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Destabilizing the Ivory Tower: An Autoethnography

Chelsea McFadden

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DESTABILIZING THE IVORY TOWER: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the bad apples.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to acknowledge my thesis committee, especially Dr. Todd Lilly, for never once (to my knowledge) doubting me.

To my children. Tabitha & Arthur, this is the roadmap to who your mother is and was. I never had one, so I'm not sure if it will help, but know that I'm trying. Always.

To Neil, for not divorcing me over something petty like Settlers of Catan. Thanks for being my torchbearer.

To the bullies, doubters, and haters: this is not for you.

Special thanks to my family for giving me the trauma that made me funny and intriguing at parties.

To Ana. Sorry my kids are feral.

ABSTRACT

The education system of the western world is a tool of hegemony used to command replication of an ontology rooted in oppression. Teachers interested in combating oppression must work toward decolonizing their praxis, a nuanced task accomplished with the help of critical inquiry done through autoethnography. I seek to synthesize literature that validates and confirms autoethnography as a mechanism of critical inquiry. I will explore the following research questions: How does autoethnography function as a tool of decolonization? Are there ways in which it reifies colonizing practices? How might autoethnography be used in the classroom to encourage nontraditional discourse? Themes include the Hegelian dualism of colonizer and colonized, the Foucauldian concept of school as imprisonment, and the Anzalduan notion of storytelling as activism. I will provide a theoretical framework of critical inquiry and the historical context of autoethnography. My goal is to define the ontology of teacherhood, examine how modern teacherhood is rooted in oppression, and examine nontraditional research methodology.

PREFACE

I am inviting you to my rebellion. That might sound strange and unlikely. I am, after all, a mother. But I myself am strange and unlikely. I'd like to begin with a metaphor from Gloria Anzaldua: we are the green shoot that cracks the rock (1987).

In this dissertation, I have written three chapters that work to trinitize. I discuss the trinity of selfhood: the past, present, and future, but also the body, mind, and spirit of teaching; finally, there is the id, ego, and superego. These are separate but the same, structurally both dependent and independent, just like my three essays.

My problem of practice stems from the fact that each day that the sun rises, children around the world are sent to schools that replicate the systems of oppression inflicted upon us by capitalism, industrialization, Eurocentricity, and specifically white Supremacy. They sit in rows or occupy squares in a virtual panopticon (Foucault, 1980). Schools are militarized to the point where cops are in kindergarten classrooms and cultural hairstyles are criminalized. The environment is highly controlled and regulated, and zero tolerance leads to a school-to-prison pipeline that benefits the carceral state (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Lewis, 2010).

This dissertation is about storytelling as an act of resistance. Autoethnography is a chance to engage in critical pedagogy. This research about the self is a way to decolonize the epistemology of teacherhood. I argue that we need to share our stories, even if they're painful. Especially if they don't make us look good.

The purpose of this study is both introspection and observation. Internally, I've confronted my own understanding of academia, teaching, research, and pedagogy. Externally, I've written about how school is problematic. Linguistically, being able to name our problem is important to confronting it. There's an example from the linguistic ancestors of the language I'm speaking. According to Ralph Keyes, the word "bear" means something like brown one or honey eater, because hunters were fearful that naming their enemy directly might attract it or speak it into being (Silver & Keyes, 2011). The taboo of naming our problems still exists. Look at the controversies around Critical Race Theory, Marxist dialogue, and feminism in the classroom (Goldberg, 2021). This autoethnography is meant to help others examine their own practices and escape the taboo of admitting our faults as teachers. The significance is that this writing contributes to a body of work that characterizes what it's like to be an academic who is also neurodivergent, chicana, and delinquent.

Neurodivergent is a way to describe how I experience the world differently as someone with ADHD (Stamp, 2020). Time passes differently for me. But different flowers aren't bad. They just need different growing conditions to thrive.

Chicana is, in a Heideggerian sense, an example of Being with a capital B (Heidegger, 2010; Anzaldua, 1987). It's not just an ethnic identity you can be born into. It's also political and mitigated through action: it encompasses Indigenous pride as well as solidarity with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color against forces of oppression.

Delinquency is a concept from Zizek (2006), who talks about how a fall from grace is an act that precedes a meteoric shift in one's ontological worldview. I write about getting in trouble both as a student & as a teacher, going from being labeled a rotten

apple in kindergarten to being fired from my first teaching gig. I talk about how this framed my own expectations for myself and how I ultimately shift from trying to fit in, to rebelling against my own conformity. Writing is my subversion of expectations, of myself, of teaching, and of grad school.

In my literature review, I discuss the concept of ontology. Traditional Western thought is all about the Cartesian model: I think therefore I am (Hegel, Miller, & Findlay, 1977). Everyone from Hegel to Heidegger has written about ontology, or the study of Being. But decolonizing is about questioning this framework for understanding the world.

Dr. Abeba Berhane describes the Ubuntu idea that the self is created through interaction with others (2017). Our story becomes meaningful from the act of telling it. Conceptually, we're more like a compost pile of all our interactions and experiences. Turning the soil is how we make it enriching.

My literature review builds on the works of Vygotsky & Freire, who were building an educational model off of Marx & Engels' view of capitalism. Education has the potential for transformative power (Roth & Lee, 2007).

This brings me to storytelling. My theoretical foundation conceptualizes storytelling as a means of breaking free. Anzaldua informs my notion of writing about the self, and Ladson-Billings defines critical pedagogy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Together, these describe how my process of identity-making helps me organize against colonizing forces.

The key concepts that underpin my argument include dualism, imprisonment, and storytelling. Hegelian dualism describes how there are two sides of a coin but they're the same coin. They're not opposites. I am both a colonizer as a teacher, but also colonized as

a student. This is a watershed moment in teaching: recognizing how we are, simultaneously, and having that “tolerance for ambiguity” Anzaldua writes about (1987).

Foucault (1980) argues that school is a type of imprisonment. It's a place that demands a specific set of behaviors from students and teachers. There's a script and a coded language we use in the classroom. It imprisons us because it closes in our identity, how we're allowed to portray our complex self and story. Also, in a historical way, school works with white supremacy and capitalism to train people to uphold and replicate oppression.

Anzaldua's notion of autoethnography has two key components: First, storytelling about the self is the way forward from oppression. We are able to analyze what we've done and had done to us in order to break free from our chains (1987). But most importantly, we need to confront the idea that theory is objective (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These philosophers and educational theorists I've mentioned had lived experiences that influenced their thoughts and presentation of materials. We are not objective observers of the world.

My methodology may seem unfamiliar and nontraditional, but it is rooted in the qualitative tradition because it is an analysis of the data of subjective experiences that is interpreted to provide a glimpse into world construction (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Autoethnography describes my setting and participants, because it enables me to critique the power dynamics of teaching while grounding it in the classroom, as seen through my vignettes (Anzaldúa, 1987).

My data is about my experiences. For example, as a youth I was forced to erase my standardized tests when I skipped ahead. I was arbitrarily penalized to highlight my

subordination. And as a teacher, I acted out these same policies: I proctored tests, sought dominion over my students, and enabled the same harm that had befallen me.

Because my stories have such a wide range of time and positionality, I use artifactual literacy, specifically my student and staff ID cards throughout the years, to ground the work in the habitus of these objects (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). They tell stories of who I was, how I passed as white, how I passed as neurotypical, the story of my name, and how identity is performed and ultimately captured.

Remembering becomes the process of analysis for me. Going back to my theoretical framework, I am the compost pile of all the people in my life and all the theories I've learned, and the only way to sort it all out is to remember and tell stories about it.

My first research question focuses on how autoethnography can be a tool of decolonization. My findings include the following.

Make the hidden curriculum explicit. Recognizing who and what I teach, and why, allows me to disentangle myself from the notions of white supremacy that seem to demand sticking to "the classics" or "the canon" in the English Language Arts classroom. Of course, we work within the confines of the colonized world, but it is important to name and recognize that critical exposure to typical curriculum can still be subversive, because it threatens the structures that uphold Eurocentricity as the viewpoint of the so-called objective world.

Another finding is that we need to be conscious of a replication of whiteness both in the texts and the curriculum, as well as the norms of the classroom. This is required as a component of critical pedagogy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Finally, it is essential to avoid tokenization (Winant, 2000). We cannot only tell the stories that enable us to remain comfortable. People are complex, as I discussed in the Hegelian sense. Morality and personhood is not binary. Diversity must not be used as a tool of cultural imperialism. It's not enough to include other stories; they must serve a purpose and be as complex and rich as the lives of those we relegate to sainthood.

My second set of findings surrounds the idea that autoethnography can be used in the classroom to encourage nontraditional discourse. First, it helps us question our teacherhood. That engagement makes it possible to engage in critical pedagogy because we're metacognitively active in our pursuit of justice. Next, it encourages the modelling of activism. Attending protests, putting our bodies where our hearts are, and fighting against policies like the dress code that penalize Black, Indigenous, and People of Color is important. Finally, as I model in my autoethnography, we need to cite nontraditional sources (Scott, 2021). Although I include the heavyweights of education & philosophy, I also practice multimodality in my literacy by citing everything from a TikTok by a historian to personal communications with activists who have informed my thoughts. This needs to continue so that we can legitimize nontraditional viewpoints and voices in the eyes of academia to give people like me a fighting chance.

This research has two implications. The first is more representation for neurodivergent, Chicana, queer, first generation doctoral students. I am making the invisible visible, grounding it, and putting it into the body of accepted knowledge so that we can't be ignored or swept under the rug for being different. Next, I am reinforcing autoethnography as legitimate scholarship, which helps future students fight back against those who seek to silence us.

In closing, I leave you with a sense of radical optimism in the face of injustice: By cleaning and cauterizing our wounds, we can finally look to the future ready to heal.

Remember, we are growing.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Chican@..... Used in place of masculine Chicano or feminine Chicana

ID Identification Card

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I don't think the security guard realized he was igniting an identity crisis when he carded me on my first day at school. He just didn't believe I was the teacher. Some days, neither can I, and I have to ground myself by looking at the identification cards that prove I am who I am.

I write this autoethnography using the artifacts of my student and staff ID cards to interrogate my position of authority as a teacher with the goal of decolonization. The pictures capture my Apache cheekbones, my prematurely peppered hair, and upon a close inspection, my teacherhood. Throughout my dissertation, I use the methodology of *autohistoria* first defined by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) to engage in the dialectics of identity. This introductory chapter will analyze the controversy of autoethnography as a methodology, define artifactual literacy, and center decolonization as a goal. The individual chapters of my dissertation will be a three-act foray into my story of who I am as a teacher, student, and scholar and how I've become this-- these chapters are metaphorical raids into the territory of my identity.

Problem of Practice

This study's problem of practice is that colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism have undoubtedly harmed marginalized populations, but healing is impossible because the wound is daily made deeper in classrooms across the country. Schooling commands

replication of an ontology rooted in oppression; students, teachers, and academics are victims trained to replace their captors. In the face of this, teachers can practice resistance through the art of storytelling. Autoethnography via artifactual literacy enables a critique of the faces of colonization, especially given that these faces are often masks teachers wear in and out of the classroom.

Introducing My Self

Growing up as a white-passing Chicana, I had two tongues: the language of school and the language of home. Teachers saw my name and made an assumption that I had already internalized those lessons that white families pass down about school culture, and any time I fell short, they assumed I was doing it deliberately to be antiauthoritarian or contrariwise. In reality, culturally, I was in this in-between space, being able to pass as white but not having the so-called cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) to quite fit in and fall in line. While being white-passing carries with it privilege that is not afforded to my sisters, it also made me feel like I lived a secret life. I lived as an outsider in the school system, caught red-handed anytime the school called home. However, these experiences also drew me to my career; they made me feel as though teaching was my soulmate. I can remember wanting to be a teacher since I was six. My teacherhood, who I became, was shaped by the dichotomy of wanting to fit in but knowing I could never belong. Identity is the performance of “a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Teacherhood is an identity that is inextricably linked to the performance of teachership; educators create their identity within the confines of political and racial boundaries learned through their childhood and educational experiences.

