism) at play to produce the American community college

leader. The perpetuation of the hero-leader myth sets up aspiring leaders with unattainable expectations (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019); in other words, this discourse is complicit in the production of damage.

In conclusion, I deployed a thinking with theory methodology in the leadership assemblage to approach my analytical questions: what are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damaged-centered, how do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses, and how do certain subjectivities of the community college leader become normalized. First, I opened two doors: the discourses of masculinity and mission/ayrism. Within these doors, a deconstruction of community college texts (community college leadership competencies and a presidential job description) revealed that the power-knowledge relations of differentiation, privileging, and marginalization are at work within discursive practices (e.g., exclusions, controls, rules) to continuously normalize a certain community college leader subjectivity—heroic man. Once more, successes and failures, and here I focus on leadership, become a narration of *thy* (and *my*) *works* rather than power-knowledge relations privileging certain groups and certain discourses over others. These moves also unhide how hero narratives are connected to dominant discourses that both produce and perpetuate community colleges as damaged institutions. In the next assemblage, “The Institution,” I draw attention to the power-knowledge relations inherent in two dominant discourses that have been shaping the community college’s institutional subjectivity since its origin: the discourses of *junior* and *community*.

Sidelight - Doors Are Artifacts

My work follows Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982). Of course it should, one would say, and, indeed, as stated in Assemblage One, Foucault's theories are the warp theories upon which this work is woven. However, I spoke of the theoretical framework when I designed this work. As I write, I see that something more is happening. I find that the strategies I use to deconstruct these discourses also follow Foucault. My assemblages put into relationship many different things occurring at once and analyze certain artifacts in time to see an assemblage forming. Foucault (1966/2001) would have called that assemblage-episteme (knowledge occurring across disciplines in a certain time). In this way, my approach is much like Foucault's archaeology.

Foucault's second approach to his work used genealogy to ask how people think about themselves in the world, given these artifacts. I, too, ask how do people or beings think about themselves in the world, given the discourses surrounding them. I also ask how beings are thought, and therefore produced. Specifically, I wonder how community colleges are produced in the world given these artifacts, these dominant discourses, these doors.

ASSEMBLAGE FOUR: THE INSTITUTION

Sidelight - Institutional Doors

*When most people consider what an institution looks like, they think about sterile places that have heavy doors, strange fluorescent lighting, and long corridors. They think only of the structures or inanimate things that comprise the physical spaces. However, there is another way to view institutions, a way that considers their **excesses**. Institutions, such as community colleges, are more than just bricks and mortar connected by concrete sidewalks that house tables, chairs, and equipment. Institutions are an assemblage of both the nonhuman and the living beings who walk through their doors. As such, institutions are spaces for community (a collection of living things). I feel the entanglement of these past and present bodies when I enter my own institution each day. There are energies in the hallways and classrooms left by those who have come before me, the many students, faculty and staff, visitors, who have written their efforts and ideas into my institution's walls. These energies merge with the energies of those who are there each day, creating an institution that seems alive. This "aliveness" produces the institution as a being with a subjectivity.*

On the first day of this semester, I took a few moments to sit by the doors to our building. They are the large institutional doors (Visualization 9) that force an outward glare making it difficult to see what is on the inside. It is interesting to watch people transition through a passageway when they are unsure of what is on the other side. In watching, I noticed that as new students opened the institution's doors and crossed the thresholds, a shift occurred. Outside the doors, they were consumed by day-to-day living (thinking about their kids, worrying about work problems, planning how to get their car to the shop). But as they crossed the institutional threshold, they became students. Smartphones were pocketed to look

at their schedules for guidance, heads raised to look for room numbers, and, on that first day, there was a visible nervousness about whether they were on the right path. These outward differences caused me to think about how subjectivity shifts depending on the spaces we inhabit.

Holding both of these ideas in my mind— institutional subjectivity and personal subjectivity shifts based on physical space—I began to wonder about the forces at work to produce as well as shift an institution’s subjectivity. After all, change of space and the physical crossing of thresholds would have no role to play. These ideas led me once more to how discourse works to produce our identities. And in thinking about the community college, I began to question how the community college subjectivity shifts through the dominant discourses of “junior” and “community.” I found myself asking how crossing the thresholds of “junior” and “community” have produced the community college.

Visualization 9

Institutional doors



Community College

In the opening assemblage, I shared a quote by President Donald Trump who stated that “most people don’t know what a community college means or represents” (as cited in Smith, 2018, p. 2). He was correct that most people do not know what community college is, and this is evident also in the opening line of season one, episode one of the Emmy Award-

winning television show *Community* (Harmon et al., 2009), “What is community college? Well, you’ve heard all kinds of things.” Community college scholar and President/CEO of the League for Innovation in the Community College, Terry O’Banion, agrees. In the introduction of *13 Ideas That Are Transforming the Community College World*, O’Banion (2019) shares perspectives on community college that he culled from various sources. The list is extensive; I have selected some perspectives and terms to describe community college that I found most applicable to damage-centeredness. These include junior college, community-junior college, technical college, second-chance college, handmaiden to the university, junior academy serving the senior academy, high school with ashtrays, college for dumb rich and bright poor, part-time college for part-time students taught by part-time faculty, holding place to keep students off the street, and workforce engine of the nation (O’Banion, 2019). In normative discourse, power-knowledge flows effectively differentiate the value of community college as damaged (Foucault, 1982).

Interestingly, the ideas put forth in normative discourse are distinctively antithetical to how the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2012) speaks about these institutions: “[Community colleges] are one of the greatest assets of this nation in the task of creating a better future” (p. viii). Community colleges are indeed “of this nation,” in other words, uniquely American. Ayers (2011) suggests similar institutions in Finland, the Netherlands, and Canada; however, according to Cohen et al. (2014), no other country in the world has comprehensive community colleges that provide both transfer and technical education. Perhaps because community colleges evolved in response to a dynamic and often divisive American society, contradiction and confusion about their purpose and value continue to shape public discourse. Even within the historical scholarship on community

colleges, confusion has resulted in the debate around the original reason for establishing community colleges. Yet, according to Cohen et al. (2014), each theory has credibility: the need for workers trained in skills that support our nation's industries, more protracted adolescence requiring additional custodial care, the goal of social equity, greater access to higher education, and a growing need for institutions to sanction one's being.

The original social motivation for creating community colleges may remain debatable; however, tracing the development of community colleges since the early 1900s reveals how discourse has positioned community colleges as certain kinds of institutions. Between 1910 and 1960, the demand for college access increased (Cohen et al., 2014). In 1924, 30 percent of high school students graduated, but by 1960, 75 percent of high school students graduated, with 60 percent entering college the subsequent year. Cohen et al. (2014) put it this way: “. . . 45 percent of eighteen-year-olds entered college in 1960, up from 5 percent in 1910” (p. 6). This increased demand could have been accommodated by universities expanding their capacity; however, several prominent university presidents wanted the universities to abandon their first- and second-year classes and remove the function of teaching adolescents to new institutions, junior colleges (Cohen et al., 2014).

These university presidents agreed that universities would never reach their fullest potential as research and professional development institutions until they relinquished lower-level preparatory coursework to junior colleges (Cohen et al., 2014). When the collaborative creation of William Rainey Harper, President of the University of Chicago, and J. Stanley Brown, superintendent of Joliet Township High School in Illinois, brought to bear Joliet Junior College, the new institution opened its doors as a junior academy in service of the University of Chicago (O'Banion, 2019). Although Joliet Junior College offered post-

secondary courses for transfer to a university, many students lacked the “ability, interest, resources, or parental support to continue beyond the lower-level college courses offered at high school” (Sterling, 2001, p. 10). *Those who would otherwise have never*. This new institutional model created a physical holding space for students who sought to further their education but were not deemed acceptable by elite universities.

Joliet Junior College adhered to its original purpose and continued to offer lower-level courses in arts and sciences; even so, to be fiscally viable, the college had to shift its mission to training workers for mid-management jobs that were locally available (Sterling, 2001). Inspired by the Joliet model of providing academic education for transfer *and* technical workforce training for locally available jobs, the years between 1950 and 1980 saw an extensive system of junior colleges developed (Cohen et al., 2014). In America today, there are more than 1,043 community colleges across all fifty states (AACC, 2022a; 2022b). Despite the confusion and contradiction, there are certain discourses that all community colleges have in common. One such discourse is the *open door*.

To open a door means to create opportunities for access. Because of their universal open-access ad/mission policy and their geographical proliferation across America, community colleges are praised for their role in social mobility and being “democracy’s open door” (Connor & Griffith, 1994). Community colleges in America now serve 10.3 million credit and non-credit students (AACC, 2022a). And, mainly due to the open door ad/mission, community colleges serve the most diverse student populations in the higher education sector. Community colleges’ success in opening the educational door to everyone has become accepted as common sense.

It is time to question this “truth.” Every year from 2010 to 2019, higher percentages of high school completers immediately enroll in four-year institutions than two-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). This trend is alarming, not because university enrollments have increased; they have not, but because enrollments in two-year institutions have decreased while university enrollments remain the same. Americans are no longer easily walking through the open door of community college. Community college organizations, elected officials, and business and industry groups are alarmed. Our workforce is untrained, unskilled, and perhaps unemployed. Calls for reform are rampant. However, these transformational ideas have done little to consider why people are turning away from community college education. Perhaps it is time to ask if potential students can sense that the open door is actually closed to many possibilities. Perhaps they can sense that since their origins as junior colleges, community colleges are often discursively positioned as damage-centered.

Thinking with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) opens up the idea that just as community college students are differentiated based on their conformity to certain standards, comparisons to one another, and an ideal, our community colleges are produced as particular types of entities by discursive practices and power-knowledge relations that marginalize and regulate community colleges within or against certain norms. Here in the institution assemblage, I use a poststructural analysis to address my three analytical questions from the lens of institutional subjectivity. Following the frame of my first analytical question, I trouble two of the dominant and intersecting discourses producing community colleges: junior and community. Within the institution assemblage, I also address my analytic questions: How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant

community college discourses? And, how do certain subjectivities of the community college institution become normalized?

As I open the institutional doors of junior and community, I spotlight texts from television and social media. These texts are necessary because they show how community colleges are positioned in commonsense discourse (television) and marketing campaigns to attract future students (social media). I also draw once more from “expert” texts (Foucault, 1978), specifically the American Association of Community Colleges’ joint legislative agenda for the 117th Congress (American Association of Community Colleges Trustees, 2021-2022). “Expert” texts are included as examples of how community colleges themselves underwrite their priorities with assumptions that are centered in damage. Following Foucault, I use scholarly literature to locate the sociohistorical surroundings of said texts and discourses; and as these materials are read, they are read alongside and thought with Foucault’s (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity. Placing the institutions themselves into the position of the subject and plugging in (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) Foucauldian theory makes visible how power-knowledge relations within the discursive practices of damage-centered community college discourse normalize a certain institutional subjectivity.

Door Five

Opening the Junior Discourse

Sidelight - Miniature Door - Part One

In 1983, my parents built the house that I grew up in. I know this because my mom tells the story of how they moved over Thanksgiving weekend when she was eight months pregnant with my younger brother. Between Thanksgiving weekend and Christmas Eve, his due date, there are tales of snowstorms, power outages, frozen water pipes, and a house filled with family waiting for the newborn. Our stories do not let anyone forget that he was born the year we moved in. His birth date is December 29, 1983. He is two years my junior.

I loved this house and still love it to this day. Perhaps my favorite feature is that a desk is built into the wall in my childhood room. This room is on the second floor and behind the wall is an eave. Instead of closing off this space, my parents allowed for a miniature door to be built into the desk's knee hole so that a child, or an adult crawling on hands and knees, could enter this dark and secret place (Visualization 10). I have numerous stories of my brother and me disappearing there when my parents were away, which caused our babysitters tremendous angst. They would call my parents to admit we were gone, and my mom knowingly would tell them where to look.

Visualization 10

Desk with knee hole door



I loved this space behind the desk dearly and affectionately called it “the hole.” Because I spent so much time there, my parents added a carpet, several flashlights, and my favorite books and toys. It was a play space, a haven, and a place for me to dream. I do not recall all the stories I told myself throughout my years of playing there; I do not recall all the games I played or even the dreams I wove. After forty years of dreaming, I only know that miniature doors often open the most possibility.

Junior

The chapter title of Kelsay and Oudenhoven’s (2014) brief history of community colleges is *Junior Grows Up*. Since the time that J. Stanley Brown and William Rainey Harper whispered their first ideas in a shared room at the National Baptist Convention to present, community colleges have *grown*, but American discourse indicates that it was not *up*. The junior college concept became established in America because early advocates for these institutions included university presidents who insisted that universities would not reach their potential for higher-order scholarship, including research, until they allowed junior colleges to provide general and vocational education (Cohen et al., 2014). As a result, most early community colleges developed as grade 13 and 14 extensions of secondary schools. In fact, some early community college supporters regarded high school and junior college together as the domain of secondary education (Cohen et al., 2014). These discursive power-knowledge relations are still at work today in the marginalizing narrative that *community college is high school 2.0* and they are perpetuated in the community college push for more dual-enrolled students.

Despite the normative association of community college and secondary level education, the idea to relegate the general course work of junior grades 13 and 14 to

community colleges did not gain momentum (Cohen et al., 2014). One reason is that the organization of America's educational system occurred from opposite ends. Elementary and higher education evolved first, later filled in by middle grades. By the early 20th century, public educational systems had filled the grade gap, and community colleges arose peripherally to the primary educational pipeline (Cohen et al., 2014).

Influential university leaders still welcomed a buffer institution positioned outside of traditional academic higher education that would sort poorly prepared students and send only those capable of college-level work to senior institutions (Cohen et al., 2014). And when the discourse of vocationalism influenced America's perception of what community colleges should be, community colleges expanded their missions. This expansion allowed community colleges to serve a slice of the population underserved by universities and created the competition discourse between academic and technical education that further discursively divided community colleges into junior status. Cohen et al. (2014) agree that "community colleges have always been defined to some extent by their association with the institutions on either end of their curricular offerings" (p. 30). Community colleges seem to have little authority or power as they tend to be subservient to high schools (one example is dual-enrollment) and universities (acceptance of transfer credit). The effect of these power-knowledge relations is that community colleges have always been the odd institution out (marginalized)—their missions are multifaceted and seemingly contradictory, their status is junior-level, and, in keeping with the overarching question that guides my analysis, their discourses are damage-centered.

“‘Junior.’ Poor Thing.”

Merriam-Webster (2022c) provides two definitions of the term junior that I find particularly useful in the context of my study. First, junior denotes an item, person, or entity lower in rank or standing. Second, junior is a term for duplicating, albeit on a miniature scale, something large or powerful. As established throughout this study, the American community college began under the nomenclature of junior college. I grew curious during my research and googled the term “junior.” I found a blog titled, “Why would you name your kid junior” (Ripkin, 2016). The mom who wrote it states: “It seems that no matter what the name is, the kid becomes known as ‘Junior.’ Poor thing. There must be some emotional impact to being called something that smacks of ‘less than’ or ‘small version of a large person’” (Ripkin, 2016, para. 8). I debated using this quotation in my work because it is sourced from an opinion-based blog. However, that cut would cast this knowledge into the category of amateur or junior status and following Foucault’s (1980) argument of how knowledge can be disqualified as “low-ranking,” that is a move I refuse to do. Besides, I agree. As this mom and I suggest, if being called “Junior” smacks of lesser than, a reasonable response to my third analytical question regarding the normalization of subjectivity, is that the power-knowledge relations within the dominant junior discourse of community colleges differentiates and makes normal an *inferior* institutional subjectivity.