Autoethnography is the study of this history; it is an often painful process of

studying the self and what forces shaped it (Anzaldúa, 1987). Throughout my dissertation, I will confront and reckon with the ways in which I was shaped by colonization, but also the ways I replicated this oppressive force in my teaching career (Foucault, 1980). This methodology is considered controversial in the academic realm because it is nontraditional and subversive.

The primarily neurotypical white hegemonic vestibule of academia is directly threatened by autoethnography as a research practice. It is treated by the academy as an illegitimate research methodology that is both lazy and narcissistic (Griffin & Griffin, 2019). Fine (1999) disdainfully calls it “me-search” and argues that it is navel-gazing that does not deserve to be taken seriously. Traditional scholarship violently rejects anything it considers to be a threat to the status quo. This dismissive attitude further marginalizes voices that struggle to be heard in academia as it is. Academics who engage in gatekeeping about qualitative research methodologies like autoethnography are desperate to preserve their power. My own writing, as well as my call to action for others to practice autoethnography, is a radical threat to this power. I seek to destabilize the ivory tower by grounding the esoteric exploration of self in the realia of academia.

Autoethnography delineates “key events and points in our lives that have shaped us into the critical scholars we are today... they focus on power relations embedded in those events and the authors’ responses to colonizing relationships of power” (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 4). Its purpose is to “resist the colonizing forces of academic production and the unequal relationships of power it engenders is to have those of us who have been traditionally marginalized create and write our own stories, our own ethnographies” (p. 7). As a first-generation college student, a Chicana, a neurodivergent woman, and a

classroom teacher, I have experienced academia in a unique light; the story within me demands to be told. My autoethnography will demonstrate the power of scholarly observation as a tool with which we can perform sense-making, specifically for the audience of future non-traditional academics who crave a trail guide on their own journey toward critical scholarship.

Autoethnography works as a method of decolonization precisely because it draws “from the experiences and perspectives of those who traditionally have been silenced, excluded, and/or marginalized in the production and dissemination of knowledge about how people in different spaces experience our schools and society” (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 12). Although identity fluctuates, it stands in as a force of action and resistance to the ever-present tendrils of colonization. My identity has been defined but simultaneously acts resistant to the colonizing forces that control our educational system. When I compile this identity through the process of autoethnography, I am both enduring and reproducing colonization. At the same time, this autoethnography is baptismal in nature: by resurrecting my memories of school and atoning for my mistakes as a teacher, I am born anew as a scholar.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Pedagogy through Culturally Responsive Curriculum

Traditional theory has been treated as a default “that researchers feel no need to make explicit. Thus, the theory’s objectivity is unquestioned” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 469). In the same way, “today’s colonizing and oppressive forces occur under a positivist epistemology that is instrumental and technical-rational yet purports to be objective. [This] epistemology uses facts and figures to make “fair” decisions about

various students, faculty, and administrators within educational systems” (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 259). These are the ways in which colonization acts insidiously to maintain control over the education system. The theoretical framework of this autoethnography does not seek to legitimize it in the eyes of the academic; rather, my quest here is to provide the footings for resistance. Academia perpetuates inequity; critical pedagogy is the antagonism of this status quo.

It is not enough to tell one’s story: Radical autoethnography requires stepping away from narration that reinforces and recreates the patterns of oppression present in traditional academic discourse. This storytelling must be based, then, in theory that drives anti-colonial action: critical theory.

Critical theory, rooted in the Frankfurt School, “insists that thought must respond to the new problems and the new possibilities for liberation that arise from changing historical circumstances” (Bronner, 2011, p. 1). All revolutionary thought schools stem from critical theory (Martinez-Alemán, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015). It first arose from theorist Mark Horkheimer, who built on Karl Marx’s work in order to lay bare the ways in which society preserves injustice (Prince & Levy, 2017, p. 3). Although critical theory was first treated as synonymous with Marxism, there has been a documented expansion to include “domination well beyond capitalism” (Levinson, 2011, p. 435). In this dissertation, domination takes the form of neurotypicality, hegemony, and white supremacy.

Critical theory works to discern the nefarious ways in which society reproduces injustice (Prince & Levy, 2017). Its foundation is de-centering the hegemony to form a catalyst for equity in formal and informal societal structures (Levinson, 2011). Using

critical theory, teacher practitioners are empowered to “to explain and decode inequitable social relations and action in... education” (Martinez-Alemán, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015, p. 90). Critical theory amalgamates theory and application, “and in doing so provides us with normative criticism, explanatory analysis and practical solutions” (Martinez-Alemán, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015, p. 212).

Alienation and reification are two concepts within critical theory that must be examined in order to further understand how it can be used in critical inquiry or research (Bronner, 2011, p. 4). Alienation describes the ways in which people have been severed from their natural state of being. This is commonly framed in terms of political and economic consequences (Dahms, 2011, p. 5). Reification is the distillation of mankind into object in order to facilitate economic and political puppeteering. It acts as a metaphorical carousel, spinning us further and further into the objectified strata (Dahms, 2011). Together, alienation and reification “[imperial] the exercise of subjectivity, [rob] the world of meaning and purpose, and [turn] the individual into a cog in the machine” (Bronner, 2011, p. 5). Alienation and reification occur in the process of teacher preparation and learning the ropes; this will be explored in my literature review and my piece on the spirit of teacherhood.

These concepts form the foundation for critical theory, which argues that “sustaining and advancing modernity is not only desirable but imperative to the continuation of social and political systems respectful of the sanctity of human life, and... the continuation of human civilization” (Dahms, 2011, p. 143). We must ask the question, is the natural state of man (student) to be a cog in the machine? The resounding answer is

no. This will be further explored in my piece on the mind of teaching, which is a reflection on my neurodivergence.

Critical theory necessitates action: critical inquiry is then “identifying normative beliefs and practices that contradict the aims of democratic living” (Martinez-Alemán, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015, p. 107). The praxis’ stated goals are “to critique and challenge, to transform and empower” (Merriam, 2009, p. 34). This will be further explored in my piece on the body of authority in teaching, which is centered on my experiences as an authoritative figure in the classroom.

Critical inquiry mandates action in order to effect change. When building praxis in order to combine theory and practice, we must remember that critical inquiry is rooted in “activism and advocacy” (Walker, 2017, p. 1898). Thus, critical inquiry is in and of itself the praxis of not just identifying but fighting injustice through questioning. It is appropriate for this study because it “serves as a framework to conduct necessary investigations for populations and subcultures that are victims of oppression, marginalization, and historical acts of discrimination” (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2004, as cited in Walker, 2017, p. 1899). Because this study will be an autoethnography, I will tell stories of the self that exemplify the traits of critical inquiry, which is “grounded in lived experiences with power relations and social justice as concerns” (Prince & Levy, 2017, p. 11).

Ultimately, critical theory liberates because “the moment of freedom [appears] in the demand for recognition by the enslaved and the exploited” (Bronner, 2011, p. 2). When teachers study the conditions under which they are placed, they gain the tools to

unfetter both themselves and their students, the next generation of workers, thinkers, and participants in our society.

As opposed to an unexamined pedagogy that reinforces colonization, critical pedagogy means teachers talk “about their own shortcomings and limitations and ways they needed to change to ensure student success” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 479). Autoethnography encourages this kind of dissection: “the very writing of these counter-narratives is a means of resistance. In writing... we further develop our understandings and actions toward people who have suffered colonizing forces or who have been constructed as colonizers” (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 273). This serves two purposes: it is not enough to confess; one must atone. Because autoethnography is a rebirth of the self, the labor pains of writing it are painful and difficult. But this is not self-flagellation. It serves a purpose. Autoethnography as a process of identity-making helps us organize ourselves against colonizing forces, making it an essential component of critical pedagogy.

Reading and writing about the self is a key facet of multimodal literacy. Validating multimodality of literacy in the classroom allows for “an opportunity to contribute a newly invigorated literate tradition and to enrich our available means of signification” (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 226). The recognition of autoethnography as a way to incorporate the theory of multiple literacies, including “spoken words, images, music, written text, and movement and transitions” (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 234), creates space for voices that have gone traditionally unheard. This dissertation serves as a model of engaging in critical pedagogy because it itself is a multimodal narrative.

Purpose of the Study, Research Questions and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to explore the utility of autoethnography in dissecting praxis to work toward decolonization of the classroom. Research questions include:

- How does autoethnography function as a tool of decolonization? Are there ways in which it reifies colonizing practices?
- How might autoethnography be used in the classroom to encourage nontraditional discourse?

This is a necessary study because today's classroom is rooted in a culture of homogenization, and this offers a perspective that fights such utilitarian pedagogical practice and provides teachers with an alternative perspective that, by its very nature, fosters antiracist, feminist, and Marxist growth in the community. Too many theorists approach identity as though it is the problem in schools: They imply there would be no educational gaps if only every child was raised like an upper-middle class white child. Instead, my identity is the thing that makes me so good at teaching because I've experienced firsthand the oppression that my students see daily.

Researcher Positionality

This study is influenced heavily by my positionality as a Chicana woman who grew up in an impoverished household headed by a single mother. As such, my research will be focused on offshoots of critical theory that include Critical Gender Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Marxist Critical Theory (Bronner, 2011). Through our Chican@ Studies programs at both Albuquerque High School and my alma mater, the University of New Mexico, I have witnessed firsthand the subversion of the school as a training ground for hegemony. I am also a neurodiverse graduate student fighting for my

voice to be heard and recognized in academia. In addition, as a union teacher for nearly a decade, I have a vested interest in the move toward decolonization in the classroom and at the school and district levels. According to the positionality continuum presented by Herr & Anderson (2015), my research will fall into the Collective Action section. It is described as absent of “outside initiators and facilitators” and involves teachers setting “their own agenda and mobiliz[ing] to carry it out” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 51). My positionality is key to my journey, because Being and the act of being are so entwined.

Research Design: Habitus and Artifactual Critical Literacy

This research will be designed as a qualitative autoethnographic study because “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). This methodology is appropriate given my background as an English Language Arts teacher and someone who earned her undergraduate degree in philosophy. In qualitative research projects, “it is the researcher’s responsibility to tell the story of the research, to analyze and to interpret in order to seek and convey its significant messages” (Byrne, 2017, p. 38).

This autoethnography will be accomplished using the guidance of artifactual critical literacy, which “is an approach that combines a focus on objects, and the stories attached to them, with an understanding of how different stories have different purchase in particular locations” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011, p. 129). Artifacts are objects which reveal the concept of habitus. Ultimately, habitus contains “the action taken given the everyday sense-making over time in which individuals engage” (Horvat, 2003, p. 9). The habitus we discuss is “an account of social reality inside and outside ourselves... often

instantiated within treasured artifacts, home possessions that might signal a way of life... or stand for an experience” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011, p. 134). The objects I will be using are identification cards. The concept of habitus has “utility in understanding how race and class influence educational experiences, educational opportunity, and life trajectories” (Horvat, 2003, p. 3). Artifacts help us to identify power structures around us: “objects can be interrogated for their meanings in relation to critical constructs and power relations and establishing a stance around objects” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011, p. 145). Because of this, authentic teaching demands recognition of one’s habitus, which can be accomplished through examination of artifacts. Part of any teacher’s habitus must encompass the teaching profession’s “socially constructed and historically evolved norms, values and ideals” (Kreber & Klampfleitner, 2013, p. 466). Habitus, then, is made up of multiple dimensions, including professional, social, and personal.