Inferiority complex is defined by the American Psychological Association (2022) as “a basic feeling of inadequacy and insecurity, deriving from actual or imagined physical or psychological deficiency” (para. 1). In community college discourse, an inferiority complex is most apparent when community college stakeholders use the phrase “like a real college,” when referring to community college institutions. At a recent community college system

office conference, I shared a bit about my dissertation with some new friends. When I referenced the damage-centeredness of community college discourse, their faces showed confusion; however, when I said, “As an example, we [community colleges] sometimes say we want to be ‘*like real colleges*,’” their faces both lit and grew pensive. They replied, “Yeah, we do that.” I am not a psychologist, but I propose that wanting to be *like the real* satisfies the diagnosis of an inferiority complex. Because inferiority results from inadequacy and insecurity, these power-knowledge relations act upon actions by casting community college into the subjectivity of lower status (Foucault, 1982). By bringing to light the power-knowledge relations inherent in the discursive practices of junior discourse, we can see that once more multiple discursive fields (junior-inferiority and deficit-shame) are intersecting to marginalize community colleges into the dominant ideology of damage.

These marginalizations show up time and again in educational advertisements. For example, “junior” and “inferiority” are evident in the social media post below (Image 3). During College Foundation of North Carolina’s (CFNC) free college application week, a

Image 3

NC free college application week advertisement

NC Schools Waiving Application Fees on CFNC.org During College Application Week (Oct. 18 – 22)

Remember, other schools may be accepting special fee waivers offered through ACT, SAT, or NACAC.

Barton College	Greensboro College	Pfeiffer University
Belmont Abbey College	Guilford College	Queens University of Charlotte
Bennett College	Johnson and Wales	Saint Augustine's University
Brevard College	Johnson C. Smith	Salem College
Cabarrus College of Health Sciences	Lees McRae College	Shaw University
Campbell University	Lenoir-Rhyne University	St. Andrews University
Catawba College	Livingstone College	University of Mount Olive
Chowan University	Louisburg College	University of North Carolina Asheville
Davidson College	Mars Hill University	University of North Carolina Pembroke
East Carolina University	Meredith College	Warren Wilson College
Elizabeth City State University	Methodist College	Western Carolina University
Elon University	Montreat University	William Peace University
Fayetteville State University	NC Wesleyan College	Wingate University
Gardner Webb University	North Carolina A&T	Winston Salem State University
	North Carolina Central University	

Updated List as of 9-21-21

College Foundation of North Carolina

CACRAO

All 58 NC Community Colleges

local high school shared this image. Even though 41 percent of post-secondary students are enrolled in American community colleges (AACC, 2022a), the community college option is listed below all other North Carolina colleges and universities participating in free application week. The discursive practice of division and rejection effectively reinforces the community colleges' junior status by relegating them to the end of the list. The order of last certainly sends a divisive message that community college should be students' last resort or bottom choice.

Furthermore, the North Carolina public post-secondary system has two parts: the 16 universities that comprise the University of North Carolina System (UNC System) schools and the 58 community colleges. All 58 community colleges were listed under one entity, yet each of the UNC System schools participating were listed individually. This is sending a message, or instead, multiple messages. Does it take all 58 community colleges to equal one university? This listing lumps all community colleges together as one almost anonymous entity. Doing so robs community colleges of autonomy and specialization and implies that all community colleges are the "same." Everyone knows what this is: a second choice that is not as good as the university. Through the power-knowledge relations of marginalization, differentiation, and regulation, community colleges are disciplined and regulated into the subjectivity of the second choice, "second chance," second place, and secondary (junior).

The same week that I encountered the CFNC advertisement on social media, I also noticed a social media post sharing a picture taken of a flier tacked to the wall of a high school's hallway (Image 4). The creator of the post gave kudos to the school for sharing this kind of information, and I agree that it is valuable that students are educated about non-normative choices for post-secondary education. However, it is the power-knowledge

relations, such as marginalization, embedded within the flier that is the issue: “You don’t necessarily have to go to college to make a good living . . . enroll in a TRADE school.” The creator of the flier did not realize that there are very few stand-alone trade schools in our communities. All of these skills are taught within community colleges. When students want to learn these skills, they will be confused about where to go and what community colleges offer.

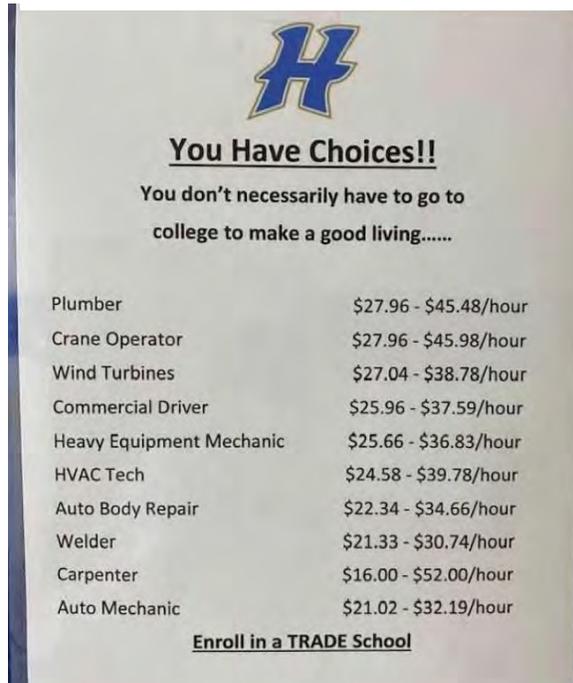
The hidden discursive practice within this flier is that these trades are not college-level, and therefore the community colleges where they are offered are also not college-level. The message is that general

academic education is the defining factor in determining college-worthy status. As such, the power-knowledge relation of differentiation within the academic/vocational competition discourse is again at work to regulate job skills training into a diminutive status. As a community college dean who supervises all these programs, I am confident that advancing to the diploma level or beyond in any one of these trades requires at least six to 15 hours of general education coursework. However, in alignment with anti-intellectualism and marginalization, this flier makes it clear that general education is unnecessary.

Regulation, another power-knowledge relation at play, is enacted through the “will to truth” discursive practice that implicates making money as the most important thing: “a good

Image 4

“You have choices!!” flyer from social media



living.” This devalues other benefits from post-secondary education, such as global citizenship, an understanding of democratic values, and critical reasoning skills. As such, within this advertisement, the junior discourse is intersecting with the discourses of neoliberalism and anti-intellectualism. By plugging in Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) and my analytical question of how certain subjectivities of community college become normalized, it becomes apparent that these discursive practices are acts of disciplinary power intended to produce students into the subjectivities of well-trained and docile workers. In the double-move of interpellation and subjugation, the power-knowledge relations within these discursive practices remained unquestioned and therefore natural. The productive effect is that students regulate themselves into training programs that enable them to make money as early as possible—“a good living.”

Legislation

Articulations of community colleges as junior also show up in legislation. Foucault (1980) tells us that modern society is characterized by legislation, which in itself is a discourse articulated in the social body and closely linked to a grid of disciplinary practices. Legislation, and the mechanism of discipline that legislation enacts, serve as the arena in which power is exercised. Legislative discourses have their own disciplinary practices that produce power and knowledge by creating natural rules—or normalizations. Looking closely at higher education funding models, the material effects of power-knowledge relations in the junior discourse are visible.

To illustrate, I return to the College Foundation of North Carolina’s free college application week advertisement, where we are reminded that there are 16 universities and 58 community colleges within the University of North Carolina System (UNC System). In the

“only 53% of UNC freshmen and sophomore students in comparable courses” (North Carolina Community College System [NCCCS], 2022b, p. 2).

In the North Carolina legislative budget, like in the College Foundation of North Carolina’s advertisement, community colleges are once again lumped under a single entity. Yet, each university is listed separately with its unique appropriation (Image 5). The practices of power-knowledge that work through the junior discourse to marginalize community colleges becomes transparent when looking at these texts through a Foucauldian lens. Foucault (1982) would have me ask whom the discourse serves or benefits. In looking closely at the North Carolina legislative state budget, the response that one must put forward is that the junior discourse serves the university. I am reminded that the original impetus for creating junior colleges was to serve the more elite universities. Indeed, junior has *grown* but not *up*.

The power-knowledge relations within the discursive practices of junior discourse differentiate community colleges into a damage-centered subjectivity when community colleges are rewritten into their original status of a poor junior academy in service of more prominent universities. These dominant discourses are enabled and promoted through exclusion principles and control procedures that diminish and marginalize the institutional subject (Foucault, 1970). Normalizations of lesser institutions ensure that community colleges cannot enter the university discourse unless they meet certain requirements. After all, not all discourses are equally open. As Foucault (1970) states, “Some are largely forbidden” (p. 62). Considering that all community colleges have as common discourse the open door, admitting that there are forbidden or “closed-door” discourses working to subjugate community colleges is ironic indeed. The power-knowledge relations embedded

within junior and other dominant discourses forbid Americans from considering community colleges as equal to universities. As these normalizations continue to appear in discursive practices, power-knowledge relations further marginalize community colleges as lesser than, and their deficits or failures become manifestations of their limited abilities rather than power-knowledge relations privileging universities.

The overarching question guiding my analysis is: How do damage-centered discourses produce community colleges? Noticing how the institutional adjective of junior has been displaced with the signifier community, and, as always, thinking with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), forces me to ask if, with this change in nomenclature, the power-knowledge relations within discursive practices may be at work in an additional dominant discourse. The next door, the community discourse, crosses the threshold from junior to community to make visible power-knowledge relations within the community discourse.

Sidelight - Miniature Door - Part Two

This section did not end as I originally intended. The Miniature Door Part One sidelight is such a personal and optimistic part of my story that I had hoped to work my way through the damage inherent within the junior discourse and show the reader the opportunities available in the community college despite its miniature door. Those words did not form in this section; yet I cannot bring myself to delete the sidelight or rewrite it so that it is a better fit. Because I cannot let it go, and because it was my first peak through the junior door, I will keep it and cherish it. For just like my childhood memories shaped me, I know that my awareness of the opportunity behind the miniature door has shaped my work (Visualization 11). I added this Miniature Door Part Two sidelight to share this realization and to say that despite my dreams, decades of subjugation are hard to shake.

Visualization 11

My children entering the miniature door



Door Six

Opening the Community Discourse

Sidelight - The Revolving Door

When I enter revolving doors, I have anxiety. There is a half-a-second when I am fully enclosed by the door that I want to panic. I must remind myself to take a deep breath and keep pushing. I also have to prepare myself to step out of the door just at the right moment because if I linger too long I fear I will get swept away with the motion of the door. These seem like silly fears but my imagination can be wild. The effect is that as I attempt to navigate the revolving door, two visions are simultaneously competing for my attention (thereby adding to my difficulty exiting the door). In the first vision, I am trapped by the glass doors that make up my small triangular space, unable to move forward or backward, and quickly running out of air. As evident in the leader assemblage, glass doors are problematic. In the second vision, I am caught in the revolving door doomed to walk in circles forever. It is not lost on me that these visions are not about claustrophobia or even public humiliation, these ideas are manifestations of a fear of being stuck.

I have questioned why I felt called to write about revolving doors as the opening for the community door. There are likely a couple of reasons. One is that revolving doors are usually located in places of high traffic, places that are very public. As a public-serving institution where students may attend for one semester, step out, then step back in, and perhaps step out again, and then step back in once more, the revolving door may be a better descriptor of community college than the open door. But my main reason for writing about the revolving door is because “walking in circles” is a figure of speech that means nothing has changed, or in other words, the status-quo is maintained.

Community

According to O'Banion (2019), "The most ubiquitous and most accepted name for this [type of] institution is likely to be 'community college'" (p. 3). O'Banion believes that the term *community* avoids the hyperbole and damage associated with other names and is general enough to include all the values, purposes, programs, policies, and practices that community colleges attempt to fit under the comprehensive mission. However, *community*, albeit less wrapped up with negativity than *junior*, sustains and advances a discourse centered in damage. For example, the likely reason that writers and directors Harmon, Russo, and Russo (2009) titled their hit television show *Community* is because they believe there is a joke to be had there. Alternatively, it could also be an appeal—if the title explicitly stated that the show was about community college, would anyone watch it? Regardless, it only takes a second for the punchline to appear. As season one/episode one of the Primetime Emmy Award-winning television show *Community* opens, these words appear on the screen: "Greendale Community College - Three blocks from your home" (Harmon et al., 2009). From moment one, show writer Harmon makes a joke out of a key aspect of the community college's open door mission: local accessibility.

Within this "joke," there are multiple meanings at work. For example, within three blocks from your home, how likely is it that an institution will find qualified graduate-level credentialed faculty to teach high-quality general education coursework? As a well-published, award-winning university professor once told me, "I knew I did not want to work in a community college." There is a normative assumption that community college is the second choice when newly hooded master's and doctoral graduates seek employment. Recall the narratives from Assemblage One shared by my colleagues: *Accepting a job at a*

community college takes you out of the discipline. No one with talent wants to work there. In other words, a “hometown” community college is not the place for experts. Another meaning at play may be that the institution right down the road is not exotic, novel, or elite. Ayers (2011) writes, “Because of its geographic dispersion, 90% of Americans live within twenty-five miles of a community college” (p. 304). Harmon et al. (2009) may be hinting that because students do not have to travel very far to attend community college, nothing will change in their lives if they go there. If the status quo does not change, where is the excitement and enticement, where is the higher education, the growth, the expansion of views or learning, and where is the socioeconomic advancement? There are multiple normalizations within the dominant discourses of *community college*, creating assumptions that attendance at community college means nothing in a person’s life will change (the status quo will be maintained—one is *walking in circles, through a revolving door*). It seems blasphemous, but some of the damage-centeredness within the *community* discourse is a result of power-knowledge relations marginalizing the community college for being so prolific (local access) and open (available to everyone). I am not suggesting community colleges become selective about admissions or for some institutions to shut their doors; my intention is to acknowledge that the open door, community discourse has been corrupted by discursive practices and power-knowledge relations that perpetuate damage: What is the open door opening *to*?

In this door, I deconstruct community discourse to trouble how power-knowledge relations within its discursive practices privilege the expert knowledges of privatization, globalization, and neoliberalism. These analytical questions continue to guide my writing and thinking: What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community college as damage-centered? How do power-knowledge relations (e.g., differentiations, privileging,

marginalization, and regulation) work within discursive practices (e.g., exclusions, controls, rules) to enable and promote dominant discourses? And how do certain subjectivities of institutions become normalized? In the first section of the community door, public versus private, I defer the meaning of *community* to *public* and make visible how public access organizations are often differentiated and marginalized as “less than” those that are private or exclusive. In the second section of the community door, I make explicit the dichotomy that privileges the expert knowledges produced by global-corporate power over local community knowledge. Foucault (1970) first drew my attention to how power operates through expert knowledges when he discusses the exclusion principles of discourse. He tells us that institutions or organizations who are privileged as *experts* or *authorities* have the “right” to author *expert knowledges* (1978). Those with other points of view are excluded or prohibited from speaking or, at minimum, are censured in what they may say. Thinking with Foucault’s (1980) ideas on truth and power cause me to elaborate upon my analytical questions by asking how the interweaving of power and knowledge positions private, global, and corporate discourses as more “noble” than local community discourses and to ask whom those “noble” discourses serve or benefit.

Sidelight - Hospital Doors

My interest in deconstructing the binary discourses of community-serving institutions and private institutions came about much differently than one might expect. In my role, I work with our college’s health sciences programs. One day I attended a community event and was invited by the regional hospital’s executive to come to the hospital for a tour. Because of my background in biology and because I have never entirely lost my teenage interest in practicing medicine, I was excited to take him up on his offer. The behind-the-

scenes tour of the hospital lasted all afternoon. I saw everything from the abandoned surgical bays of the late-1950s and 1960s to the morgue (thankfully not in use) to the COVID-19 unit of ICU to the laundry room. I could continue my list, but it was what my tour guide told me time and again that caught my attention. He kept proclaiming their status as a “community hospital.” I had never considered this term, just as I had never been to this hospital prior to this day.