Habitus is “an internalized, second-nature sense of the operation of place, position, and relation in our social world” (Horvat, 2003, p. 7). To define my habitus, I examine multiple identities that I embody, which ultimately influence how I act as a teacher. I accomplish this through a dissection of various identification cards that serve as artifacts of my life in and out of schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

Artifacts “have their own pedagogic potential in offering ways of telling stories, but they can also be placed within different settings to create juxtapositions that then inform learning in new ways” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011, p. 146). Epistemic objects are those which are constantly defined and redefined through their use and existence (Bennett, 2005). With each object, I will use its value, timescale, space, production,

mode, and relation to power structures to interrogate it (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). Artifacts from nontraditional literature must be transcribed before analysis, which involves seeking patterns “within, between, and among modes” (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 237). My artifacts are identification cards from throughout my life. Further discussion of this methodology will occur in the conclusion.

This dissertation contains three narrative essays that reflect the false trichotomy of the mind, body, and spirit. The pieces stand alone in preparation for publication but belong together as a manuscript toward justice and decolonization. When telling the story of the self, we must clarify what constitutes our essence. Is it the mind? The physical body as it exists in space and time? The ineffable spirit? In my *autohistoria* I attempt to address all three, not as separate parts, but as the things that together constitute the self.

My first experience with philosophy came through a religious pamphlet in our Catholic Sunday school. It was on the apple, which is fitting as a metaphor for teacherhood. The apple represented the trichotomy of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (the core, the skin, and the flesh). In the same way, we can understand our own humanity and selfhood, our ontology, through the same metaphor. The three must exist together, but they are discernible as their own parts once it is understood that they work together to create what exists in Lacanian signifying as Apple (Lacan & Fink, 2006).

The project of this autoethnography is to uncover, examine, and critique teacherhood in order to work toward decolonization. The irony of using a Christian theological metaphor in this uncovering is not lost on me; in the same way that the *mestizo* self of the author exists as a product of and by colonization, the autoethnography functions as a record of colonization and an effort toward decolonization.

Significance and Limitations of the Study

In this study, autoethnography will take center stage. Thus, the significance of this study is that autoethnography will be further legitimized as a tool of pedagogy. This dissertation will also provide an example of a nontraditional academic path, especially for underrepresented groups who identify with myself on a racial, ethnic, neurodivergent, feminist, or class level. Limitations include the fact that it is a nontraditional dissertation and may not be regarded by the hard sciences as a factual or objective view of the classroom, but I will seek to problematize the very existence of objectivism in teaching.

Conclusion

The woman in the mirror who stares back at me changes from moment to moment. Some days, she reminds me of my mother, all Apache cheekbones and peppered hair. Other days she is as unfamiliar as a passing stranger on the cobbled paths of Zürich, my adopted city. I define my identity and redefine it daily, calling on my fluctuating memory and changing perspective to parse out the details and give what I think is a cohesive narrative of the self, easily summed up and recited like a familiar pledge when someone asks for my story, if changed slightly to suit the occasion and audience. This dissertation is a glimpse at my identity as a teacher and an academic at this moment in time. It is colored by colonization: a name that fits a dominant race, identity descriptors colored and codified by comparison to cousins, educational degrees and diplomas that represent my ability to fit in and work the same system that actively oppressed my ancestors. It draws on literal artifacts of identity: my student and staff identification cards. As a teacher, I seek to decolonize my praxis and trouble the waters of teacherhood as an identity.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of practice in this study is that the education system of the western world is a tool of hegemony used to command replication of an ontology rooted in oppression through colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Teachers interested in healing from oppression must work toward decolonizing their praxis, a nuanced task accomplished with the help of critical inquiry done through autoethnography. This literature review seeks to synthesize literature that validates and confirms autoethnography as a mechanism of critical inquiry. It will explore the following research questions:

- How does autoethnography function as a tool of decolonization? Are there ways in which it reifies colonizing practices?
- How might autoethnography be used in the classroom to encourage nontraditional discourse?

Themes include the Hegelian dualism of colonizer and colonized, the Foucauldian concept of school as imprisonment, and the Anzaldúan notion of storytelling as activism. This chapter is organized into sections that will address the purpose and scope of the review, theoretical framework of critical inquiry, and historical context of autoethnography.

Process

This literature review involves both theory and praxis: the definitions of technical terms are understood through a historical lens, while the application of autoethnography is transmuted by its authors in the related research section. All of this research was found using peer resources and suggestions as well as the University of South Carolina library system; it is important to note that dissertations using autoethnography are uncommon and ProQuest is often the only access point due to the illegitimate nature of the methodology in the eyes of heavyweights in the ivory tower.

Purpose and Scope

This chapter seeks to define ontology, examine how modern teacherhood is rooted in oppression, and examine nontraditional research methodology. The scope includes the vast field of critical inquiry but narrows down the field of autoethnographic practices to those that specifically pertain to educational research. This section contains definitions that will be used to build an argument for using autoethnography as a way to decolonize praxis.

Ontology is the study of one's being and Being in a Heideggerian sense. Teacherhood is an ontological status that supplants personhood in many teachers' lives; teachers bring themselves into the classroom and bring the classroom into their personal lives in a way that necessitates a recognition of the false dichotomy between career and selfhood. In a Hegelian sense, this dualistic notion of career and self is only seemingly separable on a surface level: one might imagine they leave their teacherness at the classroom door (Hegel, Miller, & Findlay, 1977). However, in reality the career demands complete embodiment of teacherhood. Because of the deeply personal nature of teaching,

one's mannerisms, voice, actions, ethics, interpersonal relationships, persona, habits, and soul are completely inseparable from the verb *to teach*. Teacherhood, then, describes not just the day-to-day job of teaching in the classroom, but the overall ontological status of a teacher (Heidegger, 2010).

We exist in a world dominated by the hegemony of capitalism, sexism that centers cisgender men, white supremacy, and neurotypicality (bell hooks, 1990). Our ontology reifies the systems that created us; the hegemony is taken as a given, to the point where research that continues to center hegemonic voices is called objective. To claim objectivity in research is to continue upholding the myth that the universe is exactly as it is experienced by white cis men. Educational research's demand for objectivity precludes this notion. Foucault (1980) explains that the very nature of schooling seeks to uphold this hegemony and acts as a prison; it recreates, shelters, and prioritizes oppression. Because teacherhood is developed in and through classroom experiences, all teachers replicate the colonial forces that shaped them (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Lewis, 2010). Teachers who seek to challenge these colonial forces through examination and critical inquiry can look to scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) for examples of resistance.

Critical Inquiry

Critical theory, rooted in the Frankfurt School, "insists that thought must respond to the new problems and the new possibilities for liberation that arise from changing historical circumstances" (Bronner, 2011, p. 1). All revolutionary thought schools stem from critical theory (Martinez-Alemán, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015). It first arose from theorist Mark Horkheimer, who built on Karl Marx's work in order to lay bare the ways in which society preserves injustice (Prince & Levy, 2017, p. 3). Although critical theory

was first treated as synonymous with Marxism, there has been a documented expansion to include “domination well beyond capitalism” (Levinson, 2011, p. 435).

Critical theory works to discern the nefarious ways in which society reproduces injustice (Prince & Levy, 2017). Its foundation is de-centering the hegemony to form a catalyst for equity in formal and informal societal structures (Levinson, 2011). Using critical theory, teacher practitioners are empowered to “to explain and decode inequitable social relations and action in... education” (Martinez-Alemán, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015, p. 90). Critical theory amalgamates theory and application, “and in doing so provides us with normative criticism, explanatory analysis and practical solutions” (Martinez-Alemán, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015, p. 212).

Alienation and reification are two concepts within critical theory that must be examined in order to further understand how it can be used in critical inquiry or research (Bronner, 2011, p. 4). Alienation describes the ways in which people have been severed from their natural state of being. This is commonly framed in terms of political and economic consequences (Dahms, 2011, p. 5). Reification is the distillation of mankind into object in order to facilitate economic and political puppeteering. It acts as a metaphorical carousel, spinning us further and further into the objectified strata (Dahms, 2011). Together, alienation and reification “[imperial] the exercise of subjectivity, [rob] the world of meaning and purpose, and [turn] the individual into a cog in the machine” (Bronner, 2011, p. 5).

These concepts form the foundation for critical theory, which argues that “sustaining and advancing modernity is not only desirable but imperative to the continuation of social and political systems respectful of the sanctity of human life, and...

the continuation of human civilization” (Dahms, 2011, p. 143). We must ask the question, is the natural state of man (student) to be a cog in the machine? The resounding answer is no.

Critical theory necessitates action: critical inquiry is then “identifying normative beliefs and practices that contradict the aims of democratic living” (Martinez, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015, p. 107). The praxis’ stated goals are “to critique and challenge, to transform and empower” (Merriam, 2009, p. 34).

Critical inquiry mandates action in order to effect change. When building praxis in order to combine theory and practice, we must remember that critical inquiry is “normed in activism and advocacy... [and] seeks to contest acts that allow for the maintenance of systemic oppression while working to initiate transformational, revolutionary change” (Foster, 1994, as cited in Walker 2017, p. 1898). Thus, critical inquiry is in and of itself the praxis of not just identifying but fighting injustice through questioning. It is appropriate for this study because it “serves as a framework to conduct necessary investigations for populations and subcultures that are victims of oppression, marginalization, and historical acts of discrimination” (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2004, as cited in Walker, 2017, p. 1899). In this study’s case, practicing educators as well as students make up a population who are commanded to conform. Critical inquiry is “grounded in lived experiences with power relations and social justice as concerns” (Prince & Levy, 2017, p. 11). Autoethnography helps teachers accomplish this necessary task.

Ultimately, critical theory liberates because “the moment of freedom [appears] in the demand for recognition by the enslaved and the exploited” (Bronner, 2011, p. 2).

When teachers study the conditions under which they are placed, they gain the tools to unfetter both themselves and their students, the next generation of workers, thinkers, and participants in our democracy.

Autoethnography as Critical Inquiry

In research surrounding the classroom, there exists a crisis of representation (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015). This means that there is a documented lack of perspective from marginalized people, although they are most often the subject of intense speculation at the hands of researchers seeking to solve the problems of the current educational model. Voices in the classroom, especially from women, people of color, neurodivergents, and other marginalized identities, must be uplifted. The recognition of autoethnography as a research methodology elevates these voices into the largely inaccessible and hegemonic field of academia.

The primordial roots of autoethnographic exploration can be traced to the scholar Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), who was a Chicana theorist and queer icon writing about the self in an age when non-traditional methodology began to bloom. Her work in *Bridge Called My Back* serves as a foundation for all Latinx autoethnography that philosophizes the self as researcher (1983). This literature review would be remiss to not set the record straight that this dissertation would not be possible without the Anzaldúan conceptions of self and society.

Autoethnography arose as a direct response to the crisis in representation that continues to exist in academia (Butz & Besio, 2009). It is defined as “research is conducted and represented from the point of view of the self... [it] values the self as a rich repository of experiences and perspectives that are not easily available to traditional

approaches” (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 260). Autoethnography is treated with disdain by the academic community (Griffin & Griffin, 2019). It is also often a deeply uncomfortable project because it demands introspection into how someone has replicated the same systems of oppression that shackle the self (Ellis, 2016). In addition, “because autoethnography turns the research gaze onto the researcher, it opens the self to tensions, conflicts, emotions and vulnerabilities” (Sidhu, 2018, p. 2181). However, it is a worthy project because it uncovers emotions and helps teachers engage in practices that provide a path toward decolonizing the self (Buckley, 2015). It is a powerful tool of introspection that allows for the heavy work of decolonization (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Autoethnography itself places emphasis on retrospection; this means it is a methodology that can be quite painful and intrusive. From confronting how one is replicating traditional gender roles as a mother (Alexander, 2016) to questioning how academia romanticizes suicidality in graduate school (Hutton, 2020), autoethnography allows for critical self-reflection that applies the tenets of theory to a lived experience. It can be arts-based, like an illustrated or graphic novel (Garibaldi Cisneros, 2017), or a series of poems and conscious flow (Doyle, 2018). But it must be critical.