*I asked him to explain, “What does community hospital mean?” He informed me that most of their funding comes from our county and that their primary priority is to provide excellent and affordable health care to the people **in our home community**. Not only are their waiting room walls dedicated to the history of our communities, but as we walked the halls, my tour guide stopped to speak to every employee and patient’s waiting family members. The hospital’s website even has a page dedicated to sharing information about the communities within its service region. Since my tour day, I have noticed the community-service work this hospital does many times over—they practice what they preach (a phrase with connections to missionaryism). My observations have made apparent that the hospital recognizes that some of the people of our county will choose to travel to the larger, corporate hospital 45 miles down the road. Likewise, nursing graduates from our program often look to the big city hospital for employment opportunities.*

I share this story for two reasons. As I said, I want to share why I began thinking about the discourse of community. The second reason is so I can personally own the fact that the discourse of corporate privatization, with its inherent assumptions of higher quality healthcare treatments and providers with degrees from elite institutions, worked to produce me in a certain direction. I had never walked through this hospital’s doors before my tour

*because I have always preferred to seek medical treatment at the big city hospital 45 miles away. I chose private and corporate power over public and community knowledge. Since this realization, I have questioned how community as a dominant discourse works to produce the **community** college in certain directions. Does the damage-centeredness working within community discourse position our public institutions into a deficit subjectivity? Do the power-knowledge relations within community discourse produce a preference for the big city, “elite” colleges and universities 45 or more miles away? How is this discourse working to produce the assumption that the choice is between university and community college when the real choice for many of our students is between community college and nothing at all (Ayers, 2011)? These are not new analytical questions, but as an emergent inquiry these questions show how I began to “think” with my analytical questions through the lens of community college discourse.*

Public vs. Private

If you had your choice, would you choose to go to the public pool or the country club pool? Most of the people I know would probably answer the country club (granted, I may need to know more people). I will not try to give reasons for their response as there may be many, I will only say that the privileging of private over public is not an idea that people came upon themselves. According to Ciepley (2013), “One of the signal projects of nineteenth-century American liberalism was to sharpen the distinction between public and private and divide the social world between them” (p. 139). Following my example above, the hegemonic social divide between public and private associates the *community* with a particular class or status. If these hidden, or perhaps not so hidden, relations of power-knowledge are at work in the discursive practices (prohibition, division and rejection, and

“will to truth”) that determine our choice of swimming spot, I feel it is relevant to suspect that similar class and status differentiations are at work in our choice of educational institution. After all, the open door admission policy of the community college is indeed a narrative of public access.

While the power-knowledge relations that privilege private over public access are working within the dominant discourses of community college, power and knowledge are also circulating through the American discourse of *public service*. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), which is the primary advocacy organization for community colleges exists to promote and advance community colleges. Originally called the American Association of Junior Colleges, the AACC was founded in 1920 to serve as a national voice for promoting associate-degree granting colleges. In addition, AACC supports community colleges through leadership development, policy initiatives, publications, programs, research, and outreach to business and industry and the national news media (AACC, 2022c). To make visible how notions of *public service* are intersecting with dominant community college discourses, I turn my analysis to legislative priorities written by the AACC.

In the most recent AACC joint legislative agenda for the 117th Congress (American Association of Community Colleges Trustees, 2021-2022), there are twelve major priority categories and within each category there are often multiple supporting goals. As Foucault (1980) reminds us, legislation, a discourse in itself, characterizes modern society and is inextricably linked with disciplinary power. Within legislative discourse, power-knowledge relations regulate community colleges into certain ways of being, and then deploy

surveillance through performance indicator reports. There are multiple AACC legislative priority examples relevant to community colleges as public service institutions:

- Extend Pell Grant eligibility to short-term training programs.
- Extend Pell Grant eligibility to incarcerated students, also known as *Second Chance Pell*.
- Strengthen student support programs that help community colleges meet the needs of diverse, historically underrepresented, and economically disadvantaged populations.
- Enact policies that allow access to basic needs services such as food, housing, medical care, mental health services, etc., for low-income students.
- Bolster workforce development, adult basic education, and career and technical education.
- Enact legislation that would provide education for qualified undocumented students.
- Ensure that federal infrastructure packages are dedicated to community college facilities and workforce training programs to expand our skilled workers. (American Association of Community Colleges Trustees, 2021-2022, p.2)

According to these priorities, community colleges are simultaneously responsible for educating persons of low-socioeconomic status (Pell grants), upskilling or skill-building an entry-level workforce, educating incarcerated students, providing for the needs (food, shelter, clothing, transportation, health care) of low income students, serving as an arm of social services for the historically underserved, bolstering the workforce, providing opportunities for adults to earn high school diplomas, enacting policy to provide education for undocumented students, and expanding a skilled workforce.

Disciplinary power is on full display when colleges' compliance with such priorities are monitored through success metrics (educating Pell status students, for example), particularly when institutional productivity and funding is ranked according to similar indicators, as is the case in my own state's system. I do not intend to question the need for this work. But I am called to question how, as flows of power-knowledge, both differentiation and regulation normalize community colleges as "public service" institutions through the AACC (and individual states') legislative and funding priorities. These priorities discipline community colleges into the subjectivity of an "all things for everyone" public service organization—*I know thy works*.

Foucault (1977) tells us that disciplinary power is "a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies" (p. 104). The influence of neoliberal ideologies on community college missions has normalized community colleges, compared to universities, as the training sector of higher education. As a result, many community college educational practices mirror disciplinary practices, such as measuring, comparing, categorizing, and ranking against a norm or homogenized standard. On the other hand, educational discourse normalizes universities as institutions where students are transformed into more enlightened thinkers through education. These differentiating discursive practices are at work to sort community college students into subjectivity of worker versus students who go to university are expected to join an elite, "upper" class. Once again, these discursive practices divide academic from vocational education—thereby discounting students who start at community college, transfer to university, and successfully graduate.

It is also possible that power-knowledge relations are producing damage through the implicit association of community and criminality when we consider that public or *community service* is a substitute for criminal justice sanctions. This indicates a certain damage-centered background knowledge upholding the idea that community is tacitly associated with “second chances.” The power-knowledge relation of marginalization is once again at work through the dividing and rejecting discursive practices of deficit-shame and community. *Those who would otherwise have never.* Furthermore, the use of the term *community service* by the penal system calls me to question how meanings are further deferred through the community service aspect of the community college mission (Cohen et al., 2014) to position community colleges as disciplining institutions. A statement I have heard made by parents whose child is preparing to go away to college is that if their child does not do well at university then they will just have to return home and go to community college. In this refrain, community colleges are normalized as both second chance and punishment.

Following potential deferments of meaning and thinking with Foucault (1982) calls me to question if invisible power-knowledge relations within criminality discourses are hijacking the larger community discourse to normalize community colleges as a second choice. The power-knowledge relations with this *public-service, community-service* discourse positions universities into a place of privilege as elite institutions for those with higher status or class, and produces within many of our citizens a preference for attending “real” colleges and universities.

Sidelight - Lower-level Door

When I lived with my parents, Saturday mornings were for chores. We lived in the country, across the road from my paternal grandparents, and on a farm that needed tending. My granddad and dad worked at an international corporation in the big city Monday through Friday, but on Saturday, they traded their ties for coveralls (well, coveralls only in the winter, but that memory stands out). So as the men were doing the outside work, the women of my family would be inside cleaning, changing sheets, doing laundry. Our chores were very much delineated along male and female lines, and at the time, I did not much mind because, unlike the men who worked all day, some Saturdays at noon, my mom or my grandma would “go to town.” I, of course, would go along.

“Going to town” meant traveling ten miles to a women’s clothing store in a town whose downtown spans a total of three blocks by two blocks. Back then, the town was bustling, fueled by the money earned in the local textile mill. The small department store was locally owned and sat smack downtown at the intersection of what we generously called “the highway” and the main street. The store had a main street door front. It opened onto a jewelry counter, and standing there, at the front of the store, you could look up to see two floors filled with brightly colored women’s dresses, shoes, suits, hats. Everything a modern 1980s homemaker or working woman could need.

However, it was not the main street door I wanted to enter. For there was another door, less utilized, somewhat discreetly positioned around the corner and down the hill. This was the lower-level door, and it opened into the undergarment section (Visualization 12). It felt scandalous that this other door, this lower-level door, would open onto something so personal. Of course, my young mind was naturally intrigued, and this was the door I begged to enter. I remember times when I was pulled past that door and up to the door on the main street. And I remember other times, mostly with my grandma, when entering the store through the lower-level door was allowed.

I do not have to “go to town” anymore. I live in this town now. The lower-level door is still there, but the store closed when it became easy to go to the big cities to shop and when the giant superstore moved to town. Years ago, the lower-level door was boarded up along with many other doors along our main street. As I think about these doors, particularly the lower-level one I so cherish, it is easy to see the damage that globalization and corporate discourses have had on our local towns and communities. As the juxtaposition between global and community discourses intersected with my work in community colleges, I began to ask how the global discourse of neoliberalism competes with local community discourse to subjugate community colleges into a damage-centered institutional subjectivity. Has the effect of privileging a neoliberal corporate discourse relegated the community and their colleges to the lower level? This is

Visualization 12

Lower-level door



not a new analytical question; it is simply an illustration of how “going to town” prompted me to think more deeply about how dominant discourses are producing community colleges as damage-centered.

Side note to the side light: Within the last year, the boards were removed from my lower-level door. In an action upon action (Foucault, 1982; definition of power relationship), this building is being renovated and will reopen as a boutique hotel.

Expert Knowledges

Unique among post-secondary education, community colleges predominantly serve the local (Ayers, 2011). The nationwide establishment of community colleges is largely due to the support of local constituents and elected officials (Cohen et al., 2014). Early community colleges frequently operated out of high schools and were a source of great community pride. Cohen et al. (2014) write: “The advent of community college as a neighborhood institution did more to open higher education to a broader population than did its policy of accepting even students who had not done well in high school” (p. 17). Distance education aside, most community colleges serve one to three counties or one metropolitan area (Ayers, 2011). Their geographical locations and abundant community-level supports ensured that community colleges were physically available and responsive to local community needs. And, at the time that most community colleges were established, the *community* discourse of community colleges was synonymous with democracy, liberty, social responsibility, and civic respect.

Ideals of what community college should be has since changed. The poststructural work of McNeely (2020) and critical analyses by others (Ayers, 2005; Harvey, 2005) make visible how neoliberalism is working within education, particularly community colleges, to

shift the purpose of education to human capital development (the making of workers) and the maintenance of structures and functions required to guarantee the proper functioning of free markets. This mission “swing” was discussed in Assemblage One when competition was problematized. I recall that section of the work as a reminder that competition discourse is a product of neoliberalism (Ayers, 2011).

In thinking and writing with my analytical question of how power-knowledge relations are at work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses and following Foucault’s (1982) directive to look to the irrationality or the oppositions created, I look to the opposite of community discourse: global, corporate neoliberalism. These ideas were an extension of McNeely’s (2020) dissertation work, and it is her work that led me to this statement by Giroux (2014), “Neoliberalism’s assaults on higher education constitute a sustained effort to dismantle education from the discourse of democracy, public values, critical thought, social responsibility, and civic courage” (p. 31). While community college missions are shifting toward a neoliberal agenda, neoliberal discourse is acting on social norms to create certain assumptions about the types of institutions we value. A “will to truth” discursive practice that produces certain knowledge as “true.” In education, the most valued or “best” institutions incorporate the expert knowledges of privatization, globalization, and corporate ideologies into their missions and daily practices. My purpose in this section is not to reestablish how neoliberal discourse works *in* community colleges, but instead to open how neoliberalism works *on* community colleges to produce them as damage-centered institutions.

Following Foucault, it was a reading of Michael Dumas’s (2016) work titled “My Brother as ‘Problem:’ Neoliberal Governmentality and Interventions for Black Men and

Boys” that caused me to think about the ways in which the neoliberal turn positioned corporate, private organizations as experts on the social and economic challenges faced by community colleges. In reading with Dumas (and, by extension, Foucault), I noticed how the network of discursive practices and power-knowledge relations within neoliberalism and the institution of community college is most obvious when private-sector technical solutions are privileged over local, public investments in education. One example of this is Achieving the Dream (ATD), whose slogan is “Transforming Colleges and Communities, Together” (Achieving the Dream, 2022). The funders who “actualize” ATD’s vision include Ascendium Education Solutions, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, JP Morgan Chase & Co., and Walmart, among others (Achieving the Dream, 2022). According to the ATD website (Achieving the Dream, 2022), they work to be a partner and *champion* to community colleges across the nation. ATD’s focus is on transforming colleges so that they choose innovation over tradition. To accomplish this “noble” task, ATD creates personalized community college growth plans to address the challenges each institution faces. These growth plans provide actionable solutions to community college problems (*helping junior grow up?*).

Neoliberalism ensures that the transformational reforms orchestrated by a private, corporate class are understood as delivering change to individuals and communities (Dumas, 2016). Thinking with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) brings to light how the power-knowledge relations within neoliberal discourse marginalize community colleges as damaged-centered institutions incapable of their own solutions, and thus, success hinges on or revolves around the expert knowledges endowed by the corporate world. The discursive move is a disciplinary one that differentiates, marginalizes, and regulates the community

college. At the same time, community colleges are written into the subjectivity of damage through limited institutional agency. The power-knowledge relations within the discursive practices of neoliberalism produces private philanthropic and corporate organizations as the “answers” to the community college’s “problems.” This marginalization of the localized, institutional knowledge further props up these external organizations as the “heroes” saving community colleges from deficit and demise.

Under the pretense of transformative ideas and a novel completion agenda, private philanthropic organizations have invested in community college reforms. These organizations include the Ford Foundation, which funded the Bridges to Opportunity project; Complete College America; and Lumina Foundation’s, Achieving the Dream (ATD), among several others (Bailey et al., 2015; Fain, 2011). Major for-profit corporations are also privileged as having the expert answers to community college challenges. In 2016, education behemoth Pearson created a partnership with a community college suffering from declining enrollment to deliver marketing, recruiting, and retention solutions (Smith, 2016). Todd Hitchcock, the chief operating officer of Pearson Embanet, a subsidiary of Pearson, shared his thoughts on the partnership in an article published by Insider Higher Ed: “We decided to enter into an agreement with them about two years ago to solve this problem. What we found is what you would find at any community college in the country ... so we thought, ‘this is a good problem for us to solve’” (Smith, 2016, para. 4). The power-knowledge relations of privileging and marginalization have produced a partnership in which each year the local community college gives Pearson \$550,000 from its marketing budget—a budget that is typically funded from state tax dollars. This partnership spans from 2016 to 2026. It is clear

from Hitchcock's words that he considers Pearson the answer to community college problems and that these long-term solutions can be delivered at a nationwide scale.

Google and Microsoft provide additional examples of corporations that are privileged through the discursive practices of neoliberalism as having the solutions to community college problems. In 2021, Google gave all United States community colleges access to its four career certificates (Hess, 2021). This move effectively marginalizes the community college curriculum through patronage and replaces local knowledge with the expert knowledge of a corporate juggernaut. At the same time, Google is creating a national workforce trained in Google technologies. These power-knowledge relations not only ensure a workforce trained in the operation of their product, but an entire workforce that prefers Google products over other technologies—the actions of discipline and biopower. Microsoft recognized these competitive moves and announced that they will partner with community colleges to train 250,000 workers in the cybersecurity sector (Hess, 2021). In Microsoft's announcement, the company says this: “[Community colleges] are one of the nation's most remarkable and ubiquitous assets, and with some targeted assistance, they can move quickly to help address the cybersecurity workforce shortage” (Hess, 2021, para. 16). Microsoft makes clear in their statement that their “targeted assistance” is privileged as the necessary expert solutions to local community college problems.