Teaching with Social Justice In Mind

The majority of today’s teachers are ill-prepared to investigate race and culture (Howard, 2014). Not only that, but most teachers are middle-class white women (Hochschild, 2003). Too many of these teachers pretend they do not see color and that race is not important (Pollock, 2004). This is often termed colorblindness or colormuteness (Pollock, 2004). This is problematic because pretending that they do not see color causes them to develop deficit thinking (Watson, 2011, p. 24). At school, there

is a set of social skills, behavior, and knowledge that requires cultural capital to understand (Lewis, 2003). In addition, there exists a hidden curriculum that is made up of unspoken values; this hidden curriculum is interposed by race (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008, p. 593). The underlying function of our educational system tends to do a disservice to certain students, especially if they come from a low-income family or identify with ethnic minorities. These students have fallen a measurable amount behind classmates from wealthy and / or white families when it comes to academic achievement (Hochschild, 2003; Mahari de Silva, Gleditsch, Job, Jesme, Urness, & Hunter, 2018; Langhout & Mitchell, 2008). Thus, the hidden curriculum and the way schools currently function are both rooted in practices that result in harm to certain groups of students, specifically students of color. In other words, the very structure of our education system has a hidden curriculum rooted in success for mainstream White culture and oppression to students of color.

If we are ever to address this, we must make the hidden curriculum explicit. According to Howard (2014), our classrooms desperately need conversations about race and racism (p. 108).

In addition, as demographics shift, educational institutions must make race a mandatory topic any time research, practice, or policy is involved (Howard, 2014, p. 108). The best way to accomplish this task is to ask teachers to pause and reflect on their own role in white supremacy; autoethnography can be used here to practice critical inquiry. It is not enough to tell one's story; "intimate stories of the academic self must be subjected to critique and analysis" (Learmonth & Humphreys, 2011, pp. 11-112).

We have long known that teachers are the single most important educational

factor when it comes to measuring student achievement (Carey, 2004). Teacher self-efficacy was quantified and researched for the first time in the 1970s (Mickel, 2015, p. 34). In a preliminary study, a “Likert Scale” about two statements measured how teachers felt about the ability to do their job. This study showed an association between teachers with high self-efficacy and student success (Armor et al., 1976). In addition, teacher efficacy is associated with how much time is put into teaching, having preset goals, and having that ineffable quality known colloquially as grit (Bandura, 1977). Teachers with a high self-efficacy raise student achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006). When teachers feel empowered to talk about race, especially using their own stories and experiences, their self-efficacy will increase.

The classroom is a place where identities can be played with and actualized (Yoon, 2012, p. 1). However, teaching is inching closer toward a perfectly scripted performance with no room for improvisation (Yoon, 2012, p. 2). How can teachers break out of this performance? It demands metacognitive recognition of the self. Teachers who model being lifelong learners end up encouraging students to find their own passions (Martin, 2018, p. 20). Thus, by engaging in critical inquiry, teachers provide a model for students to do the same.

Related Research

Autoethnography has been popularized in academia, but it is still a radical non-traditional approach to the dissertation. From a historical foundation in Gloria Anzaldúa’s epistemic explorations to modern applications like graphic novels or poems, narrative in research is being practiced at large. Unfortunately, modern autoethnography is still

considered illegitimate, lazy, and narcissistic (Griffin & Griffin, 2019). It is not tolerated by scholars at large.

Griffin & Griffin (2019) describe autoethnography as a radical methodology that offers a non-traditional path to explore the self. Their article encompasses common critiques including how autoethnography without reflection is incomplete. Ultimately, they suggest a moderate view of autoethnography as one among many paths to transformative work at the academic and personal levels.

Doyle (2018) describes autoethnography as a navigation of tensions. Her autoethnography critiques and problematizes whiteness in education using personal examples of her privilege through her educational journey. Findings included how out of control white lies can get, how performative wokeness can backfire, and how being able to write autoethnography in and of itself is a privilege not afforded to many. Her conclusion and recommendations are a call to action, especially for white people, to move toward social justice as an ethos.

In a similar vein, Phillips (2019) explores his experiences of the school system as an African American man who had mentorship along his academic and athletic paths. His autoethnography utilizes his identity to tell the story of racial injustice in schooling. Findings coded collected stories using school culture and family dynamics, as well as historical context, to draw conclusions about the value of mentorship.

Authors like Phillips (2019), Martinez (2016), and Kwon (2017) utilize race to explore broad societal issues. Phillips (2019) describes mentorship and Black masculinity through an autoethnographic interrogation of his experiences with athleticism. Martinez (2016) uses the theme of the body and spirit to draw attention to the lingering trauma of

colonialism that she calls a specter haunting Latinas. Kwon (2017) explores her family's history and the use of art as a way to talk about rape in the historical experiences of Korean "comfort women." These authors are social justice advocates not in spite of their experiences, but because of them. This is the importance of autoethnography: instead of ignoring the self and claiming objectivity, it allows us to recognize how tied up we are in our identities.

This related research has influenced my own writings, how I approach the criticism of fellow academics, and how I write truthfully about the self even when it is painful and problematic.

Summary & Conclusion

In conclusion, today's classroom exemplifies a replication of cultural hegemony instead of democratic and antiracist pluralism. Autoethnography offers a tool for decolonization of praxis. Although it is painful, critical inquiry of the self is necessary for social justice.

CHAPTER 3

THE SPIRIT OF TEACHING: THE NAIVETY AND PURITY OF BEGINNERS

In my rundown pink Ford Escort, one hand holding a lit cigarette and the other tapping on the stick shift, I took in the view of Albuquerque from the edge of the mesa. A spring dust storm built behind me, the blackened air seemingly chasing me back to the trailer park where I rented a room in a metal shack with peeling turquoise paint. Red ink stained the soft pad of my right hand from grading papers, speckled with the black from the pen Assistant Principal Jeffery gave me to sign the papers that called me incompetent as a teacher and asked that I formally acknowledge my contract's termination. I was being punished for my subversion of the oppressive hegemony of schooling that demanded complete compliance and silence. Before I handed in my staff ID, I snapped a quick photo of it side by side with the ID I wore as a student under that same oppressive system just a few years prior. The difference was, as a teacher, now I had the power to challenge the colonizing forces. I just didn't realize my power yet.

This study's problem of practice is that colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism have undoubtedly harmed marginalized populations, but healing is impossible because the wound is daily made deeper in classrooms across the country. Schooling commands replication of an ontology rooted in oppression; students, teachers, and academics are victims trained to replace their captors. In the face of this, teachers can practice resistance



Figure 3.1 Image of RRHS Student ID 2007-2008 and RRPS Staff ID 2012-2013

through the art of storytelling. Autoethnography via artifactual literacy enables a critique of the faces of colonization, especially given that these faces are often masks teachers wear in and out of the classroom.

Not only are marginalized people neglected by the education system; it actively oppresses their voices and wounds them daily in classrooms across the country. As rebellion is punished, teachers must find subversive ways to combat the nefarious tendrils of colonization and imperialism that sneak into the curriculum and classroom practices. Autoethnography allows for the self-reflection and thought necessary to commit to this activist work.

Handing in my staff ID was humiliating; it was clear I didn't fit into their narrative of what a teacher should look, act, and think like. But now, I recognize that this is one of the first times I felt what Gloria Anzaldúa terms *conocimiento*: "the term used to describe an acquired state of embodied awareness that equips one with a capacity to act

and to create” (Pitts, 2020, p. 359). Throughout this chapter, I will demonstrate the power of *conocimiento* as praxis.

My identity has been defined but simultaneously acts resistant to the colonizing forces that control our educational system. When I compile this identity through the process of autoethnography, I am both enduring and repelling colonization. This is because “critical autoethnographies... [draw] from the experiences and perspectives of those who traditionally have been silenced, excluded, and/or marginalized in the production and dissemination of knowledge about how people in different spaces experience our schools and society” (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 12). Through my reflections on teaching and schooling, I am able to discover how the past is intertwined with my desire to subvert the system and fight from within as a lifelong educator.

For April, it was already heating up. The precious student artwork I’d hastily pulled from my classroom walls fluttered in the backseat. I couldn’t afford to live in Rio Rancho. That should have been a sign that I would never fit in as a teacher. My mom hadn’t been able to afford it either; it’s why she worked two jobs and came home to her third: drinking Coors and forgetting. Memories of my time as a Ram flooded me as I shifted the hot stick and rolled down the big hill back to the city limits of Albuquerque.

Rio Rancho was a glorified suburb that started as a golf course in the 1980s. The school district was hailed as some sort of modern miracle in the time of NCLB and Bush. Dress code sweeps happened weekly; parents had successfully rallied to remove books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Catcher in the Rye* from the school library. I keep in touch with a number of former students from this time, as a way to remind myself of where I came from. They’re all from my seventh period freshman English class, maybe

because I was so worn out from faking it all day that by the time they came in my mask had withered to reveal a more authentic me. Most still live in Rio Rancho. One shared with me that being homeless, carless, or jobless is treated like a crime. Her mother got harassed by police simply for walking home with her groceries. In 2019, Rio welcomed President Trump for a MAGA rally. A former classmate who student-taught alongside me summed it up: Rio is like if Blue Lives Matter was a place. But it's also the place where I discovered that teaching is my soulmate.

I worked hard to graduate high school early and move out of my mother's home. I even went late to my own prom reeking of chicken nuggets from my afterschool job at Wendy's. So why did I ever come back to Rio Rancho when I had a teaching credential that could get me a job anywhere in the grand state of New Mexico? Part of it was that they paid thousands of dollars more than neighboring districts. Exchanging labor for money keeps us trapped in situations where we would otherwise revolt (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1982). Part of it was familiarity. But also, "many of us inherited systems of oppression and began to act in accordance with the systems we found. This not only reinforced our own self-marginalization, but also contributed to upholding the systems that oppress countless others" (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 252). Foucault tells us that the most effective way to train a new prison guard is to select him from amongst the prisoners (1980). Since the strict, regulated environment was so familiar, it made sense that I sought those rigid boundaries as an adult.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an exploration of the "anomalies of emotion and drive, idiosyncrasies of attraction and repulsion, phobias and panic attacks, nostalgias and

irrational wills; personal curiosities, selective collecting, inventions of knowledge, and job vocations” that make up who we are (Lacan, 1949, p. 74). It is driven by the principle that our past speaks to us and drives who we become. My career as a teacher is influenced heavily by how I learned and what I experienced as a student. This includes the painful, negative, humiliating, and heartbreaking things I bore witness to as a student; in part, they motivated me to become a teacher and change the system from the inside, but they also shaped my values and beliefs in a subconscious way that was replicated in my own actions as a teacher. This work is often subconscious, but Gloria Ladson-Billings encourages us to dig deeper, arguing that “who I am, what I believe, what experiences I have had all impact what, how, and why I research” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 470). My past drove me to become a teacher, but it also drives me to act as a researcher, dissecting the past for clues. This is why I chose autoethnography as my methodology: I felt the need to get to the bottom of who I became.

The day I took my ID photo, I was full of naivety, innocence, and purity. I did not fully understand the realities of my chosen career, despite knowing it was my destiny and my soulmate. I was new and fresh, and that first year broke my spirit through daily administrative walkthroughs, punitive and bureaucratic measures, and my transformation into the very thing I hated.

The overall goal of autoethnography is Heideggerian in nature. History becomes as it is remembered, so the act of remembering these moments through artifactual literacy is bringing it into reality: “The idea... becomes something that has occurred, that is, becomes history and exists in the extension of the idea as history” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 50). My purpose in writing this autoethnography is to seek out the patterns that led me to

where I am today, in an effort to seek out patterns that exist for students like me. Through my analysis, I hope to illuminate the path I took for those who follow behind me.

Although my experiences are unique, the act of writing about them helps me process them in an open and transparent way that may serve as an example for teachers who desire self-actualization, which is an underlying goal of my project.

Identity is inextricably linked to the performance of teachership; educators create their identity within the confines of political and racial boundaries learned through their childhood and educational experiences. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that the ethics of personal accountability means an acknowledgment of ideological position and non-neutrality in the classroom. In order to function as an effective and radical teacher, I must publicly acknowledge the ways in which my identity has led me to my drive for decolonization and how that influences my curricular choices, as well as the ways my childhood traumas reappeared in my actions. Only by making this transparent can I create the space for change needed in today's classroom.

In *The Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression*, Martin Heidegger discusses how our history, the elements that make up our autoethnography, is defined as we think of it (2010). Thus, as I contemplate my identity and the moments which define me now, I am making meaning out of what happened, which in effect defines what happened through the context of the viewer, myself as I exist in 2021. My identity is embedded in the history I analyze and make sense of, so my identity is constantly being reified as I express it. This is because “having apparently expresses a relationship that is rooted in the Dasein of the having person itself, that therefore is not merely attached to it and touches on it from the outside” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 43). In other words, traits and characteristics

that I have are in part defined by the act of me having them. Here is a simple example: the statement that blondes have more fun influences people with blonde hair to view themselves in that light and influences their perceptions of other blondes. My identity “runs across [my] own achievements, creations and consolidations in which [I] and with which and for which [I] partly live” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 44). My self “becomes something that has occurred, that is, becomes history and exists in the extension of the idea as history” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 50). This sets the stage for autoethnography, because “as we think about something, the act of thinking itself changes the nature of the thing thought about” (Griffiths, 2017, p. 331). Autoethnography is action that defines the self as it attempts to define the self through history.

Theoretical Framework

Because pedagogy is linked so closely with theory, we must define “a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools and other institutions perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 469). This informs our teaching to catalyze decolonization. Teaching is deeply personal, so these perspectives of resistance must necessarily arise from introspection on both a pedagogical and personal level. This theoretical model is called culturally responsive curriculum. The term “culturally responsive curriculum” is used here without implications of accommodating student culture so that students fit into a dominant discourse. Instead, we use it “to refer to a more dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.

467). In other words, it is not about making a square peg fit into a round hole; it is about questioning the existence and worthiness of that idiom to begin with.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is “designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student- teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 483). Autoethnography encourages this kind of dissection: “the very writing of these counter-narratives is a means of resistance. In writing... we further develop our understandings and actions toward people who have suffered colonizing forces or who have been constructed as colonizers” (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 273). Autoethnography as a process of identity-making helps us organize ourselves against colonizing forces, making it an essential component of critical pedagogy. This is because pedagogy encompasses not just the lesson plans or even the enactment of a given lesson, but the teacherhood of how those actions are taken, the self-reflection before and after a lesson, and the overall conception of teaching.

One way in which a teacher might use decolonization in her pedagogy through culturally responsive curriculum is refusing to center traditional academic discourse: When teachers use “language interaction patterns that approximated the students' home cultural patterns, [they] were more successful in improving student academic performance” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 466). Validating multimodality of literacy in the classroom allows for “an opportunity to contribute a newly invigorated literate tradition and to enrich our available means of signification” (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 226). When teachers incorporate the theory of multiple literacies, including “spoken words, images, music, written text, and movement and transitions” (Hull &

Nelson, 2005, p. 234), it creates space for voices that have gone traditionally unheard. Autoethnography can help a teacher recognize her own voice as a source of authority; so often, we are told that the self is unimportant and objectivity is key, but decolonization refutes objectivity because it reinforces the idea that a straight, cis, WASP man's paradigm of the world is the only correct one.

In culturally responsive curriculum, it is not enough to tell one's story: Radical autoethnography demands that we also step away from narration that reinforces and recreates the patterns of oppression present in traditional academic discourse. Only then can we demonstrate the power in decolonized narration. This is essential because "many of us inherited systems of oppression and began to act in accordance with the systems we found. This not only reinforced our own self-marginalization, but also contributed to upholding the systems that oppress countless others" (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 252). Without culturally responsive curriculum as a guiding component of our storytelling, we might fall into the trap of becoming a model minority, of telling a story that reinforces the stereotypes we seek to dismantle. This storytelling must be based, then, in theory that drives anti-colonial action: critical theory.

Critical theory works to discern the nefarious ways in which society reproduces injustice (Prince & Levy, 2017). Its foundation is de-centering the hegemony to form a catalyst for equity in formal and informal societal structures (Levinson, 2011). Using critical theory, teacher practitioners are empowered to "to explain and decode inequitable social relations and action in... education" (Martinez, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015, p. 90). Critical theory amalgamates theory and application, "and in doing so provides us with

normative criticism, explanatory analysis and practical solutions” (Martinez, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015, p. 212).

Within the context of autoethnography, critical theory requires an understanding of alienation and reification. Alienation is the way the school system separates us from our natural inquisitive and curious selves, forcing us to learn in a rote or industrialized factory way to prop up the political and economic goals of those in power (Bronner, 2011; Dahms, 2011). Reification is the way in which we are distilled into objects as both students and teachers, furthering the notion that we are cogs in a machine. Together, alienation and reification rob “the world of meaning and purpose” (Bronner, 2011, p. 5). Autoethnography discourages this pure objectivity by placing the subject at the forefront of scholarship. Through critical inquiry, we can identify “normative beliefs and practices that contradict the aims of democratic living” (Martinez, Pusser, & Bensimon, 2015, p. 107). Autoethnography enables a praxis with the goals “to critique and challenge, to transform and empower” (Merriam, 2009, p. 34).

Critical inquiry mandates action in order to effect change. When building praxis in order to combine theory and practice, we must remember that critical inquiry is “normed in activism and advocacy... [and] seeks to contest acts that allow for the maintenance of systemic oppression while working to initiate transformational, revolutionary change” (Foster, 1994, as cited in Walker 2017, p. 1898). Thus, critical inquiry is in and of itself the praxis of not just identifying but fighting injustice through questioning. It is appropriate for this study because it “serves as a framework to conduct necessary investigations for populations and subcultures that are victims of oppression, marginalization, and historical acts of discrimination” (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso,

2004, as cited in Walker, 2017, p. 1899). Because this study will be an autoethnography, I will tell stories of the self that exemplify the traits of critical inquiry, which is “grounded in lived experiences with power relations and social justice as concerns” (Prince & Levy, 2017, p. 11).

Ultimately, critical theory liberates because “the moment of freedom [appears] in the demand for recognition by the enslaved and the exploited” (Bronner, 2011, p. 2). When teachers study the conditions under which they are placed, they gain the tools to unfetter both themselves and their students, the next generation of workers, thinkers, and participants in our democracy.

Artifacts

This project will be accomplished through remembering with the aid of artifactual critical literacy, which “is an approach that combines a focus on objects, and the stories attached to them, with an understanding of how different stories have different purchase in particular locations” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011, p. 129). My first anecdote was written after stumbling upon the photograph of two ID cards, juxtaposing my life as a student and my life as a teacher. It gave rise to a remembrance of my first year of teaching and how it influenced the trajectory of my career, allowing for a deeper analysis that goes beyond nostalgia and digs into the painful ways the past is rooted. This is termed “productive remembering” and it demands more than passivity from the act of reminiscence (Strong-Wilson, Mitchell, Allnutt, & Pithouse-Morgan, 2013). My productive remembering seeks to define and explore the creation of my teacher gaze.

The “teacher gaze” is a confluence of our experiences as students, our personalities, and our ambitions for the classroom (Mitchell & Weber, 1998). My

autoethnography attempts to use artifacts as a way to study the development of my own teacher gaze. I primarily use artifacts to uncover this because “image-based research, employed as part memory trigger and part visual ethnography, allows for a dialogue within the self, a dialogue that can then be studied from a semiotic perspective” (Benoit, 2016, p. 1125).

This project “is as much about wresting the practice of knowledge from the clutches of institutional meaning-making as it is about demanding that institutions take seriously the implications of such an intervention” (Cotera, 2018, p. 484). Because it is not a traditional dissertation, I have the opportunity to think critically about my praxis and write about it unfettered by the impossible demands of objectivity. Ultimately, this project has three goals. Autoethnography needs to be

(a) a resistance of all master narratives with a critique of Eurocentrism as a primary goal, (b) a resistance against all forms of spatial homogenization and temporal teleology, and (c) an understanding of the dialectical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Chawla & Atay, 2018, p. 5).

In order to accomplish this in my first anecdote, I will first examine how I replicated systems of oppression in my first year of teaching. I will then discuss the teleological implications of my staff ID. Finally, I will dive into the dialectics of being a teacher.

Analysis

As opposed to an unexamined pedagogy that reinforces colonization, critical pedagogy means teachers talk “about their own shortcomings and limitations and ways

they needed to change to ensure student success “ (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 479). How did I fail to be a radical force for change? How did I recreate modes of oppression? In my search for memories of my first year, I found an old Facebook status:

My traumatic experiences as a student of Rio Rancho schools really shaped my perspective as a teacher. Being taken out of the classroom for not having an id on a school-approved lanyard around my neck, not being allowed to wear jeans or even plain shirts, being shamed for my body shape and self expression... I will never let my darlings go through those experiences. My classroom is safe, and not a superficial way where everyone is labeled and homogenized, but I a way that respects difference.

Figure 3.2: Screenshot of Dress Code Status

This status was written August 19, 2015, two years after I taught at Rio Rancho High School. It exemplifies my fighting spirit and how badly I wanted to champion the issues of social justice that troubled me as a student. And yet it contains a sorry truth: in my first year of teaching, I replicated the very same things I wrote about being traumatic. Whether it was inadvertent or unavoidable is irrelevant; during my time at RRHS, I allowed security guards into the classroom I claimed to be a safe place in order to police students through the organized terror of dress code sweeps. The fact about dress code is that “when racism is the overarching, unwritten law of the land, any and every rule can and will be used to control” (Perry, 2020, para. 2). As a student, I remember feeling like it was the most unjust thing in the world that my friends couldn’t wear their hair in certain styles, that I couldn’t wear my Chicana hoop earrings, and that jeans, a staple of the working class Americana ethos, were a guaranteed suspension. How could I have

forgotten those feelings when I began my teaching journey? It was almost as if it had never happened.

I remember feeling like it was just the way the world worked, that if I didn't teach them to obey the rules they'd be set up for failure when they hit the professional workplace, and that the rules weren't that bad. The truth is, the dress code is part of a collective shadow that "symbolizes the historical violence and fragmentation that [Anzaldua claims] we are all now called to confront and to remember" (Pitts, p. 364). Anzaldua's concept of the Shadow-beast (1987) is here used to represent the desire of the Chicana to fit in, the fear at being rejected or recognized as Other, and the internal replication of the master/slave dialectic. The fragmentation here is between who we are inwardly and outwardly. Teacher enforcement of a dress code demands rejection of internal self, and can be violent when applied to LGBTQ students, racist when applied to students of color, and classist when considering the cost of meeting respectability rules that pay no mind to cost or accessibility.

One important element of the dress code at RRHS was the ID, which was worn on a lanyard around the neck at all times. Another rule covered boys' hair styles, which affected Native American students who often kept their hair in long braids, as well as Black students who kept their hair in any fashion deemed unacceptable, like box braids or afros. This is notable because hair is seen as a physical manifestation of someone's spirit (Luger & Vox Creative, 2017). Jeans were not allowed. Logos could not be any bigger than a quarter. Skirts had a length requirement. The only colors of pants allowed were khaki or navy. These rules made it difficult for my mother to shop at the thrift for me. I got coded once because I wore a thrifted pair of navy pants that had been washed too

many times and faded into a lighter shade of blue. The classist and racist implications are clear.