Despite Google saying that it does not make any profits on its courses (however, Coursera, the delivery platform does), it is worth noting that both Google and Microsoft seem to be aware that there may soon be an influx of federal funds to fuel these kinds of industry-community college partnerships (Hess, 2021). In the article announcing Google's gift of four

career certificates to community colleges, there are quotes from two United States Senators.

First a statement by Senator Murphy:

I'm hopeful that in a few weeks, we'll be able to report some pretty good news to supplement these efforts. The Build Back Better Act, which we are on the verge of passing through Congress, will invest historic amounts of money in community college, workforce training and students [by] increasing the maximum Pell Grant, and importantly, dedicating \$5 billion just to grow public-private partnerships with community colleges. (Hess, 2021, para. 13)

A second quote by Senator Blumenthal mentions that the legislation would also mean "\$20 billion for workforce development through both the Department of Education and Department of Labor" (Hess, 2021, para. 14). The Build Back Better Act "light version" passed the senate in August 2022 (Stark, 2022). The full regulatory effect of these legislative power-knowledge moves on local community colleges remains to be seen.

In the meantime, I posit that the discursive practices and power-knowledge relations that produce community colleges into a subordinate and damage-centered subjectivity allows corporations to commandeer taxpayer funding under the guise of transforming the community college, and by extension, these corporations can act as experts-heroes-saviors of the American workforce and economy. Foucault would not necessarily be concerned with who profits (although he does ask who benefits) but rather the "marginalization and repression of historically specific alternatives" (Weedon, 1987/1997, p. 87). An alternative specific to this deconstruction could be that community colleges can "save" themselves. These flows of power-knowledge operate to maintain privileges and allow the accumulation of corporate profits. Annoyingly, these power-knowledge relations allow tax dollars to

finance neoliberal solutions, while corporate nonprofits maintain their privileged status as virtually tax exempt (IRS, 2022). The regulatory effect is that state and federal dollars are used to pay corporations so that public monies are no longer available for local community colleges.

Another reason that community colleges are so beholden to these expert, corporate knowledges and heroic private organizations is that community colleges are in desperate need of the funding provided through grants and legislative dollars (*Junior—Poor thing*). As a flow of disciplinary power, the knowledge produced about community colleges regulates their subjectivity into that of institutions who require continuous improvement and surveillance. This forces community colleges to report on metrics (for example, the IPEDS data described in Door One) and operate in certain ways to ensure the metrics are met. As a material effect of power-knowledge flows, community colleges participate in these regulations in the hope that these metrics will produce funding streams. Because community colleges are funded at a junior status, they are forced to internalize dominant discourses of the day (which currently privilege neoliberal ideas). The productive effect of expert knowledges of neoliberalism (privatization, globalization, and corporation), regulate community colleges into the subjectivity of docile institutions trained to maintain social differentiation and stratification. In the section below, I continue to think with my analytical question of how damaged-centered subjectivities of community colleges are normalized. I do this by opening up how power-knowledge relations operate through the expert discourse of global corporations to oppress local, community knowledge to the lower-level.

Global-Corporate Power

Terry Hathaway (2020), an instructor and scholar at the University of York in the United Kingdom, provides the ideational definition of neoliberalism as a faith in the free market and a lack of faith in state provisions. Thinking with Foucault (1982) makes visible that the idea of a “free market” reinforces corporate privilege. Hathaway (2020) agrees; in his article, he reviews neoliberalism in the literature and, in doing so, offers an account of how so-called “free market” policies have resulted in increased corporate power. These power-knowledge moves are insidiously made. Hathaway (2020) shares that in rhetoric, neoliberalism co-opts the ideals of freedom and liberty. He writes, “the freer the market, the freer the society” (Hathaway, 2020, p. 317). Indeed, its most loquacious advocates espouse neoliberalism as interchangeable with the American values of individualism, globalism, and a dynamic meritocratic society (ideas that this dissertation work challenges). In terms of national policy agenda, neoliberalism has advanced privatization, deregulation, non-intervention, lower taxes, and a reduction in state size. All of which has contributed to a “free market” where the power relations within private, global, and corporate discourse outcompete local community knowledge. Hathaway (2020) articulates through scholarly work what I noticed in the boarded-up, lower-level doors on the main street of my hometown: the power-knowledge relations that have privileged neoliberal discourse over the last forty years have resulted in the death of small, entrepreneurial, community-based businesses and the rise of oligopolistic international corporations.

In alignment with Foucault’s ideas, Hathaway’s (2020) work also points out that the power-knowledge relations within neoliberal discourse are generally obscured through the normative idea that the market is natural and eternal. This normalization is highlighted with

the inclusion of a quote by Zuidhof (2014): “neoliberalism ‘turns the market into a norm for government action, dictating market-like forms of government . . . [whereby] social problems are best governed by creating markets or market-like institutions’” (as cited by Hathaway, 2020, p. 319). Hathaway subsequently elaborates that schools, which have been traditionally non-economic institutions, are now faced with privatization and outsourcing. As power-knowledge relations work through the discursive practices of neoliberal discourse, corporations are given expanded scope, even crossing boundaries traditionally considered the state’s domains (Hathaway, 2020). By deregulating corporations, community institutions are regulated into marginalized subjectivities with lower-level local knowledge (*those who would otherwise have never*). Further, these moves place education into the market sector so corporate profits can be made (Baldrige, 2017).

In keeping with Foucault as the guide for my thinking, once more my concern is who is marginalized and who benefits. I posit that power-knowledge relations within global-corporate discursive practices are manifested through the marginalization of community colleges as institutions in need of global-corporate salvation. This idea is borrowed from Ayers (2011); however, he uses the term nation-state instead of local in his work. He writes, “The nation-state is associated with dysfunction, lethargy, and intransigence, whereas global is associated with efficiency, responsiveness, and progress” (p. 305). This global-efficiency-progress discourse intersects with the discursive practices of the hero-leader; something or someone must be differentiated as deficit or victim in order to produce the subjectivity of hero. In this assemblage, these oppositions produce a corporate savior. In other words, the power-knowledge relations that underpin notions of global-corporate power discursively construct the local community as deficit, lower-level, and damage-centered. Damage-

centered imaging pathologizes community colleges, reduces their agency, and effectively allows corporations to be positioned as the community college's saviors. Importantly, this damage-centered framing devalues the local knowledge and wisdom of community college educators and leaders who are actively working to ensure community college education fully delivers on its open door promise.

Image 6

Your "hire" education marketing campaign



In my research for this section, I learned that C. Wright Mills, a political sociologist in the mid-1900s, was worried about the revolving door between the government and large corporations (Gill,

2018). His concerns were centered on the issue of corporate elites making the political decisions under which Americans had to live. Mills was shunned by the social scientists of his time, and it was not until the 1960s that another generation of sociologists saw that the corporate-political revolving door was limiting democratic possibilities (Gill, 2018). With Mills's ideas in mind, I once more return to and wring meaning from the "Your Hire Education" marketing campaign (Image 6) introduced in door one (APCO Worldwide, 2022). Inscribing the goals of community college education as "hire" only marginalizes community colleges as subservient to corporations while affording corporate elites the privilege of making decisions about what education should be. As a flow of power-knowledge, regulation of community colleges into certain ways of being (e.g., damaged, in need of rescue) maintains social stratifications that ensure local and state taxpayer dollars are channeled into the philanthropic workforce training solutions produced by heroic global corporations. The educational aspects necessary to support local knowledges and the social

and economic aspirations of an inclusive, democratic community are diminished as the community college's workforce training institutional subjectivity is normalized by advertisements and texts such as "Your Hire Education."

In thinking with Foucault (1978), I began to question if corporate power as a social solution is a practice of biopower circulating within and among our institutions. Biopower holds human life (Foucault, 1978, 2003; Taylor, 2011). Phrased differently, it is a form of power that produces and manages life. Foucault (1978) writes:

This bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. But this was not all it required; it also needed the growth of both of these factors, their reinforcements as well as their availability and docility; it had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern. (p. 45)

Biopower "optimizes" life through the establishment of norms rather than laws; it is internalized by subjects and it is dispersed through society (Taylor, 2011). While corporations offer neoliberal reforms as the solutions to community college's "problems," they reinforce a hegemonic societal value that the mission of community colleges is to rapidly train the working class.

These power-knowledge relations are unmistakably felt in local communities when corporations close their doors and relocate overseas for a cheaper labor force. As a result of narrow training, workers may know the skills needed for a particular job. If worker training does not include transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, or technology

skills, when these particular jobs go away it becomes difficult for people to repurpose their education in a comparable position for equal pay. At the same time, places to obtain similar employment become increasingly limited. Often, these workers once more become students in need of training, and the community college's revolving door becomes an entryway for the purpose of worker retooling. Experience has shown that these effects are damaging to the local community—*the lower-level door was boarded up along with many other doors along our main street*. As examples, the power-knowledge relations are visible in the lower socioeconomic statuses of our citizens, declines in regional standards of living, and fewer opportunities for a fulfilled life (fewer restaurants, entertainment venues, natural spaces, cultural events). Granted, in a web of power relations, many communities still try—*this building is being renovated and will reopen as a boutique hotel*.

During my reading for this work, I found this statement from Levin (2006) to be a fascinating account of global-corporate power in higher education: “Clearly, the impact of globalization, and specifically economic globalization, alters institutions, including higher education institutions, and the subset community colleges” (p. 65). This statement, intended to critique global discourse and the power-knowledge operating within it, supports that the expert knowledges of neoliberalism are at work to produce institutions of higher education. However, that is not my only reason for including Levin's statement. I include his words here, at the end of this door, because it illustrates, yet again, how community colleges are continuously written into a deficit subjectivity. In this case, community colleges are marginalized as both outside and below higher education (*including higher education, and the **subset** community colleges*). Once more, multiple discourses—global/local, corporate/community, deficit—intersect in the production of community colleges.

Thinking with Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity, I made visible that America's community colleges, which community college scholars espouse as institutions of democracy, public values, social responsibility, and civic pride are subjugated by global-corporate discourse to a lower, damage-centered level. And as an effect of power-knowledge relations (differentiation, privileging, marginalization, and regulation), expert knowledges limit democratic possibilities and community colleges are disciplined as servants of neoliberalism. Because there is no beginning or end to this work, I repeat the overarching question that has guided this analysis and subtly shift my ideas: Are the damage-centered discourses that produce community colleges concurrently producing damaged communities? After reading and thinking with Foucault, I believe that they are.

To conclude *Assemblage Four, the Institution Assemblage*, I reiterate that scholarly literature supports how neoliberal ideals have shifted community college's discourse to the expert discourse of neoliberalism (e.g., globalization, privatization, corporation, and competition) (Ayers, 2011; Levin, 2006). Within the discursive practices of these discourses, the power-knowledge relations at play are marginalization and privileging (expert discourse is given authority over local, community knowledge). In higher education, this means that institutions are regulated into subjectivities focused on the neoliberal values of generating revenue and reducing labor costs (Levin, 2006). This brings forward concerns voiced by McNeely (2020) regarding the narrowing of the community college mission to the making of workers. I would elaborate on her concerns and question if a narrower mission might also limit the community service facet of the community college mission. Despite the points raised about the damage inherent within a community service discourse, such a narrowing

would be detrimental to the communities that community colleges serve. Finally, I would also suggest that free market solutions in the form of expert knowledges privilege private philanthropic corporations as the answer to not only economic problems, but to educational problems as well.

In Assemblage Four, I thought with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) to open how the power-knowledge relations at play within two dominant discourses produce the community college institution. The ideas that illuminated my analysis of power and knowledge emerged from my encounters with hospital doors and my remembrance of a once vibrant and bustling main street with a lower-level door. Through the metaphor of these door types, I became aware of how power and knowledge move through damage-centered assumptions of community college to produce effects that negatively impact our local community colleges and the communities that they serve. Following my first analytical question, in the institution assemblage, I troubled the intersecting discourses of junior and community. Secondly, I ask: How do power-knowledge relations operate within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses of community colleges? I plugged in Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) to bring to light how discursive practices (exclusions, controls, and rules) produce community college by the power-knowledge relations of differentiation, privileging, marginalization, and regulation. The productive effects of these power-knowledge relations are that community colleges are normalized as lesser than “real” colleges and universities; local, “hometown” spaces where the status-quo is maintained (*walking in circles, stuck in a revolving door*); subservient to global-corporate discourse; and institutions in need of saving by heroic private, philanthropic organizations. *I know thy works.*

Thus, my work in this assemblage deconstructed how the discourses of junior and community narrate the agency of community colleges. In writing and thinking with my third analytical question, I made visible how the subjectivity of inferior and subordinate institutions has become normalized through power-knowledge relations within television, social media, and legislative texts. Crossing the threshold into the final assemblage of my dissertation work, I aim to close the door on damage-centered community college discourse. The ultimate purpose of my work, and the purpose of the concluding assemblage, is to refuse damage. As an action upon action (Foucault, 1982), my final poststructural move opens the door for community college discourse to become centered in *disruption*.

Sidelight - The Hall of Doors

For years, on the door of my refrigerator, lived a magnet. It said this:

Alice laughed. “There is no use trying,” said Alice; “one can’t believe impossible things.”

“I dare say you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

The possibility of “impossible” things has long captured my curiosity and imagination.

In Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll (1865/2015), Alice goes down the rabbit hole and finds herself in the long hall. On the walls of the long hall, there are many doors, and the long hall itself is the entrance to Wonderland. During much of this work, I have felt like Alice. I fell into a rabbit hole that led me to door after door after door. And just like with Alice, these doors seemed locked. The work of my writing was to open the doors (discourses) to the power and knowledge relations that were maintaining the discourses as productive forces of community college subjectivities (e.g., student, leader, and institution). When I began, like Alice, I was lost. I knew I wanted to refuse the damage within community college discourse after reading Tuck’s (2009) letter to communities, but I had no preplanned steps or maps showing me how to find dominant community college discourses. I certainly was unaware of how to locate the power and knowledge relations within them. Yes, like Alice I was lost and, frankly, afraid. I asked my mentors what to do and the advice I was given was to write. But in order to write I also had to read. I began by reading and writing about community college. I read and wrote about the history of community college in America which led me to certain ideas that I noticed: deficit, junior, masculine, and mission. As I continued to write, these ideas emerged and merged again and again; and they became,

along with shame, competition, missionaryism, and community, the dominant discourses where I focused. My next move was to learn about the discourses themselves; their histories, what they represented, and how they have been used in society over time. Finally, I was able to hone in on how these dominant discourses are repeated and repurposed within community colleges, and it was here that I was able to plug in Foucault's theories and my encounters with texts so that the discursive practices and power-knowledge relations producing damage-centeredness finally became visible.

*Truthfully, this sounds much simpler than it actually was. Each door was a unique struggle. In each assemblage, I was starting almost anew. And the work grew longer and longer, just like the long hall. I knew I would never be finished, such is this type of work, but I was concerned that I would never find a place to stop. I also must admit that it took **all** of the thinking and writing to illuminate the productive effects of power and knowledge. Until I wrote the section in Assemblage Five that provides a summary of the power-knowledge relations (which you have yet to read), I did not see the explicit discursive practices at play; nor did I realize how the power-knowledge relations within discursive practices fold into one another and reemerge across discourses and subjectivities. After this opened for me, I had to go back to the hall of doors (start of the analysis) and write again so that the reader could see all along what I could not see until the end.*

Every piece of this work had to be done so that in the final assemblage the damage-centered discourses would be disrupted and their doors might be closed. My hope to accomplish these tasks (disrupting and closing the damage) makes the end of the hall, where a new discursive door will be framed, the entrance to my own wonderland of seemingly impossible things.