Later, as a teacher, I was terrified of breaking the rules. Teachers were required to check for dress code violations for every class period. If a dress code sweep occurred during 3rd Period, for instance, and a student was caught violating a rule, their first and second period teachers would be held accountable for not catching the violation. The pressures put on me to maintain control over my classroom were made visible in my students' appearance: I literally replicated a white supremacist, hegemonic, and classist ideal by requiring students to follow the same dress code I despised as a student. In this way, the artifact of the photograph has helped me uncover the ways in which I exemplified Foucault's (1980) statement that we are both victims and producers of oppression.

Praxis is informed by theory. Traditional theory has been treated as a default "that researchers feel no need to make explicit. Thus, the theory's objectivity is unquestioned, and studies undergirded by these theories are regarded as truth or objective reality" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 469). In the same way, "today's colonizing and oppressive forces occur under a positivist epistemology that is instrumental and technical-rational yet purports to be objective. [This] epistemology uses facts and figures to make "fair" decisions about various students, faculty, and administrators within educational systems" (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 259). These are the ways in which colonization acts insidiously to maintain control over the education system.

The teleological implications of the photograph of my student and staff ID are clear. The ID serves to identify. In some ways, it separates the student from the teacher

by designating the role which is expected to be performed in the school. The juxtaposition of the two represents the transition from learner to instructor. As Anzaldua (1987) writes about being and becoming using the borderlands as a material space in which she Becomes, so does the school up on the mesa serve as a material space that both controls and defines my identity. A close study of materialism shows us that teleology is related to the mechanism of an object in a dialectical fashion (Henderson-Espinoza, 2016). The mechanism of the ID is that it exists to identify, but its teleology also reifies that identity and produces it in a clear, comfortable, neutral format that exists to simplify the bureaucratic entanglements of schooling. It formalizes the existence of space between student and teacher while simultaneously infantilizing the teacher and creating a power dynamic between teacher and district as such. The moment at which I forfeited the artifact that justified my presence on campus was a moment where my identity itself shifted as if in an earthquake: who was I without my badge? The synecdoche is not lost on me: I was my badge, I was my ID, I was my lanyard. And then all of a sudden, I wasn't.

My last project for this artifact is exploring the dialectics of teacherhood. Teaching in itself is a verb, an action, a thing one undertakes. As an identity, it comprises the act of teaching, but also all of the actions behind the scenes that are implied: the deep, unquantifiable "teacherness" of teaching. One might consider teacherness similar to the living spirit of teaching. This often comprises the arguments in the public space about what teachers do, most of which is invisible. Advice I often tell new or aspiring teachers is that one cannot learn to teach in a classroom. When we talk about teacher preparation programs, action through student-teaching is an essential facet, especially given the

increasing diversity found within classrooms (Bartolo & Smyth, 2008). Without student-teaching, those preparation programs are hollow and untrue to the grittiness of the profession. And yet the dialectical contradiction that exists is: the first place one learns to teach is in a classroom. It's just not the classroom we're thinking of. It's an amalgamation of every classroom where we observed as teachers acted out the fantasy of "teacherness" and every classroom where we experienced failure and success as a learner. It's every classroom we saw on the television, every classroom we physically occupied, and every classroom our ancestors experienced and brought to the next generation's parent-teacher conferences. And through this dialectical contradiction, we can finally begin defining "teacherness" as it defines us. Although my first year was one in which I was hired to perform the role of teacher, it also defined my teacherness, or my teacherly spirit.

My project of autoethnography requires that I continue unpacking what it means to be a teacher, who I was, who I became, and how I got here. This is the heavy, uncomfortable work of decolonization as praxis, and it is accomplished through a seemingly passive act that turns out to be one of our most painful labors as teachers: remembering.

CHAPTER 4

HOW MINDS ARE MADE UP: NEURODIVERGENCE IN ACADEMIA

“Sorry to miss class, but I have an appointment at the shack,” I told the serious-looking professor. There was an impatient clearing of phlegm from one of the grad students sitting in on the upper-level philosophy seminar. They always formed an impenetrable huddle around Dr. J’s desk after each lecture, like seagulls ready to peck away on the poor old man’s remaining thoughts. I was one of two women in the class, and because I’d graduated early, I must have been the youngest in the room by ages. “I’m getting tested for ADHD today.” Immediately Danny, one of the older guys, said, “Don’t they prescribe meth for that?” And the fellas around him chuckled. In those days, I didn’t know how adults with ADHD might be cautious or guarded when talking about it because of the social stigma (Berger, Filipe, Conrad, & Singh, 2018).

The exam room at the “shack,” colloquially termed because University of New Mexico Student Health and Counseling (UNMSHAC) was a bit too long when one broke one’s foot skateboarding or needed a quick STD test, was a shock of cold compared to the hundred-degree heat of August. I was in my junior year of college and I couldn’t take it anymore. This is actually pretty common for women with ADHD. Like many high IQ people with ADHD, “impairments were not noticed until the adult began university studies or employment where he or she was challenged by increased demands for EF” (Brown, Reichel, & Quinlan, 2009, P. 166). Executive function is the capability of

handling tasks associated with day-to-day life. Clearly, the discourse surrounding EF continues to uphold a colonized and capitalist-centered paradigm.

Contrary to belief at the time, getting a diagnosis for ADHD wasn't simple or easy. To this day, I still hear jokes about how doctors want to shovel Ritalin into the mouths of babes; perhaps it is a confluence of my class status and ethnicity, but the hoops I jumped through made it clear that this was not the case. As a child, I sometimes wondered if I had ADHD, but like many, I had "been told by educators and clinicians that [my] superior intelligence precludes [my] having ADHD" (Brown, Reichel, & Quinlan, 2009, P. 161). But now I was on my last step: I'd been quizzed on my symptoms, forced to sit through a dozen mandatory counseling sessions, and finally given a strange and surreal test. I flashed my student ID, filled out a form, and waited.



Figure 4.1 Image of University of New Mexico Student ID

The test itself is called the T.O.V.A., which stands for Test of Variables in Attention. I took the visual version, but there's also an auditory version. I sat in a little room in front of an old monitor and half-listened as someone gave me instructions: You have a target geometrical shape to click, and one that you should click during (Greenberg

& Waldman, 1993). My target was a sharp, stinky shade of green against the humming black screen. It lasts about twenty minutes, and I swear it was the longest test of my life. I remember forgetting which one to click for almost immediately, second-guessing, thinking about what Danny had said about the meds being meth, and then becoming so utterly bored with the repetitive task that I just stared at the clock and leisurely clicked until the doc came back.

Danny's comment wasn't the first I'd hear about my diagnosis. Everyone from Scientologists to well-known psychologists argue that ADHD is over diagnosed, that prescription stimulants are ineffective or even poison, and even that ADHD doesn't exist (Berger, Filipe, Conrad, & Singh, 2018). Two years after I was diagnosed, I sat through a particularly painful TED Talk. The instructor in my teacher preparation program was a woman who had taught in the East mountains for thirty years. She had long silver hair and a hippie vibe, and I really wanted to impress her. Then came the Ken Robinson video. He spends a few minutes talking about the industrialization of school, the factory model, and fitting in. But then he says ADHD doesn't exist. I remember the discussion afterward with all of my fellow teachers-to-be dog piling on how kids just needed to run outside more, and everyone giving each other back-pats for regurgitating the same tired lines that neurotypical people recite when confronted with the existence of neurodivergence: it doesn't exist. And if it does, it's the parent's fault. And if it isn't? It's the school's failing. And if it isn't? Oh, look, a squirrel; let's move on.

Minds are made up, and I mean this in three ways. First, there is the cartesian interpretation of this statement. Descartes' ties between the brain and the experience of the world makes up the fundamentals of a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, the degree

upon which I was working during my diagnosis. Second, there is the way the mind is made up of the substance of memories. Artifacts help me recall these moments, but ultimately the mind is made from the moments of everyday life. And finally, minds are made up in academia about the validity of autoethnography as a methodology, the very existence of ADHD, and the ability of neurodivergent students to engage in scholarship. However, this piece is a way of changing the mind.

Readers may wonder why I do not delve into the so-called problem of overdiagnosis here, and to that I say, who has spun that narrative? Who gains from it? And what does it cost those of us who are neurodivergent? Foucault reminds us that madness is real and its effects demand to be heard (1980). We must keep in mind that our purpose of critical inquiry into ADHD is “not to debunk Ritalin, but to follow the agnosticism of Michel Foucault” (Miller & Leger, 2003). There are enough studies and articles (commonly by neurotypicals) that question the existence of ADHD. To wrest the power of society that demands conformity is not to deny the existence of ADHD. In the work of decolonizing the classroom, we must sit with the contradiction of a mythologized birth of ADHD as a byproduct of capitalism alongside its actual demonstrable effects on students and educators. This concept will be further explored using critical theory.

Purpose

This autoethnography seeks to decolonize praxis. Praxis happens in the moment:

“When Katherine teaches, she participates in praxis, in which there is no time out from the situation, and everything she does has consequences.

When Katherine reflects about what she has done, the patterned ways that

characterize her actions, she articulates practices, not praxis.” (Roth & Lee, 2007, pp. 190-191)

Praxis is a living thing; because it encompasses and creates ontology, it is necessary to explore the implications of neurodivergence both internally and externally. As a neurodiverse teacher, I use autoethnography as a tool to explore my experiences and ultimately work to decolonize my teaching. Anzaldua (1987) demonstrates the way in which ontology and praxis are intertwined and can be unearthed through autoethnography. Turning inward and reflecting through writing allows teachers to sift through their past and discover implications on their teaching. We know that oppressed individuals grow to replicate the systems of oppression that shaped them; the trick is to explore how, acknowledge that we are constantly learning, and seek a more just path forward.

In an ontological way, how have I replicated what I’ve been taught about neurodiversity to my students? In this case, the oppressive force is neurotypical discourse that dominates our struggles to define, diagnose, treat, and live with neurodiversity. My autoethnographic memories serve as examples that demonstrate this colonization in progress. To decolonize my teaching concerning neurodiversity, I use autoethnography to uncover how ADHD has influenced my ontological teacherhood.

In this piece, I explore two problems simultaneously: the legitimacy of ADHD and the legitimacy of autoethnography. I seek to accommodate the historicity of pathologization within the overarching theme of Marxist scholarship through a framework of cultural-historical activity theory.

The Existence of ADHD

Activist scholarship demands attention to the insidious impact of capitalism on learners. Social-justice oriented teachers like those mentioned in my introduction are obsessed with disproving the existence of ADHD because they think that it wins them a point in the fight against oppressive forces. The pathologization of ADHD is widely discussed in neoliberal circles; it is said that “the pathologization of young people distracts attention from structural inequalities by psychologizing issues of social order and disorder” (Miller & Leger, 2003, p. 10). Here, however, there lies a significant issue. Academia wields ontotheological violence to maintain that neurodiversity is a product of capitalism. They insist on engaging in a thought experiment: would ADHD, and medications like Ritalin, exist in a post-capitalist world? But the neurodiverse are directly harmed by this narrative that fails to take into consideration the very real conditions under which workers exist today. From a Marxist perspective, it falls into the trap of dividing theory from praxis.

Worse still, because education is dominated by neurotypicals and traditional scholarship is limited to those who can work under such conditions, a plethora of research out there is written by neurotypicals who are downright anti-ADHD. For instance, Sjöberg argues that “diagnosis serves a number of different interests at the same time as the diagnosed individual is transformed into a technological object, which in turn enables social control over, and instrumental modification of, behaviors not following a conformist order” (Nilsson Sjöberg, 2019, p. 3). This matches my earlier experience with my philosophy class, because “in the wake of classical Greek thought, philosophy has evolved dualistic modes of expression, which do not permit contradictory entities” (Roth

& Lee, 2007, P. 197). The dualistic nature exemplified in Nilsson Sjöberg's attack on ADHD further forces an artificial gap between the person and the condition, the oppressor and the oppressed, colonization and the colonized. This is evident in the misguided drive for people-first language, often by abled bodies, which demands that we use "people with ADHD" instead of ADHDers or "people with autism" instead of Autistics. In addition, Nilsson Sjöberg's analysis hurries past the very real existence of ADHD by blindly ascribing neurodivergence as a teleological occurrence.