ASSEMBLAGE FIVE:
REFRAMING COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISCOURSE

In my post qualitative dissertation, I deployed thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) to reveal the dominant discourses and power-knowledge relations within their discursive practices that are producing community colleges as damage-centered. I wanted to open community college discourse to the unthought. Therefore, I used Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge, and subjectivity to make visible how power-knowledge relations within the discursive practices of dominant discourses produce certain subjectivities (e.g., student, leader, and institution). Thinking with theory provided a framework that allowed me to trouble the normative community college discourses that I encountered and acknowledged as intersecting. Foucauldian theory was a space for "thresholding" the discursive practices and power-knowledge relations that discipline and regulate community college subjectivities. As I close the door on these normalized community college subjectivities, I return to my analytical questions to emphasize the significance and implications of my work.

Part One: Dismantling Damage: Closing the Normalized Subjectivities

Three questions guided my thinking and writing. In this section, I revisit each analytical question to conclude, or close, what was opened during the process of plugging in.

What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered?

In the sidelight titled "Constructing the doors," I shared that multiple interwoven discourses emerged during my analytical work. At times, I struggled to untangle them enough so that an analysis of the power-knowledge relations within their discursive practices

was manageable. And there are many moments throughout the work that I make clear that a detanglement was undoable. Most of the discourses, deficit is one example, appeared time and again as I moved through the subjectivities I selected for this dissertation (e.g., student, leader, and institution). In each assemblage my analysis made visible that community college discourses are interwoven in the production of damage; for example, the discourse of deficit that was first opened in assemblage one, the student, was inseparable from the mission/aryism discourse of assemblage two (leader) and the junior discourse in assemblage three (institution). As another example, the competition discourse between academic education and workforce technical training appeared in the selection of male community college leaders with vocational, workforce experience as well as the privileging of global-corporate discourse over the local, democratic community discourse commonly associated with community college institutions.

I also came to see that once these dominant discourses intersected, the power-knowledge relations within their discursive practices flowed as one current and amplified one another. The effect is that damage-centeredness is continuously reproduced by interwoven discourses, and within their inseparable discursive practices, power-knowledge relations work as emergent properties. In the biological sciences, emergent properties, is a term that represents how recognizing the collective properties of an entity (e.g., a cell, a multicellular organism) is necessary to understand the interactions of the entire system. I propose that it is necessary to look across multiple intersecting discourses to fully reveal the depth of the power-knowledge relations at work within their discursive practices to produce community colleges as damaged. It is for that reason that I challenged myself through this work to

analyze the power-knowledge relations in six different discursive doors across three subjectivities (student, leader, and institution). The discourses in my analysis became:

- Door One. A double discourse of deficit-shame that produces community college students as lacking, deficient, and those who have previously failed at secondary education, life, a job, or college and need a “second chance”.
- Door Two. A discourse of competition that creates a divisive and swinging emphasis on two facets of the community college mission: academic general education versus technical workforce training.
- Door Three. The masculinity discourse that aids in the perpetuation of community college leadership ideals normatively associated with men.
- Door Four. A mission/aryism discourse that reestablishes as normative that damaged community colleges need to be saved by a powerful hero.
- Door Five. A junior discourse that positions the institution as inferior, miniature, and subordinate to the university.
- Door Six. A community discourse that competes with expert knowledges (privatization, globalization, and neoliberalism) to produce the community college as local, public-servicing institutions whose purpose is to produce workers for regional business and industry.

Following Foucault, I will not get trapped into proposing that one discourse is more reasonable (or even powerful) than the other. Furthermore, it has never been my intention to reject every aspect of these foundational community college discourses. My concern is that the ways in which these discourses are often manipulated and perpetuated are troubling and dangerous. The peril that I bring to light through this work is that the power-knowledge

relations within the discursive practices of these discourses are working to act on the actions of students, leaders, and institutions without their awareness. That is where the damage is centered.

I repeat the thought that is entangled with my overarching research question, “What are the costs of thinking of [community colleges] as damaged?” (Tuck, 2009, p. 415). Thinking of community colleges as damaged, makes it natural for Americans to use assumptions of brokenness to dismiss community colleges. The cost to community colleges is that students look elsewhere for education and may end up nowhere at all; innovative, non-traditional leaders look to other kinds of organizations for employment and difference making; funding is cut or never increased because legislators do not want to invest money in institutions that they perceive as incapable of their own solutions; and the corporations now necessary for community college operations are positioned as the trustees of community colleges instead of local knowledges. The cost to American communities is equally as dear. Thinking of community colleges as damaged casts the educational solution for generational poverty and the place where society strives to deliver on equality into the sociohistorical position of broken, to be either fixed or cast aside. The costs of thinking of community colleges as damaged is that this thinking perpetuates a pathologizing ideological framework (with its power, knowledge, and discursive strategies), and thereby, closes too many doors to equitable opportunities.

How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses?

No one entity holds power (Foucault, 1977). Instead, power flows through a network of social relations that permits an action upon the action of others. Foucault (1982) tells us

that to make visible how power-knowledge relations work, we need to look at “‘How,’ not in the sense of ‘How does it [power] manifest itself?’ but ‘By what means is it exercised?’ and ‘What happens when individuals exert (as they say) power over others?’” (p. 786). My work makes visible *how* power-knowledge relations are exercised within the discursive practices of dominant community college discourses and *how* community college subjectivities are produced as power-knowledge moves.

Discourse is how power relations are made visible. The work of Foucauldian discourse analysis seeks to “name” the discursive practices at play within dominant discourse. By problematizing discursive productions, the associated effects of power-knowledge relations become visible. One example used in the institution assemblage is how the discursive practices of *exclusions*, *controls*, and *rules* establish expert knowledges (as compared to the local knowledge of community colleges), which allows heroic, non-profit organizations such as the Ford Foundation; Complete College America; and Lumina Foundation, among several others (Bailey et al., 2015; Fain, 2011) to act on the community colleges’ behalf. These power-knowledge relations put into operation *differentiations* (how power is exercised) that are at the same time the condition of power (deficit assumptions of community colleges) and its results (the differential status of local, community knowledges *privilege* the expert knowledges of neoliberalism and *marginalizes* the local knowledge of community college students, faculty, and leaders). These ideas work in combination to further *regulate* community colleges into a deficit or junior status.

Discursive practices are enacted through power-knowledge relations. The effects of discursive practices and the strategies and techniques of power-knowledge relations that were

revealed through my poststructural discourse analysis and thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) inquiry are:

- Differentiations. These dividing practices are a form of judgment that establish binaries and hierarchies that allow individuals, groups, or entities to be positioned into a certain status, rank, category, or class. As strategies of power-knowledge, differentiations, worked within the dominant discourses of deficit-shame, competition (career-technical training versus academic education), masculinity (women versus men), mission/aryism (victim versus hero), junior (junior versus senior or university), and community (public versus private and local knowledge vs. the “expert” knowledges of global-corporate power). These techniques of power keep discourse on the move by producing exclusionary knowledge that sustains the discourse.
- Privileging. Within the established binaries and hierarchies, certain positions are given privileged status. As such, privileging is a strategy of judgment and regulation that establishes preferred subject positions, hierarchical classification schemes, and the status of expert or authority. Through the technique of privileging, power produces preferred types of knowledge: academic success, university bound, masculine leadership ideals, missionary work, “real” college or senior institutions, expert texts, and global-corporate solutions. As an example, global-corporate, neoliberal ideals such as capitalism and materialism enable and promote the knowledge that success is measured by productivity (capital gains). In modern educational discourse, these global-corporate knowledges are privileged over the localized knowledge of professional community college educators. And ideals needed for a strong, democratic community and quality of life (joy, happiness, and a

collective sense of purpose) are disqualified in the pursuit of corporate profits.

Further, those who are privileged as experts or authorities have the “right to speak” on the community college’s behalf. This effectively excludes and controls local knowledges, and thereby, reduces the agency of community college students, leaders, and the institutions.

- **Marginalization.** *Those who otherwise have never.* Marginalization is the “other” to privilege. Power-knowledge relations operate within discursive practices that marginalize community colleges by producing assumptions of what “community colleges” and “their students” are and who community college leaders “should be.” Like privileging, marginalization is a strategy of judgment and regulation. In the student assemblage, I troubled how power-knowledge relations within deficit-shame discursive practices marginalize community college students as failing in some aspect of life and now needing a “second chance.” My work also considered how marginalization worked within the dominant discourses of competition, leadership, mission/aryism, junior, and community to position community college students and community colleges as in need of saving. The institutional assemblage re-reveals that marginalization works to produce community colleges as deficit institutions inferior to universities and dependent on expert, corporate saviors. There are other terms for marginalization that surface throughout this work including disqualification and devaluation. Marginalization is the strategy of power-knowledge that controls who can enter the discourse.
- **Regulation.** *I know thy works.* Regulation maintains “necessary” social stratifications. Society requires compliance of docile bodies to meet the demands of productivity. In

other words, there is a need for “workers” at all levels of society. Regulation is visible on the population level through biopower (regulatory processes) and on the individual level through disciplinary power (judgment and surveillance). As an effect of regulation, people learn that their lives are meant to be lived in certain directions. This knowledge limits their social mobility, thereby, preserving a financial-based class system that optimizes corporate profits. The strategy of regulation, as a power-knowledge flow, works within all of the discourses troubled in this work—academically successful students are regulated to university, females are regulated into middle-leadership roles, and community colleges are regulated into junior status. However, regulation is distinctly visible by analyzing the neoliberal worker ideals produced within the discourses of competition and community that regulate students into certain career pathways.

Through this work, I offer that strategies and techniques of power (differentiation, privileging, marginalization, and regulation) perpetuate the status quo by upholding certain knowledge as “truth” or common sense. These power-knowledge relations are enabled and promoted by the discursive practices (exclusions, controls, and rules) of dominant and intersecting community college discourses. The discourse’s assumed status as “true” or “real” can be disrupted, and the damage within the discourse can be closed, by undermining the discursive practices and power-knowledge relations that perpetuate the discourse.

How do certain subjectivities (student, leader, and institution) become normalized?

Community college subjectivities become normalized when we reproduce discourses without regard to the power-knowledge relations that produce the structural and social conditions necessary for damage-centered inequities. For example, community college

discourses are underwritten by damage-centered ideologies that position the underachievement of community colleges, and the diverse students they serve, without mention of the sociohistorical discursive practices (within the discourses of deficit-shame, competition, masculinity, mission/aryism, junior, and community) that have positioned the community college's subjectivity. Damage-centered discourses perpetuate myths about community colleges; maintain common-sense or status-quo thinking; indoctrinate students, leaders, and institutions into a certain, limited way of being and belonging; and set up certain discourse as the "truth." Through discourse, community colleges are enticed to assume certain subjectivities, and when they do, community colleges conform themselves to these fixed, static ways of being (Allan et al, 2003).

Just as we all operate within the systems in which we are born into, community colleges are operating within the normalizing constraints of our social and economic systems. My work critiques the constraints, not the community colleges (students, leaders, or institutions) themselves. By thinking with Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982), I reveal how power moves within the discursive practices of everyday encounters and experiences, and thereby continuously reproduces knowledge that normalizes the subjectivities of community colleges within a framework of damage-centeredness. As made visible in my work, an overarching assumption of damage produces "preferred subject positions" (McNeely, 2020, p. 139). As normalizing, damage-centered discourse circulates, community colleges perform acts of self-subjugation when they accept the subject positions allowable by the dominant discourse (Foucault, 1982). The subject positions most often occupied by the three community college subjectivities (students, leaders, and institutions) are:

- Students. High achieving students, for example, might occupy the preferred subject positions of university-bound immediately after high school. Whereas “other” students may occupy the deferred subjectivity of community college attendee working towards future transfer to university. Deferred is used here to draw attention to the language of deferred in the university admission process and serve as a reminder that one of the original missions of the community college was to be a holding institution for those not yet ready for higher education. Further, many students who are ranked as underperforming in secondary education are restricted to a narrower field of possibilities, and thus, take up the subject position of community college students earning two-year career-technical degrees, or those seeking short-term (less than one-year) job-skill training.
- Leaders. The executive leader subjectivity most accepted and expected (common sense, status quo) is hegemonically masculine. This subjectivity is normalized by ideal worker norms and narratives of community college students and institutions that need to be saved by a hero. Although women work in and lead divisions within the community college, many are relegated to middle management roles where they perform much of the institutional labor, while their male counterparts are awarded executive roles and hailed as heroes saving the institutional day. Many women opt out of the executive role because of the choice between career and family. Female leaders are often compared to masculine norms and labeled as unfit for the role, as they operate beyond the patriarchal lines drawn between work and home.
- Institutions. The stereotypical institutional subject positions occupied by the community colleges themselves often are post-secondary high schools, second choice

institutions, technical institutes for job training at scale, and local community service hubs where the work of transformational education reform is left to the global, corporate powers. Tacit assumptions of junior as miniature or inferior perpetuate ideas of community colleges as subordinate to and in service of university. The ways in which the community discourse is contorted for certain aims produces the community college as a local, static, public service-community service organization. And as an effect of discounted funding, justifiable through the circulation of dominant discourses, community colleges maintain their reliance on corporate saviors.

These subjectivities become normalized through techniques of exclusion, strategies of control, and enactment of rules within the discursive practices of dominant community college discourses. The ones who benefit from the establishment of these normalized subject positions are the ones in positions of privilege (universities, men, corporations, as examples). Thus, this is how power-knowledge relations work so efficiently and effectively to enable and promote dominant discourses. Troubling how power-knowledge relations are working within the discursive practices of community college discourse to produce these particular presupposed subjectivities opens up possibilities to disrupt the discourse and refuse the damage.

Refusal of Damage

In the simplest form, damage is “the long-term repercussions of thinking of ourselves as broken” (Tuck, 2009). After reading the words of Tuck (2009), I became concerned about how normative American discourse (popular media, scholarly literature, and legislation) maintains community colleges as damaged, and after reading Foucault (1970, 1977, 1980,

1982), I grew troubled about the power-knowledge relations working to frame an entire educational system as diminished. The danger with damage-centered discourse is that a pathologizing, ideological framework oppresses the community college, its students, and its leaders. Tuck (2009), who was concerned with reframing Native communities' research, writes:

As I have noted, damage-centered research involves social and historical contexts at the outset, the significance of these contexts is regularly submerged. Without the contexts of racism and colonization, all we're left with is the damage, and this makes our stories vulnerable to pathologizing analyses. (p. 415)

Inspired by Tuck's (2009) concerns, my intention with this work was to name the dominant and intersecting discourses that produce community colleges as damage-centered, and to trouble how power-knowledge relations within the discursive practices of these discourses work to normalize certain community college subjectivities (e.g., student, leader, and institution). To do this work, I chose to think with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017), a form of post qualitative inquiry, by using Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge relations, and subjectivity.

However, a final intention of this work is to create openings so that dominant community college discourse can be produced beyond the damage. In thinking about this, I felt called to do two things. First, I refuse the damage that I have named in this work. Second, I create a space for disruptive discourses to emerge. To imagine more specific strategies, I returned to the poststructural scholars who have inspired me. There, McNeely (2020) led me to this quote from Foucault (1978): "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (p.

101). Thinking once more with Foucault (1982), now with his ideas of resistance, I am provided the theoretical tools to show how local, day-to-day discursive resistances work as practices or acts of refusal.

According to Foucault, power is not held by any one person or entity; instead, it constantly circulates in a web of complex relations that is constantly in tension (Jackson & Mazzei, 2018). Jackson and Mazzei (2018) explain Foucault's perspectives on the relations between power and knowledge:

Foucault is careful to explain that power and knowledge do not exist in simple opposition to encourage or restrict one another. They merge and become visible as forms of power-knowledge in cultural and material practices within specific conditions . . . Knowledge was formed by activity that is in itself a practice of power, and power was exercised by the distribution or restraint of knowledge. (p. 60)

Within this dynamic relationship, subjects can use knowledge to construct themselves differently. As Foucault (1978) tells us, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (p. 95). Points of resistance are possible everywhere in the web of power-knowledge relations. The discourses of community college are no exception.

Dominant discourses offer community colleges "preferred subject positions" (McNeely, 2020, p. 139). However, with each discursive reinscription, community colleges (students, leaders, and institutions) choose to participate in or resist the power-knowledge relations perpetuated in dominant discourse. These choices occur in how community colleges think, what community colleges say, and their daily practices. As a community college leader, I both participate in and resist the power-knowledge relations in a damage-centered community college discourse. I shared some of these double-moves and struggles in the

sidelight stories that I included in the analytical assemblages of this work. As an example, at times I participate in dominant discourses of competition (specifically vocationalism) by promoting short-term training programs as a quick pathway to a family sustaining wage. At other times, I resist the dominant discourse with reminders that general education coursework produces well-informed citizens capable of participating in democracy (voting, serving on juries).

This wrestling match within myself mirrors what Foucault (1982) calls the “strategy of struggle” (p. 225). He tells us that anytime there are two conflicting discourses, the forces they serve will engage in a “relationship of confrontation” (p. 225) that is an inevitable, perpetual, dynamic, and reversible conflict. McNeely (2020) also uses the example of the conflict between vocationalism and comprehensive education when she states, “Both are critical of the other. Both seek to undermine the knowledge the other is advancing as ‘truth’” (p. 141). To escape from this conflict is impossible because competing interests always arise. Even if resistance can reverse dominant discourses and their associated power-knowledge relations, it creates new dominant discourses that give rise to new regimes of “truth” and new power-knowledge relations, including new forms of resistance (McNeely, 2020). Foucault warns that these new constructions may produce power-knowledge relations that are also problematic and damaging. For example, if community colleges resist vocationalism because it limits students’ choices, then whole sectors of society, such as our healthcare system, would collapse leaving millions with little choice regarding their medical care.

Resisting the discourse itself is different than refusing the damage within the discourse, which is my intent. For Foucauldian-influenced poststructuralists, the ability to engage in struggle and launch resistance is the only freedom and agency we have to refuse

damage because society contextualizes our categories, realities, and identities (McNeely, 2020). However, actions of refusal do produce change. St. Pierre (2000) cites Foucault's statement that "power relations are obliged to change with the resistance" (p. 492).

According to McNeely (2020), these practices of resistance, or refusal, work in two ways. First, they interrogate the dominant discourse to reveal how underlying norms, such as damage-centeredness, might serve as points of resistance. Second, the subject may choose to embody an alternative, disruptive discourse that offers different interpretations and possibilities. Foucault (1982) writes:

The target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be . . . we have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of [what] has been imposed on us. (p. 785)

As an example, I return to a question I left unanswered in *Assemblage Four: How is this [community] discourse working to produce the assumption that the choice is between university and community college, when the real choice for many of our students is between community college and nothing at all (Ayers, 2011)?* In an act that refuses damage, community colleges can embrace a discourse that resists comparisons to university and instead advances a disruptive discourse that the community college's open door serves to provide opportunities for any American to have a productive, self-sustaining life.

These always present opportunities of resistance and refusal guarantee that community colleges have the freedom and agency to challenge the power-knowledge relations that work within current dominant discourses. Inspired by Stephen King's (2000) quote, "Write with the door closed, rewrite with the door opened," I conclude this section of my work with a reminder to community colleges that every attempt to reinscribe dominant

discourses is an opportunity to “write” with the damaged-centered doors closed and rewrite new doors framed by disruptive discursive practices.

Part Two: Framing New Doors

Throughout this work I have critiqued how community college scholars espouse that transformative solutions are needed to position America's community colleges to meet 21st century needs. Transformation means "across form." Following poststructural thought, this meaning can be deferred as across frames and across doors. My concern is that these "transformative" ideas are reimaginings of already existing discursive doors, and as brought to light by my work, these dominant discourses intersect and interweave within formations of discursive practices to produce power-knowledge relations that contextualize community college subjectivities in damage. A transformation is not needed. Entirely new doors must be framed from alternative, disruptive discursive practices.

These alternative discourses should not be reverse discourses as Foucault (1978) might suggest or even counter discourses that other poststructural scholars have proposed. I worry that reverse or counter discourse would continue problematic divisions and binaries. Instead, I am searching for different, unthought, not yet discourses that disrupt the binary reproduction of either/or and make space for *both-and* within and between community college subjectivities. As Koro-Ljungberg, et. al (2018) wrote, "The bifurcation of nature misses the dynamism of the "between" where everything happens" (p. 469). Disruptive discourses do not simply run counter to dominant discourses but force a new flow of power-knowledge relations in the form of a range of possibilities (subjectivities) beyond an either/or existence toward a *both-and* way of being and engaging with the world. Discourses such as these will defy the lure to serve as vehicles for the status quo by operating through different power-knowledge relations. I imagine that new power-knowledge relations within these disruptive discourses might work through discursive strategies and techniques that applaud

excesses and embrace multiplicities. In these alternative discourses, spaces are made within each subjectivity so that the community colleges' (students, leaders, and institutions) sense of selves can be underwritten by the intersecting, human-centered, disruptive discourses of wisdom, love, and hope. This will allow community colleges to move beyond the normative dichotomy of damage so that ongoing structural inequities might be exposed (Tuck, 2009).

I return to a quote that was a key inspiration for this work. Trinh (1989) said: "You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said" (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000). This work "unsays" the damage-centeredness of community colleges by making explicit that it is societies' own perpetuations of power-knowledge relations within discursive practices that allow these discourses to continue to circulate and produce limited subjectivity. This acknowledgement is in itself an act of power-knowledge that closes the door to the damage-centeredness within current dominant discourses. The challenge I issue to community colleges now is to write something disruptive and new. As someone once told me, "If we want better futures, we need better stories" (Unknown). In other words, if we want to change the world, we must first change what we say.

Contributions to Community College Discourse

My willingness to do this poststructural and post qualitative work of thinking with theory offers community colleges a deconstruction of how they came to be through the power-knowledge relations within discursive practices, an opportunity to unsay the damage, and an encouragement to write different and radical inscriptions of what community colleges could be. I felt called to speak out because I believe community colleges are in the midst of fundamental shifts. Education faces daunting issues that include reduced funding, anti-

intellectualism, the COVID-19 pandemic fallout (“apathetic” students, increased mental illness, and growing numbers of students ranked as “underperforming”), high rates of employee turnover, and increasing disparities in students’ preparation for college particularly when looking across socioeconomic status and race and ethnicity. Community colleges have additional challenges such as the impact of non-profit institutions, online universities, and universities experimenting with short-term workforce training. Publications teem with ideas to solve community college problems (Bailey et al., 2015; O’Banion, 2019; Wyner, 2014). However, these ideas are underwritten by status-quo discourses that work through existing flows of power-knowledge to maintain narratives of “truth.” The danger is that common sense thinking and truth discourses produce which subject positions are available and thinkable, which restricts community colleges into their normative, often diminished, role.

Other scholars have critiqued community college discourse (Ayers, 2009, 2011, 2017; Mitchell & Garcia, 2020; McNeely, 2020; Wilson, 2021), but to my knowledge no one has published the implications of perpetuating damage-centered community college discourse or how the power-knowledge relations embedded in discursive practices produce subjectivities contextualized by this norm. In this work, I name the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered, I deconstruct how power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses, and I make visible how certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions become normalized. Returning to a concept from St. Pierre (2019) previously shared in *Assemblage One*: “Following Derrida, deconstruction does not reject what is deconstructs. Rather, it overturns and displaces a structure to make room for something different” (p. 3). In my final move, I cross a threshold from damage-centered to disruptive

discourse in order to offer alternative discourses for the community college. These alternative possibilities are opportunities for reinvention, for self-claiming, and a chance to construct subjectivities that do not run counter to dominant discourses, but instead go beyond and flow differently than binary existences and subject positions. My work offers disruptions that create an existence and way of being (subjectivity) outside of the typical, binary mold.

Subjectivity is fluid; it is a continual process of becoming where there is opportunity to expand beyond fixed categories (binaries) and identities. I recommend several changes to community college discursive practices that will serve as a foundation for the emergence of different, disruptive discourses and expanded community college subjectivities as follows:

- Agency-based narratives. Community colleges can immediately shift their language from deficit-based narratives to agency-based narratives. The students who attend community colleges have multiple subjectivities and experiences that are currently underwritten by narratives of deficit or asset. I suggest community colleges move beyond that dichotomy and think of students as agency based. Students performed the action of walking through the community college's open door and that action (or potential action) is what should narrate their student subjectivity.
- Multiplicity of education. Community colleges can challenge the "academic/vocational divide" (Ferm, 2021, p. 1) by embracing fluid student positions. A new, disruptive discourse will highlight the multiplicity of education; making space for Americans to appreciate academic and vocational education for what they are and even how they are ultimately intertwined. This thinking disrupts the either/or discourse that students must choose one or the other and offers as alternative that American students would benefit most from a corequisite curriculum where students

learn interwoven academic and technical skills. In this disruptive model, both academic and technical curricula are privileged as higher education.

- Expanded visions of leadership. Community college leadership competencies can move away from gendered leadership ideals. Doing so would embrace the fluidity of gender and open opportunities for non-gendered norms to serve as the measure for good leadership. As Eddy (2010) writes, “How we talk about leadership begins to dictate who feels included in the conversation” (p. 127). Community colleges can immediately change the language in their leadership competencies and job descriptions so that expanded notions of gender are reflected in their words.
- Claiming higher education spaces. Community colleges can stop using the phrase “*this is missionary work*” and instead say “*this is higher education work.*” Community colleges must disrupt how they produce the damaged-centered victim subjectivity. Community colleges can also make changes to their own marketing materials as community colleges at times market themselves as subordinate or inferior.
- Challenge subordinate labels. Community colleges can name when they are discursively positioned as subordinate to universities in advertising, scholarly discourse, and legislative priorities. This move will bring awareness to how community colleges’ junior status is repeatedly maintained and challenge the authors of the texts to position community colleges differently.
- Active affirmations. Community colleges can advocate that their own local knowledges (rather than the expert knowledges of global-corporate discourse) contain the strategies and techniques of wisdom and love needed to create disruptive

discourse and reframe the community college's future. To accomplish this, community colleges might invest in their employees (pay increases, professional development, growth opportunities) rather than directing their financial resources towards corporate solutions.

- Altered language and messaging. Finally, community colleges can move away from the normative discourse that community college is an open door for *everyone* and instead espouse the disruptive discourse that community college offers to *anyone* the opportunity and hope for a better life and a better future for their families and our communities. This shifts the status-quo of community colleges from being all things to everyone and focuses the community college's attention onto ensuring that anyone can succeed.

These suggestions are setting forth what might happen; however, these disruptive discourses are not mine to write alone. Therefore, it is with intentionality that I do not share stories (or sidelights) of these alternative possibilities. I hope that readers imagine and create their own ways to operate in this new discursive world.

Contributions to Educational Leadership

My work offers educational leaders the theory and language to deconstruct the dominant discourses of their institutions and fields. I am certain there are other educational leaders who have noticed the productive effects of damaging discourse without having the theoretical tools and language to speak on how power-knowledge relations were working through discursive practices to produce certain subjectivities. My work offers these observant leaders a way to do their own work, to open their own doors.

I also offer a way to do leadership differently. My experiences in community college have led me to believe that the doctoral dissertations of future presidents (which I one day hope to be) are positivist data-driven research solutions to predetermined problems. Even though I began this journey with a scientific background, when I learned that I could do a dissertation differently, I refused the normative “quantitative scholar becomes future president” ideal and embraced the unknown of post qualitative inquiry. I wanted to learn how to think differently about community college and community college’s “problems.” I chose my path with the faith that it would be new and disruptive because I felt that the normal ways of solving community college problems had become static and stale.

As part of my offering to do leadership differently, I disrupted my analysis with sidelights that expanded my own subjectivity beyond fixed categories of leadership. These moves opened narrations that are personal. The sidelights combine stories of my family, my weakness, my questions, my passions, my mistakes, and my youth into the subjectivity of a community college leader. This required both vulnerability and courage. I like to believe that I lead by example and for community college leaders to write new disruptive discourses, community college students, leaders, and the institutions themselves will have to become both vulnerable and courageous. These moves also made visible how leaders (and students and institutions) move in and out of multiplicitous subjectivities.

Contributions to Inquiry

My study challenges the normative quantitative and qualitative approaches to community college research through a thinking with theory post qualitative approach to inquiry. As *undisciplined* (Sharpe, 2016) inquiry, thinking with theory distances itself from conventional research and disrupts conventional methodologies that disrupt data collection

and data analysis. By resisting the assumptions that inquiry requires a predetermined method, I opened myself to a novel way to do an analysis of discourse. My deconstructive work puts into assemblage several different things to reveal how power-knowledge relations within the discursive practices of dominant community college discourse are producing community college subjectivities as damaged-centered. Through the act of plugging in, new ways of thinking emerged as connections were continuously made among multiple encounters and experiences (social media advertisements, television, scholarly literature, leadership competencies, job descriptions, legislation, and my own sidelight stories). As an entanglement inquiry, my analysis of community college discourse includes figurations of doors and sidelight stories to show how my thinking sparked and erupted. Perhaps this work's best contribution is its unique illustration of how the unpredictability of post qualitative inquiry comes from all experiences and takes all shapes and forms, thus disrupting traditional, linear research paradigms.

I used Foucault's theories of power-knowledge to show how the discursive strategies and practices embedded in dominant community college discourses produce community college subjectivities. The overarching analytical question that guided my analysis was how damage-centered discourses produce community colleges. The point of interest is not how power-knowledge is held, but how it moves through a network of emergent discursive relations to produce certain subjectivities. In my assemblages of discourses, I located the techniques and practices of power that keep status-quo knowledge on the move to sustain the normative subject positions of community colleges. My intention was to close the door on damage-centered subjectivities and open community college discourse to be written from a

new, disruptive frame. To my knowledge, very few scholars have deployed a thinking with Foucault post qualitative approach to inquiry when doing community college research.

Areas for Future Inquiry

In my post qualitative dissertation, I used a thinking with theory inquiry (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) to deconstruct how community colleges are produced by damaged-centered discourse. By thinking and writing with my analytical questions:

- What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered?
- How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses?
- How do certain community college subjectivities (student, leaders, and institution) become normalized?)

I problematized normative assumptions about community colleges and troubled the productive relationship among power, knowledge, and community college subjectivity. This work was emergent, and as such, my strategy was to begin at a point that inspired me (the Open Door Missionary Baptist Church sign) and continued from there. And because this work is an entanglement of ideas, texts, and theory, there are many opportunities to embark on new lines of inquiry. In the sections that follow, I make some suggestions for future research that include more dominant discourses to deconstruct, additional subjectivities to take up, and other theorists and concepts to inspire one's thinking.

Door After Door After Door

Several dominant community college discourses came to the surface throughout this work—open door, democracy, Christianity, globalization, progress, deficit, shame,

competition, vocationalism, neoliberalism, transformation, meritocracy, masculinity, whiteness, mission/aryism, colonialism, capitalism, junior, privatization, place (rural or urban), and community—and I feel certain there are more to reveal. Because this dissertation could not possibly open every dominant discourse of community college, I chose to open these six discursive doors: deficit-shame, competition, masculinity, mission/aryism, junior, and community. These were the ideas that stood out to me in my initial reading and writing about what community colleges are, and they are the discourses that continued to shine through the constellation of interwoven dominant discourses made visible in my work. Part of my purpose was to show how these discourses are intersecting across community college subjectivities. In doing so, I illuminated how the power-knowledge relations at work within the discursive practices of each discourse intertwine with one another to produce emergent strategies and techniques of power, that when combined are more damaging than the productive effects of one discourse alone. Due to the scope of this inquiry, my work can be considered an opening for future post qualitative scholars to take any one of the six discourses and go deeper into each discourse's archaeologies (the discourse's relationship with many things) and genealogies (how people are produced in the world as an effect of the discourse) (Foucault, 1970).