The Power in Autoethnography

Autoethnography is treated by the academy as an illegitimate research methodology that is both lazy and narcissistic (Griffin & Griffin, 2019). Fine (1999) disdainfully calls it "me-search" and argues that it is navel-gazing that does not deserve to be taken seriously. Traditional scholarship violently rejects anything it considers as a threat to the status quo. This attitude further marginalizes voices that struggle to be heard in academia as it is, sometimes to the point of severe depression and suicidality. As one trans researcher put it, "We allow neoliberal logics to burrow so deeply into our soul" that it kills us (Pearce, 2020, p. 809). However, autoethnography is a way "to resist the colonizing forces of academic production and the unequal relationships of power it engenders [by having] those of us who have been traditionally marginalized create and write our own stories" (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 7). Autoethnography is a painful project that splays the past in a regurgitation that threatens the presenter, but its ability to transform academia into a space for the marginalized is unquestionable.

Neurotypicals dominate the educational research field, and capitalism enforces that by insisting on a stringent publication-oriented path toward notoriety and success:

“Institutional positions are increasingly governed by market segmentation and competition so that universities, for example, will look for a yield on their investment in terms of research ratings or more immediate funding” (Parker, 2009, p. 75). The rigorous demands of scholarship, including reading theory and engaging in discussion without interruption, do not lend themselves to the work ethos many ADHDers have. This is not to say that ADHDers are not capable of scholarship; rather, neurodivergent activism demands that the field of academia move toward a more open and inclusive, yet equally rigorous, scholarship. Only then can we fulfill our project’s basic demands of decolonizing the classroom.

The scholarship of Gloria Anzaldua (1987) provides a path forward: The methodology of *autohistoria* opens the field of academia to those who have not been served by traditional scholarship. Through critical autoethnography, we draw “from the experiences and perspectives of those who traditionally have been silenced, excluded, and/or marginalized in the production and dissemination of knowledge about how people in different spaces experience our schools and society” (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 12). The current research body is lacking in a neurodivergent perspective; this is apparent in the social justice movement of people-first language that erases voice and autonomy, the limited appearance of authorship that owns diagnosis, and the abundance of research that contributes to the moral panic regarding Ritalin and other medications (Miller & Leger, 2003). The solution is to carve out, violently and radically, space for neurodivergent scholars to share and own their stories through autoethnography.

Theoretical Framework

Autoethnography is situated as a means by which one can meld theory with praxis, but it requires a unifying theory that acts as a net of support by which autoethnography becomes meaning-making instead of navel-gazing. Vygotsky's theories of learning teach us that our environment and socio-historical context will influence our ontological being, an essential point in building the argument for autoethnography as a tool of pedagogy. Thus, my experiences as a child with undiagnosed ADHD in school have contributed to my teacherhood, that is, the persona and affect I inhabit in my role as an educator. Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) works to bridge the "theory-praxis gap due to the historical primacy of material, work-related activity over language and theory" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 210).

Pedagogically, Vygotsky is a familiar figure to many educators. He describes learning as "systematic cooperation between teacher and student [which] provides the development of higher psychological functions and consequent intellectual development" (Alves, 2014, p. 26). This cooperative view of learning places power into the hands of the learner and views knowledge as more than transmission. Vygotsky posits that "the social environment is the source of the human characteristics acquired by the child" (Gredler, 2012, p. 118). This ties in with Anzaldua's exploration of the development of the self into an ontological being (1987).

Autoethnography as seen through the CHAT framework allows us "to account for the role of history — and more generally sociocultural context — in human thought and, by extension, in all theory and practice" (Zoshak, 2015, p. 147). Because it is written from the perspective of the researcher, it is a clear and undistilled look into voice, which

encompasses “recognizable identities, personalities, attitudes and social roles” (Hengst, 2015, p. 21-22). In an activist sense, CHAT describes how we use language in the pursuit of our goals (Leont’ev, 1971). In this autoethnography, the goal is decolonizing teacherhood.

Medication in a Marxist Light

In my introductory story, I describe the common and rabid view among social-justice oriented teachers that ADHD does not exist, and that medication is a dangerous tool of the oppressor.

What do Marxist scholars say about psychiatry? There is a significant lack of research from neurodivergent people, a direct effect of the limiting tendrils of academia as a mechanism of capitalism. Those who have written about ADHD argue that “psychiatric discourse becomes increasingly important in reinforcing the dominant goals of neoliberalism, focusing on the self — rather than the group, community, organization, or society — as the appropriate site for change and ‘growth’” (Cohen, 2017, p. 76). Again, capitalism is blamed, but the efficacy of ADHDers is diminished when we ignore that we do not live in a post-capitalist society yet. As we push with our activism, we create a burgeoning space for discourse, and that leftist discourse must include the voices of neurodivergent scholars.

To examine the moral panic that exists about medication, we must trace the rise of child-centered psychiatry. Social Darwinism, a eugenicist and classist approach to explaining the differences in children of the working class, was the original theory that dominated the field (Sandberg & Barton, 1996). Child law, with an emphasis on the juvenile delinquent, and child psychiatry were inextricably linked historically, arising

hand in hand (Jones, 1999). This history explains the neoliberal claim that drugs like Ritalin are a tool of capitalism: A compliant workforce serves the desires of the ruling class. Having a pill to solve social malaise is temptation itself. Indeed, “identifying the brain as the etiological site of educational, social, personal, and even political problems, psychiatrists have comprehensively medicalized misery” (Miller & Leger, 2003, p. 16). This ties into the neoliberal logic that dominates ADHD discourse, and thus praxis, in education.

Why is there such a heavy stigma against medicating for ADHD?

If we readily recommend glasses for poor vision and acetaminophen for headaches, why should we dismiss as some kind of bourgeois conspiracy the available (though still inadequate) treatments for a very real, physical disorder? (JB, World Socialist Website, 2000)

When I got my first prescription, it was printed on marbled blue paper and handed over with the formal advice that I should only take it on the weekdays. So that’s what I did, day after day: I took my blue pills on the days I worked, and I endured weekends where I couldn’t turn a page for pleasure, couldn’t carry a straight conversation, couldn’t plan a nice hike without forgetting my boots and a map.

This is a common recommendation: don’t take meds every day. Just when there’s work to do. But that is not a Marxist approach; in fact, it uses neoliberal logic that traps the academic mind and does not work to decolonize daily life. By claiming that medication is simply for working hours, neurotypicals inadvertently uphold the dualistic division of labor and self. Until capitalism falls and workers wrest back their power, it is a revolutionary act to medicate, especially outside of working hours. With the rise in

autoethnography as a scholarly pursuit, more neurodiverse voices will be heard throughout the academy, perhaps leading to an ontological shift in perspective concerning medication. This is of particular importance when we consider that scholarly work is disseminated through teacher preparation programs, which in turn bring theory down from its lofty nest in the ivory tower and into the classroom, where it has a direct impact on pedagogy.

Praxis as a Neurodivergent Teacher

Two brief vignettes will serve to illustrate my experiences with colonization as a child. Autoethnography requires that we parse through our histories to discover patterns that explain our selfhood. The first offers a look at a common behavioral technique that carries with it a Lacanian signifier of doom: the bad apple (Lacan & Fink, 2006). The second describes how the ethos of standardized testing in America serves to wear down the neurodivergent student until they are either compliant or dismissed, more fodder for the school to prison pipeline.

On the wall of my kindergarten classroom, there hung a brown paper tree trunk with multitudinous limbs. Pinned to the branches were cut out apples epoxied with our faces, and these apples had two sides. One side was red and the other was rotten. If someone was a good child, their apple stayed red and juicy and sweet, like our angelic blushing cheeks. If they were deemed to have committed any offenses, the teacher would march up to the tree and turn their apple to the rotten side in front of the whole class.

One day, the teacher read the instructions to us and I restlessly scratched my braids with my thumbnails, enjoying the pleasant, intimate crackle as I smoothed over small knots. But the teacher thought I was plugging my ears. Stimming is defined by Dr.

Scharf of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston as “‘rapid, non-rhythmic, stereotyped movements’ that most commonly involve the head, neck and arms” (Insights, 2017). The teacher asked me to stop, but I was just a child, and it was a second nature. When she turned my apple publicly and proclaimed me to be rotten, I experienced the violence that neurodivergent students constantly face in colonized spaces. It is also reminiscent of the soul-crushing experiences of my first year of teaching, and also how I crushed the spirits of my own students in the same ways.

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria is a common symptom among people with ADHD (Bondü & Esser, 2015). It describes the intense spiral of rejection and shame that comes with perceived failure. Neurotypical teachers must be made aware of this so that the classroom becomes a refuge instead of a torture chamber for the next generation of neurodivergent students. In a Lacanian sense, the language we employ to talk about behavior (“bad apple”) directly affects students’ ontological sense of self, causing irreparable damage (Lacan & Fink, 2006).

Later in childhood, I again experienced the quiet suffocation of my neurodivergence. The lights were off and the daylight and sounds of my buddies singing little jump rope songs filled the vacant classroom. I sat alone while my teacher pushed around papers at her desk. The pink eraser left rubbery lint all over my paper. In one of my first encounters with the absurd cruelty of bureaucracy, I was forced to skip recess so that I could erase the answers from my test booklet. I’d gotten so bored waiting for the rest of my classmates to finish that I decided to tackle the next few sections. My punishment was erasing my work so that I could do it all again the next day, an early Sisyphean experience that gave me another lesson in the oppressive nature of schooling.

And that bureaucracy replicates itself; when my students would ask why we were learning certain texts, my best answer was because that was what happened to me when I was a student.

The shadow curriculum is the hidden message we get from what is prioritized in our schooling (Hagay & Baram Tsabari, 2010). On the surface, I was made to erase and re-answer a few questions. But deeper than that, I was told that doing things according to the book was more important than play, socialization, or relaxation. This, in turn, directly shaped the ontology of my teacherhood.

Looking back at these childhood incidents I'm shocked I wasn't diagnosed with ADHD far sooner, but it is diagnosed at a ratio of 3:1 in boys versus girls (Gaub & Carlson, 1997). This may be because girls are socialized in a different way (Eisenberg & Schneider, 2016). Because my neurotypical teachers used humiliation as a tool to ensure obedience, I learned quickly to adapt in school and hide behavior from neurotypicals. Later, when I became a teacher, I found myself micro-rebelling against the demands of my profession; snarking during staff meetings, upending test preparation materials in front of the students, and questioning the authority of the Public Education Department were regular behaviors I exhibited. Obviously, the impulsivity and interruptions directly relate to my diagnosis, but in a deeper sense, they demonstrate the little girl who was made to tuck away her true nature in order to succeed. Lacan articulates that no matter the lies we tell ourselves, our true nature will find a way to make itself heard (Lacan & Fink, 2006).

These two instances of arbitrary cruelty are evidence of a trend:

Within formal education, there has been a worldwide push for performance and efficiency: a technological rationality enforced by the use of standardized curriculums and measurements squeezing students into conformity rather than focusing on unique subjectification. (Nilsson Sjöberg, 2019, p. 11)

I experienced this trend firsthand through both my own education and my experience becoming a teacher. Teachers are members of “a historically situated educational community, which... has now moved to impose external (political) control through the rigid application of high-stakes examination and accountability procedures” (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 187). We can trace the rise in standardized testing to a report called *A Nation At Risk*, the 1983 hard-hitting report on the failings of the nation’s public school system. After this report, “the mass media (did) not provide a positive picture of the performance of schools in this nation. Although from time to time the exceptional school (would) be portrayed in glowing color, when such schools (did) appear in the media, they (were) clearly portrayed as exceptions” (Eisner, 1991, p. 76). Our nation bought into this image, decrying the widespread failures of public education especially in so-called inner-city schools, which led to a movement toward rigor as defined by high-stakes tests. The tests were a symptom of the trend toward homogenization in the classroom. According to Popham (2011), “the more homogeneous the responses yielded by a test’s items, the higher... the test’s internal consistency” (p. 69). A good test demanded homogenization. Thus, testing is both a symptom and the cause of a drive toward homogenization that leaves teachers and students alike feeling trapped in a box.