There are discourses that were revealed in this work that I wanted to open but could not due to space and time. I offer to the next poststructural community college scholar willing to take on a thinking with theory post qualitative approach the chance to open the discourses of democracy, Christianity, place (rural or urban), liberalism, anti-intellectualism, meritocracy, whiteness, and colonialism. I noticed their undercurrents throughout my work and believe these additional dominant discourses will offer a rich tapestry from which to

unravel more ways that power and knowledge are working to produce community colleges. Furthermore, these discourses are not unique to community college. Many of the systems in our society are written through the repetition and normalization of these discourses. Examples of systems that could be deconstructed through the framework of discursive doors and Foucauldian power-knowledge relations include families, healthcare, religion, and other sectors of education (secondary education, baccalaureate degree granting institutions, and graduate programs).

Additionally, there are other power-knowledge relations at work that include quantification, measurement, and assessment; domination or authoritarian acts; and essentialism or generalizations. Also, the discursive rules (necessary qualifications of the speaking subject, privilege of the author's voice, speech rituals, doctrinal allegiance, and the social appropriation) that were introduced in *Assemblage One* were largely left for future exploration. To have done this work well required cuts and I chose to focus my attention on four strategies and techniques of power-knowledge relations (differentiations, privileging, marginalization, and regulation) within the discursive practices of exclusion principles and control procedures. This is not to suggest these are "more powerful" or "more prominent" than the ones I left largely unaddressed. The simple fact is I had to make a choice, and the ones I hone in on are the ones that called to me most loudly at that time by showing up throughout my reading and writing and thinking (e.g., deficit, mission, competition, junior). The strategies and techniques of power-knowledge that I did not include are left as suggestions for other scholars to open.

Additional Subjectivities

There are many subjectivities not discussed in this work. Again, this was a choice that had to be made because of space and time, and it was my choice as I considered how I would be answerable to subjectivities that have never been my own. I admitted early in this work that I did not attend community college as a traditional, post-secondary community college student. The path that I took would mirror that of today's dual-enrollment student. Often these students are transient community college attendees, who still consider themselves as belonging to the high school. These students have been lured their entire educational life by dominant discourses into the subjectivity of university bound. My work within *Assemblage One*, the student subjectivity, was written based on my own experiences and the ideas about community colleges that discourse has perpetuated in my own life. As such, I left many community college student subjectivities (e.g., military, veteran, inmate, undocumented, minority, caregiver, remedial) for future analyses.

Perhaps the most difficult subjectivity for me to leave untouched was the faculty subjectivity. My entry into the community college system was a faculty role, and I remember with fondness the years when teaching and learning was my only responsibility. I believe many readers might question my choice to reserve the faculty subjectivity for future inquiry given the status of faculty in community college. Along those lines of thought, I believe there are opportunities for a rich deconstruction of faculty status through troubling the divide between transfer faculty (e.g., Arts and Humanities, Math and Sciences, and Social Sciences), and Associate in Applied Sciences (e.g., Business, Computers, and Engineering Technologies, Cosmetology, and Health Sciences) faculty and even how faculty are often ranked as "more important" than staff (another subjectivity to explore). Similarly, within the

community college system there are two faculty subjectivities, full-time and adjunct (part-time), that are produced in particular ways by dominant discourses and power-knowledge relations.

There is also opportunity to open the faculty subjectivity to problematize how community college faculty are positioned by damage-centered discourse. As Levin (2006) shares there is a litany of damaged-centered assumptions about community college faculty in the literature. These include faculty as disconnected, faculty as inept, community college faculty as desirous of a university teaching post, faculty as malcontent with their roles of nourishing an underclass, and faculty as neither liberators or self-consciously downtrodden workers (Levin, 2006). I am reminded of my statement from the opening of this work: *I suppose I have been in the community long enough for normative discourses of damage to do their work subjugating me as someone capable of only belonging here.* Indeed, from the framework of damage-centeredness I believe there is much within the faculty subjectivity that calls for a disruptive opening.

Beyond Foucault

One of my already realized regrets is that I only had the time and space to work with Foucault's theories. There are other theorists and theories to think with, including Butler's (2004) performativity, Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) desire, and Barad's (2007) intra-action. Thinking with Butler would open how normative heterosexuality imposes upon us learned performances of gender. Butler's ideas would contribute much to a deconstruction of community college leadership ideals. Thinking with Deleuze would dive deeper into the ideas of assemblage, fold, difference, and desire to unsettle the knowledges of community colleges. Activating Deleuzian theories for a community college discourse analysis would

open a deconstruction of community college discourse that contrasts and complements my own work. Finally, thinking with Barad's theories of intra-action would trouble the normalized subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions because all "things" are thought of as constantly exchanging, diffusing, and working inseparably. I share these particular theorists and their theories, because at times during my work their ideas caught my curiosity and tempted my thoughts to embark on new lines of flight. However, I had to force those theorists to wait outside the door because thinking with Foucault was the work at hand.

Foucault was chosen for this inquiry because I felt a sense of urgency when reading his work. I recall growing anxious as I was finishing my coursework that thinking with Foucault's theories (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) of power-knowledge around community college discourse would come too late. As revealed in my analytical work, thinking with Foucault raised critical concerns about how the power-knowledge relations within the discursive practices of dominant discourses are working to produce community college subjectivities. Admittedly, Foucault brings one lens. Thinking with different theories, perhaps those mentioned above, will open up other analyses, other ways of thinking. I am inspired and comforted that post qualitative work has no beginning, middle, or end. My sincere hope is that rhizomatic connections across discourses, subjectivities, and theorists will continue to become.

Concluding Thoughts

In this final assemblage, I returned to the questions that guided my analysis to emphasize the significance of my post qualitative work. My dissertation problematizes the dominant discourses of deficit-shame, competition, masculinity, mission/aryism, junior, and

community that intersect to produce community colleges as damage-centered and deconstructs how power-knowledge relations of differentiations, privileging, marginalization, and regulation are working within discursive practices to produce certain subjectivities of community college students, leaders, and institutions. The theoretical frame of poststructuralism calls for flexibility, creativity, and reflexivity of application in various ways, as such, I was inspired to think with the figuration of the community college's open door mission. Thus, the door became the conceptual framework for the effects unfolding from and folding into damaged-centered discourses. As a community college leader, these effects are personal; and the ways that my subjectivities shifted during encounters with dominant discourses are shared in narrative disruptions that I called *sidelights*.

Using thinking with theory, I plugged in assemblages of encounters and experiences to produce the following analytical questions: What are the dominant discourses that intersect to produce community colleges as damaged? How do power-knowledge relations work within discursive practices to enable and promote dominant discourses? And how do certain community college subjectivities become normalized? These analytical tools were put to work with Foucault's (1970, 1977, 1980, 1982) theories of discourse, power-knowledge relations, and subjectivity. By making visible the power and knowledge relations circulating within a discourse, acknowledging that discourse is a collection of meanings and ideas sociohistorically produced, and becoming aware that our own stories, narratives, and texts are keeping discourse in circulation to produce preferred subject positions, I created new knowledges that incite the power to write these doors closed.

These moves urge community colleges to disrupt damage-centered assumptions. And as I crossed my final threshold, I offered to community colleges ideas for framing new doors

from an alternative discourse of disruption. In my final move, I made suggestions for future inquiry that flow from the excesses, accumulations, and lines of flight that I noticed during my analysis. In reflecting on the writing of this work, I see that like the discourse of community college, I have been opened and closed. These new doings in the world were woven into me by reading, thinking, and writing with theory. Like my doors, I have been reframed by this work. These ideas are becomings within me, so that now, as I enter my community college each morning, the open door is an *opportunity* for change.

Sidelight - The Open Door

People have asked me about my work. They want to know what kind of research this is. They always ask which category of inquiry it fits into. They are often quite surprised to learn that I am not doing quantitative work. They are even more surprised, and confused, when I try to explain post qualitative inquiry. They ask, “How can you do a dissertation without data?” or “Explain what you mean by there is no methodology?” At the end of these conversations, I usually tell them they will just have to read it. This reminds me of my mentors telling me to just write it, and I smile. Sometimes until you engage in doing, there cannot be understanding.

Until I engaged in the doing of this work, I did not know at all how it would end. This is likely because the person I was at the beginning of this work had different ideas than the person I am now. As I wrote and read, Foucault’s theories moved within me. I was opened as someone new, and I closed the door on damage-centered ideas, such as either/or categorizations, that I had long held as “truth.” I learned that one can embrace multiplicities in various ways: as strategies for doing scholarly inquiry, as subjectivities in which community colleges can inhabit, and as negotiations of my own ways of being and interacting in the world. By the time I stopped writing, I knew why St. Pierre (2000) shared the Trinh quote that I had held in my mind since the start—we do not have to let them “say” us, the blanks are ours to fill in.

As mentioned previously, there is no end to this work. There must, however, be a stop to this particular writing. So I stop by sharing that the whole of this work is an example to community colleges. Just as I did through the doing of this dissertation, I want community colleges to open themselves up to the (im)possibilities, think with what moves them, and write

*themselves anew. I suppose another wish that I held tightly is that by disrupting the discourses that center community colleges in damage more Americans will come to see community colleges as I do: wondrous educational spaces of hope and opportunity. I use wondrous to represent **both** awe **and** the necessity of wondering (critique). I know that there are more doors to be opened; and as others read this work and begin to think about discourses (community college and otherwise) that are damage-centered, they will want to open other doors for the deconstruction of those ideas. As an invitation to join me in crossing these new, disruptive thresholds, I say “Welcome.”*

References

- Achieving the Dream. (2020, December 5). *About Us*. Achieving the Dream.
<https://www.achievingthedream.org/about-us-0>
- Achieving the Dream. (2022). *Supporters*. Achieving the Dream.
<https://achievingthedream.org/supporters/>
- Acevedo, N. (2020). “Hopefully I can transfer:” Cooling out postsecondary aspirations of Latina/o/x students. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 53(4), 466-482.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1791281>
- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, job, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender and Society*, 4, 139-150. <http://doi.org/10.1177/089124390004002002>
- Allan, E. J., Gordon, S. P., & Iverson, S. V. (2006). Re/thinking practices of power: The discursive framing of leadership in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30(1), 41-68.
- Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation). In *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* (pp. 127-186). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- American Association of Community Colleges [AACC]. (2012). *Reclaiming the American dream: A report from the 21st-century commission on the future of community colleges*. <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/21stcenturyreport>
- American Association of Community Colleges [AACC]. (2018). *AACC 2018 Competencies*. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from https://aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/AACC2018Competencies_111618_FINAL.pdf

- American Association of Community Colleges [AACC]. (2022a). *AACC Fast Facts 2022*. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AACC_2022_Fact_Sheet-Rev-5-11-22.pdf
- American Association of Community Colleges [AACC]. (2022b). *Membership*. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/about-us/membership/>
- American Association of Community Colleges [AACC]. (2022c). *Message from the President*. Retrieved August 13, 2022, from <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/about-us/message-from-president/>
- American Association of Community Colleges Trustees. (2021-2022). *Joint legislative agenda for the 117th Congress*. Retrieved August 13, 2022, https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ACCT8151_Joint_Legislative_Agenda3.pdf
- American Psychological Association. (2022). *Inferiority Complex*. Retrieved August 13, 2022, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/inferiority-complex>
- Amey, M. J. (2006). Making sense of multiple missions. In B. K. Townsend & K. J. Dougherty (Eds.), *Community college missions in the 21st century, New Directions for Community Colleges*, 136, (pp. 95-97). Jossey-Bass.
- Amey, M. J., & Twombly, S. B. (1992). Re-visioning leadership in community colleges. *The Review of Higher Education*, 15(2), 125–150. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1992.0018>
- APCO Worldwide. (2022). NCCCS: Driving enrollment through understanding the value of a community college education. *APCO Worldwide*. Retrieved July 30, 2022, from http://apcoworldwide.com/case_study/ncccs

- Ashford, E. (2020, June 11). A time to reimagine community colleges. *Community College Daily*. Retrieved April 28, 2022, from <https://www.ccdaily.com/2020/06/a-time-to-reimagine-community-colleges/>
- Ayers, D. F. (2009). Institutional contradiction in the community college. *Community College Review*, 37(2), 165-184. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0091552109348042>
- Ayers, D. F. (2011). Community colleges and the politics of sociospatial scale. *Higher Education*, 62, 303-314. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9388-5>
- Ayers, D. F. (2017). Three functions of the community college mission statement. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 180, 9-17. <http://doi:10.1002/cc.20276>
- Bacchi, C. (2012). Why study problematizations? Making politics visible. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 12(1), 1-8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2012.21001>
- Bacchi, C. & Bonham, J. (2014, April). Reclaiming discursive practices as an analytic focus: Political implications. *Foucault Studies*, 17, pp. 173-192.
- Bailey, T. (2018). Responding to divergent trends: Vocational and transfer education at community colleges. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 50(3-4), 113-116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2018.1509634>
- Bailey, T. R., Jaggars, S. S., & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's community colleges: A clearer pathway to student success*. Harvard University Press.
- Baldrige, B. J. (2017). "It's like this myth of the supernegro"; resisting narratives of damage and struggle in the neoliberal educational policy context. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 20(6), 781-795. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1248819>
- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.

- Barthes, R. & Lavers, A. (1972). *Mythologies*. Hill & Wang.
- Beach, J. M. (2011). *Gateway to opportunity? A history of the community college in the United States* (1st ed.). Stylus Publishing.
- Belsey, C. (2002). *Poststructuralism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Boyer, J. (2010). *Broad and Christian in the fullest sense: William Rainey Harper and the University of Chicago*. University of Chicago Press.
https://issuu.com/uchicagocollege/docs/boyer_occasionalpapers_v15
- Burck, C. (2005). Comparing qualitative research methodologies for systemic research: the use of grounded theory, discourse analysis, and narrative analysis. *Journal of Family Therapy, 27*, 237-262.
- Burman, E., & Maclure, M. (2011). Deconstruction as a method of research: stories from the field. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds.), *Theory and Methods in the Social Sciences* (2nd ed., pp. 286-294). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. Routledge.
- Carroll, L. (1865/2015). *Alice's adventures in wonderland* (M. Burstein, Ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Cheek, J. (2008). Foucauldian discourse analysis. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 356-357). SAGE Publications, Inc.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n180>
- Chen, G. (2022, January 17). 7 top community college myths. *Community College Review*.
<https://www.communitycollegereview.com/blog/7-top-community-college-myths>

- Ciepley, D. (2013). Beyond public and private: Toward a political theory of corporation. *American Political Science Review*, 107, 139-158.
- Cohen, A. M., Brawer, F. B., & Kisker, C. B. (2014). *The American community college, 6th ed.* Jossey-Bass.
- Community (TV Series). (2022, July 6). In *Wikipedia*.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_(TV_series))
- Connor, A. & Griffith, M. (1994). *Democracy's open door: The community college in America's future.* Heinemann.
- Crotty, M. (2015). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, J. (1970). Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences. In R. Macksey & E. Donato (Eds.), *The structuralist controversy: The languages of criticism and the sciences of man* (pp. 247-272) (R. Macksey & E. Donato, Trans). Johns Hopkins University Press. (Lecture delivered 1996).
- Dollar, H. (2018, July 21). Dealing with community college myths. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD48gjlHGGI>
- Douglas, A. J. (2019). *W. E. B. Du Bois and the critique of the competitive society.* University of Georgia Press.
- Dreyfus, H. L. & Rabinow, P. (1983). *Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

- Dumas, M. J. (2016). My brother as “problem:” Neoliberal governmentality and intervention of Black young men and boys. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 94-113.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815616487>
- Eddy, P. L. (2010). *Community college leadership: A multi-dimensional model for leading change*. Stylus.
- Eddy, P. L., & Khwaja, T. (2019). What happened to re-visioning community college leadership? A 25-year retrospective. *Community College Review*, 47(1), 53-78.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552118818742>
- Eddy, P. L., & VanDerLinden, K. (2006). Emerging definitions of leadership in higher education. *Community College Review*, 34(1), 1–22.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552106289703>
- Edgecombe, N. (2019). Demography as opportunity. In T. U. O’Banion (Ed.), *13 ideas that are transforming the community college world* (pp. 213-230). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Fain, P. (2011, December 14). Behind the billboards. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/12/14/texas-business-groups-billboard-campaign-completion-rates>
- Fayetteville Technical Community College [FTCC]. (2022). President job description. *Fayetteville Technical Community College*. Retrieved August 27, 2022, from <https://www.faytechcc.edu/campus-offices/office-human-resources/presidentialsearch/>
- Ferm, L. (2021). Vocational students’ ways of handling the academic/vocational divide. *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training (IJRVET)*, 8(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.131152/IJRVET.8.1.1>

- Foucault, M. (1966/2001). *The order of things* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1970). The order of discourse. In R. Young (Ed.), *Untying the text: a post-structural reader*. (1981). Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Foucault, M. (1972). The discourse on language. In M. Foucault, *The archeology of knowledge* (A. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: Volume 1: An introduction*. Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1978-1979). *The birth of biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège of France 1978-1979* (G. Burchell, Trans). Picador, 2008.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977* (A. Fontana & P. Pasquino, Interviewers and Trans.). Pantheon Books. (Reprinted from *Microfiscia del Potere*, Turin, 1977).
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777-795.
<http://jstor.org/stable/1343197>
- Foucault, M. (2003). Society must be defended. In M. Bertain & A. Fontana (Eds.), *Lectures at the Collège of France, 1975-1976* (D. Macey, Trans.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fogarty, W., Lovell, M., Langenberg, J., & Heron, M. (2018). *Deficit discourse and strengths-based approaches: changing the narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing*. The Lowitja Institute & National Centre for Indigenous Studies [PDF]. <http://www.apo.org.au/node/172676>
- Gándara, D. & Jones, S. (2020). Who deserves benefits in higher education? A policy discourse analysis of a process surrounding reauthorization of the Higher Education

- Act. *The Review of Higher Education*, 44(1), 121-157.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2020.0037>
- General Assembly of North Carolina. (2022). *House bill 103 ratified*. General Assembly of North Carolina. Retrieved August 14, 2022, from
<https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2021/Bills/House/PDF/H103v4.pdf>
- Gill, T. M. (2018, December 24). Why the power elite continues to dominate American politics. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved August 21, 2022, from
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2018/12/24/why-power-elite-continues-dominate-american-politics/>
- Giroux, H. A. (2014). *Neoliberalism's war on higher education*. Haymarket Books.
- Gleazer, E. (1970). The community college issue of the 1970s. *Educational Record*, 51(1), 47-52.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Prentice Hall.
- Hathaway, T. (2020). Neoliberalism as corporate power. *Competition & Change*, 24(3-4), 315-337. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1024529420910382>
- Harmon, D. (Writer), Russo, A. (Director), & Russo, J. (Director). (2009, September 17). Pilot (Season 1, Episode 1) [TV series episode]. In A. Russo, J. Russo, D. Harmon, G. Foster, R. Krasnoff, N. Goldman, G. Donovan, M. Port, T. Shapeero, C. McKenna, & R. Schrab (Executive Producers), *Community*. NBC.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Hess, A. J. (2021, October 29). Google is giving all U. S. community colleges free access to their 4 career certificates. *CNBC Make It*. Retrieved on November 5, 2022, from

- <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/29/google-gives-community-colleges-free-access-to-their-4-certificates.html>
- hooks, b. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking: Practical wisdom*. Routledge.
- IRS. (2022). *Exemption requirements-501(c)(3) organizations*. Internal Revenue Service. Retrieved October 16, 2022, from <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/exemption-requirements-501c3-organizations>
- IPEDS. (2022). *2021-2022 Survey Materials - FAQ*. IPEDS 2021-2022 data collection system. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from <https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/public/survey-materials/faq?faqid=6>
- Jackson, A. Y. (2017). Thinking without method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, (23)9, 666-674.
- Jackson, A. Y. & Mazzei, L. (2012). *Thinking with theory in qualitative research: Viewing data across multiple perspectives*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Jackson, A. Y. & Mazzei, L. A. (2017). Thinking with theory: A new analytic for qualitative inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 717-737). Sage Publications Inc.
- Jacobs, J. & Worth, J. (2019). The evolving mission of workforce development in the community college. In T. U. O'Banion (Ed.), *13 ideas that are transforming the community college world* (pp. 167-190). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Jamrogowicz, J. L. (2014). Community college economic, climate, policy landscape, and the American graduation initiative. In L. S. Kelsay & E. M. Zamani-Gallaher (Eds.), *Working with students in community colleges: contemporary strategies for bridging theory, research, and practice* (pp. 17-30). Stylus Publishing, LLC.

- Kellogg Community College. (2021, December 7). *Industrial trades at Kellogg Community College* [Video]. Facebook. <https://fb.watch/iV-QbhE3oG/?mibextid=qC1gEa>
- Kelsay, L. S. & Oudenhoven, B. (2014). Junior grows up. In L. S. Kelsay & E. M. Zamani-Gallaher (Eds.), *Working with students in community colleges: contemporary strategies for bridging theory, research, and practice* (pp. 3-16). Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Khoja-Moolji, S. (2019). Death by benevolence: third world girls and the contemporary politics of humanitarianism. *Feminist Theory*, 0(0), 1-26.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/1464700119850026>
- King, S. (2000). *On writing: A memoir of the craft*. Simon & Schuster.
- Koro-Ljungberg, M., MacLure, M., & Ulmer, J. (2018). D...a...t...a..., data++, data, and some problematics. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 462-484). Sage Publications Inc.
- Lather, P. (2006). Paradigm proliferation as a good thing to think with: Teaching research in education as a wild profusion. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19(1), 35-57.
- Levin, J. S. (2006). Faculty work: Tension between educational and economic values. *Journal of Higher Education*, 77, 62-88.
- McCleeney, K M. (2019). Guided pathways to college completion and equity. In T. U. O'Banion (Ed.), *13 ideas that are transforming the community college world* (pp. 85-102). Rowman & Littlefield.

- McNeely, A. M. (2020). *Making workers: A Foucauldian-influenced poststructural analysis of the purposes of community college education*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Appalachian State University.
- Meier, K. M. (2008). *The community college mission: history and theory, 1930-2000*. [Doctoral dissertation]. The University of Arizona, University Libraries.
<https://repository.arizona.edu/handle/10150/194041>
- Merriam-Webster. (2022a). Academic. *Merriam-Webster dictionary*. Retrieved September 18, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/academic>
- Merriam-Webster. (2022b). Executive. *Merriam-Webster dictionary*. Retrieved September 18, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/executive>
- Merriam-Webster. (2022c). Junior. *Merriam-Webster dictionary*. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/junior>
- Merriam-Webster. (2022d). Stigma. *Merriam-Webster dictionary*. Retrieved July 15, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stigma>
- Mendible, M. (2016). American shame and the boundaries of belonging. In M. Mendible (Ed.), *American shame: Stigma and the body politic* (pp. 1-26). Indiana University Press.
- Mitchell, R. L. G. & Garcia, L. R. (2020). A new hope: shifting the gendered discourse around community college presidential leadership. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, 13(2), 157-174. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2020.1781650>
- Morehouse College. (2019, August 28). Morehouse professor writes book on W. E. B. Du Bois and the culture of competition. *Morehouse Inside*. Retrieved August 6, 2022,

- from <https://inside.morehouse.edu/news/news-inside/morehouse-professor-writes-book-on-web-du-bois-and-the-culture-of-competition.html>
- Munsch, P. & Kelsay, L. S. (2015). Who are our students? In L. S. Kelsay & E. M. Zamani-Gallaher (Eds.), *Working with students in community colleges: Contemporary strategies for bridging theory, research and practice* (pp. 57-66). Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- North Carolina Community College System [NCCCS]. (2022a). Total headcount. *Dashboards*. Retrieved January 11, 2023, from <https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics/dashboards/total-headcount>
- North Carolina Community College System [NCCCS]. (2022b). FY 2022-25 legislative agenda. *North Carolina Community College System*. Retrieved from January 11, 2023, from https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/sites/default/files/state-board/legislative/leg_01_-_sbcc_ncccs_legislative_budget_request_2022-25_0.pdf
- O'Banion, T. (1997). *A learning college for the 21st century*. Oryx Press.
- O'Banion, T. U. (2019). Introduction: the continuing evolution of the American community college. In T. U. O'Banion (Ed.), *13 ideas that are transforming the community college world* (pp. 1-29). Rowman & Littlefield.
- O'Banion, T. (2021, July 8). Opinion: let's not turn community colleges into just workforce development. *The Hechinger Report*. Retrieved from <https://hechingerreport.org/author/terry-obanion/>
- O'Banion, T. U. & Culp, M. M. (2021). It's time to reimagine the American community college. *The NISOD Papers*, 20. https://www.nisod.org/archive_files/nisod-papers/TNP_20.pdf

- Opportunity America. (2020). The indispensable institution: reimagining community college. *Opportunity America*. https://opportunityamericaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Indispensable_Inst_FullReport.pdf
- Pusser, B. & Levin, J. (2009). Re-imagining community colleges in the 21st century: A student-centered approach to higher education. *Center for American Progress*. https://www.immagic.com/eLibrary/ARCHIVES/GENERAL/CAP_US/C091211P.pdf
- Ramsey, E. M. (2020, May 5). Consumption, COVID-19, and the consequences of language in higher education. *Mere Rhetoric: Discussions about communication, pop culture, education, and politics by Dr. E. Michelle Ramsey*. Retrieved on November 11, 2020 from <https://micheleramsey.wordpress.com/2020/05/05/consumption-covid-19-and-the-consequences-of-language-in-higher-education/>
- Ripken, M. (2016, March 14). Why would you name your kid junior? *Blunt Moms*. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <http://bluntmoms.com/name-kid-junior/>
- Russo, A. & Russo, J. (Producers). (2009, September 17). *Community* [Television broadcast]. NBC.
- Saltman, K. J. (2018). *The politics of education: A critical introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Salvador, S. (2014). Foreword. In L. S. Kelsay & E. M. Zamani-Gallaher (Eds.), *Working with students in community colleges: contemporary strategies for bridging theory, research, and practice* (pp. xi-xvi). Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Scott, J., & Marshall, G. (Eds.). (2015). Vocationalism. *A dictionary of sociology* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/>
- Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Duke University Press.

- Smith, A. A. (2016, March 16). New ground for Pearson. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved November 5, 2022, from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/03/17/pearson-jumps-community-college-student-recruiting-new-cincinnati-state-partnership>
- Smith, A. A. (2018, February 2). Trump calls for converting community colleges to vocational schools. *Inside Higher Education*.
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/02/02/trump-calls-converting-community-colleges-vocational-schools>
- Spivak, G. C. (1993). *Outside in the teaching machine*. Routledge.
- Stancill, J. (2019, August 14). Community colleges roll out ‘your hire education’. *Higher Ed Works*. <https://www.higheredworks.org/2019/08/nccc-your-hire-education/>
- Stark, R. (2022, August 8). Build back better ‘light’ passes the senate-What it means for Americans. *Washington Policy Center*. Retrieved November 5, 2022, from <https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/build-back-better-light-passes-the-us-senate-what-it-means-for-americans>
- Stearns, P. N. (2017). *Shame: A brief history*. Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.
- Sterling, R. E. (2001). *A pictorial history of America’s oldest public community college*. C. Bradley Publishing.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (1997). Methodology in the fold and the irruption of transgressive data. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 10(2), 175-189.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2000). Poststructural feminism in education: An overview. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(5), 477-515.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2019). Post qualitative inquiry, the refusal of method, and the risk of the new. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1-7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/10778004/9863005>

- St. Pierre, E. A. & Jackson, A. Y. (2014). Qualitative data analysis after coding. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6), 715-719. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/10778004/4532435>
- Taylor, C. (2011). Biopower. In D. Taylor (Ed.), *Michel Foucault key concepts* (pp. 41-54). Acumen.
- Teacher Goals. (2022, January 6). *Important!* [raising hands] [Image attached] [Status update]. Facebook.
https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02bBbbUZ6TKdzWkP4SfQqWoGz2hq4uAi1puDo4qwTVkF6aXDhTPaUXVyX38N1CjWmDI&id=1491286067853099&mibextid=qC1gEa
- Townsend, B. K., & Dougherty, K. J. (2006). Editor's notes. In B. K. Townsend & K. J. Dougherty (Eds.), *Community college missions in the 21st century, New direction of community colleges*: 136 (pp. 1-5). Jossey-Bass.
- Townsend, B. K. & Twombly, S. B. (2007). Accidental equity: the status of women in the community college. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 40: 208-271.
<https://doi.org/10.1080.10665680701334777>
- Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409-427.
- Twombly, S. B. (1995). Gendered images of community college leadership: What messages they send. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 23(1), 67-77.
- University of North Carolina System [UNC System]. (2022). Current students. *The University of North Carolina System*. Retrieved January 11, 2023, from <https://www.northcarolina.edu/current-students/>

- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2021). *Report on the Condition of Education 2021* (2021-144). Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2021/2021144.pdf>
- Vaughan, G. (1991). *Institutions on the edge: America's community colleges*. Los Angeles: ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 338270).
- Weedon, C. (1987/1997). *Feminist practice and poststructural theory* (2nd ed.). Hartnolls Limited.
- Wilson, A. (2021). Exclusion and extraction: Situating spirit murdering in community colleges. *The Journal of Educational Foundations*, 34(1), 47-67.
- Wilson, K. B. & Cox, E. (2012). A discourse analysis of portrayals of community college leadership in the Chronicle. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice*, 36, 279-290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2012.637866>
- Wyner, J. S. (2014). *What excellent community colleges do: preparing all students for success*. Harvard Education Press.
- Zuidhof, P-W. (2014). Thinking like an economist: the neoliberal politics of the economics textbook. *Review of Social Economy*, 72(2): 157-185.

Vitae

Ashley Myers Morrison received a Bachelor of Sciences in Biological Sciences and Master of Sciences in Plant Pathology from North Carolina State University. Her master's research focused on identifying the primary insect vectors of a prominent and lethal bacterial grapevine disease. Her paper, "Pierce's disease of grapevines: Identification of the Primary Vectors in North Carolina," was published in *Phytopathology*. After working for one year in a university, Ashley moved back home and joined the community college as a horticulture and biology instructor. Ashley served as a faculty member for four years and then moved into the role of Science Division Chair. After eight years as chairperson, Ashley became Dean of Arts & Sciences in 2018.

In her 16 years in the community college, Ashley has had the opportunity to serve all curriculum areas including transfer and Associate in Applied Sciences programs, and over time her role as dean has expanded to include oversight of both curriculum and continuing education. To date, Ashley continues to serve her home community through the work she does as Vice President of Instruction. Her future plans center around spending time with her family and continuing to disrupt the discourses of community college through her everyday discursive practices.