Call to Action

There are practical applications for these vignettes; the true work of this autoethnography is to uncover them and delineate a path forward. First, it has been established that ADHD exists (Brown, Reichel, & Quinlan, 2009), and that my very existence in academia as a neurodivergent scholar is praxis. Because the polemics of suffering are often done at the hands of neurotypicals, the act of autoethnography is decolonizing praxis. However, I write not just as a scholar, but as a practitioner who recognizes there is a deep divide between our strides in academia and the practicalities of the classroom.

Autoethnography enables the rebirth of the mind. We are made up of memories, and by interpreting these in a new light, we see all of the faults, the troubles, and the sins of our past. But I also see the promise of hope and my spirit is rebaptised with the fiery desire to rectify and build a new classroom where this violence does not happen.

What is the modern teacher to do, armed with the information in this missive? There are three serious calls to action. The first is to remember. Active remembering of our past allows us to uncover our present and determine our future (Anzaldua, 1987). Autoethnography is a written form of active remembering, but it can also be done through sharing with students and colleagues, through making art that draws literally on the past, and through using digital media to force open the sealed time capsule of our childhoods and study how we became and are constantly becoming who we are as teachers. The next call to action is to decolonize through uplifting marginalized voices, be it our own or our brethren. Citing scholarly work directly from marginalized sources offers a way to legitimize it in the eyes of traditional scholars. In the classroom, this may mean going

beyond dismantling the literary canon and actively including voices of the marginalized at every step. In all facets of education, whenever possible, we must question who is on the committee. As a Swiss-American activist Brandy Butler says, if nobody from the marginalized community is sitting in the committee that determines their fate, bad things are afoot (Butler, personal communication, 2020). And the final call to action is to work toward enacting a pedagogy that builds off of Vygotsky, Freire, and Anzaldua and carves out the space for students to encounter and create anti-traditional narrative academic work to demonstrate competency.

Ultimately, the artifact of my UNM student ID draws out all of the trauma and strife I faced in my discovery of pathologization and neurodivergence. It was a ticket into the Student Health and Counseling Center, a verification of my place in academia, and a reminder that I was, in fact, a worthy student, despite being marginalized in the philosophy classroom where I first shared my diagnosis. Autoethnography is the method of teasing out these experiences in search of examples of alienation and reification for the purpose of questioning our teacherhood, our practices, and our contributions to the oppressive hegemony that exists in academia to this day.

CHAPTER 5

AUTHORITY: THE BODY OF TEACHING AS A SYMBOL AND A MOVEMENT



Figure 5.1 Image of Albuquerque High School Staff ID

Introduction

We screamed the chorus of “Bad to The Bone” just as the little two-door Mazda catapulted over the dusty pocked dirt road in Canyonlands National Park. Three of us sat in the back while Dad drove and Mom navigated. The car cascaded to a stop at the head of Horseshoe Trail. We took turns leading as we hiked toward the archaeological site, six-year-old me often at the front despite the ever-present danger of snakes and sprained

ankles. There it was ahead: The Holy Ghost Pictograph. I rushed to the foot of it, pushing my bucket hat back so I could get a good look. It took my breath away. Seeing the bloodbrown figures with broad chests bear witness to the rising, ghostlike figure behind them in that dark sacred canyon was my first true experience of God. But not only that: the pictographs were also my first experience of non-traditional writing. They told stories the West shrugged off.

The layers of sediment leave distinct white, brown, and red layers in the walls of the canyon. My dad explained to me how it took longer than a kid can fathom for these layers to settle and form, and longer still for tumultuous waters to carve out the canyon. Reading Judith Butler's description of sedimented gender reminds me of those canyon walls, that sacred experience. Butler (1988) writes that "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (p. 523). In this way, layers of identity are formed. The intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, and myriad other identities comprise our ontological status (bell hooks, 1990; Heidegger, 2010). At the same time, our recollection of memories forms and is formed by our current ontological status, so we are constantly reifying ourselves.

Our bodies are physical manifestations of the sedimented journey that Butler (1988) describes. The gestures, posturing, and stylistic choices we make are influenced by the ways in which we've viewed others performing their identities. They also keep the score of the traumas we have endured (van der Kolk, 2014). This piece will discuss the manifestation of identity through physical choices, in addition to critiquing the teacher's body as a metaphorical embodiment of authority in the classroom.

The enactment of curriculum itself is sedimented in much the same way as identity: it is a reflection of teachers' own learning experiences, their beliefs, and their ways of Being in the world (Heidegger, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this chapter, I will be diving into memories surrounding the embodiment of curriculum from stages throughout my life. My act of remembering forms the frame of an autoethnographic methodology (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Anzaldua, 1987). In my dissertation, I am seeking to subvert the traditional dissertation delivery format in order to carve out space for culturally responsive pedagogy. These memories will be tied with analysis in order to make a statement about the necessity of decolonizing curriculum, pedagogy, and teacherhood. In this way, I will seek to do the work of culturally relevant pedagogy: decentering the cisgender, upper middle class, straight, white male perspective that tends to be the focus of not just the common English Language Arts curriculum, but teacherhood itself as an ontological position, in the United States.

The artifact I use to critique my embodiment of teaching is my 2019-2020 staff ID card, where I am pictured with blue hair and a smile. After nearly a decade as a teacher, this was the year in which the majority of this dissertation was written, and this was the manifestation of my autoethnography's subversion and internal dialogue with my identity as a teacher. It also ironically displays my married name, misspelled, as if to further the point that names are just another tool of patriarchy that only have as much meaning as we endow unto them. My mother named me the whitest name she could imagine: Chelsea Worthington, because she thought that her maiden name of Garcia would hurt my chances at passing as white and getting into college. Mom and Dad have different stories about why they chose Chelsea; each are eager to assert that it was their own stylistic

choice, but ultimately the consequential whiteness imbued by the name holds more weight than the microcosmic custodial battle that plays out when either tells me the origin of my name. When I married, I took my husband's name of McFadden as a symbolic gesture of entering into the Irish clan, a move which was widely praised by my new family even as they noted how uncommon it was these days to take one's husband's name. Looking at the ID card, the name seems so clearly a perfect metaphor for the naming and masking of my identity throughout my life.

Part of the physical experience of a teacher is hearing one's name over and over: Miss, Mrs. McFadden, Ms. Dubs (a nickname short for Worthington that a freshman basketball superstar named Caleb Wrotten gave me when I was 20). The name is but an extension of the concept of a teacher's authority, represented by her body and her physicality in the classroom.

Another part of the physical experience is the relentless critique and retraumatization: students make the same remarks their families tell them, the same remarks my family told me. Hearing a joyful student tell me that my body still looks pregnant as I was going through a miscarriage, hearing that I was a lazy fat ass just as my mom used to say when I didn't meet her expectations, hearing comments about what I wore and what I ate and how my voice sounded; those are all common experiences in teaching. The physical toll of teaching isn't just the bone weariness after a long day, it's the brutality of high school kids and the memories of my own traumas, eating disorders, physical abuse as a child, my hunger, my poverty; and the body keeps the score (van der Kolk, 2014). Looking at the artifact, I remember how it felt, how I flinched to hear the comments on my appearance every time.

Scripted Curriculum

The email came on a dry Friday afternoon in January of 2016. I'd transferred to Albuquerque Public Schools and was teaching in a windowless classroom in a school rumored to have been designed by a prison architect. The email was from our local teachers' union. Normally their Friday missives came with pep and verve, but this was stark. I read it twice to be sure, acid rising in the back of my throat. The district was mandating that all English Language Arts teachers exclusively use SpringBoard, a scripted curriculum program made by the College Board. The first thing I thought was, "I'd be better off as a busker singing folksongs for coin because there go all the things I loved about teaching." It felt like I had been asked to turn into a caricature of myself, to roleplay a teacher instead of actually teaching.

Self-efficacy is "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994, p. 2). In terms of teaching, this means that self-efficacy is the belief that a teacher has the power, through their curriculum, to create transformative learning experiences for their students. To me, nothing has been more fulfilling than taking in the world with a trained educator's eye: horrific news stories that demand to be processed become grounded and digestible when viewed from a curricular framework; the job and wage crises become teachable moments inspiring history lessons to connect the past of the labor movement. I'm thinking about the standards all the time; I'm processing what my students need to know, what they've got so far, and what they're getting stuck on. And just as my identity is sedimented, so is my curriculum (Butler, 1988; Heidegger, 2010). I build my curriculum in response to the students, weaving a narrative thread that ties these

elements together to form a cohesive year-long story in the English Language Arts classroom that responds to who I am, who they are, and where the world is right now. It is literally pouring one's heart into teaching: an embodiment of the self, a living and breathing creature.

The Hidden Curriculum

There is a hidden curriculum we teach, beyond the actual lessons and units. In addition, “the hidden curriculum (the values, norms and beliefs transmitted via the structure of schooling) [is] mediated by race” (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008, p. 593). It also is affected by other factors like gender, sexuality, and culture. These factors make up the hegemony, meaning the norm or standard set of behavior tolerated in schools. The hidden curriculum presents itself in our gestures, intonations, and actions in the classroom. It reinforces a cultural hegemony that prioritizes and benefits students who fall in line. This hegemony specifically pushes a narrative that the typically white, upper-middle class, straight, cis-male perspective is not only dominant but objective and correct (Howard, 2014). For instance, Shakespeare might be taught with gravitas that is not afforded to Hughes.

Thus, we are left in a field where certain students are othered and taught implicitly that their identities are not valuable in the educational world. Originally conceptualized by Said (1978), othering is making marginalized people feel like outsiders. Students who are othered will “feel a lack of social presence, and may have a weak sense of community with their peers” (Phirangee & Malec, 2017, p. 16). The harm that might be done by forgoing the work of critique is well-researched.

La Cueva High School sits close to the foothills in the wealthiest part of Albuquerque. The parking lot is full of Mercedes, the residue off the bathroom sinks could probably get Sigmund Freud high in his grave, and the PTA is the kind that would serve filet mignon at a barbeque. The year I student taught, I'd take the bus from the Student Ghetto, a racialized nickname given to the half dozen blocks of substandard housing available near the University from slumlord property managers like my landlord William Cornelius III. I'd transfer to another bus in the International District, another poor neighborhood that is known in Albuquerque as the War Zone for its gang and drug problems as well as its high immigrant population from war-torn countries like Vietnam and Rwanda. After a long commute, I'd arrive in the Heights, where LCHS is nestled in the foothills. I'd student teach using a classics-heavy curriculum from my cooperating teacher, and then I'd take the bus back to my neighborhood, where I would change into my McDonald's uniform for an afternoon of beeping fry baskets. The physical toll of this seeped into my academic life. My late evening classes were filled with venting about the common issues we were all feeling in our first forays into teaching, but I usually kept quiet from exhaustion.

I was 20 when I first walked into a classroom as an authority figure. Since I graduated high school early at 16 with enough concurrent courses and AP credits to skip my prerequisites at the college level, I was able to finish my Bachelor's in Philosophy at 19 and jump into a post-undergraduate teaching program. I walked in with confidence, feeling more than prepared because all of the classes I had taken to that point focused heavily on the classics, the Greeks, the Romans, and Western discourse. Once, when our cohort argued about what books we'd take with us into a nuclear bomb shelter, I took a

few seconds to rattle off an already-memorized list: Shakespeare, Thoreau, and Steinbeck. It hadn't changed since high school.

When we talk about Whiteness in schools, it means that “Whiteness is not recognized or named by white people, and a universal reference point is assumed. White people are just people” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 59). Another facet of this is that many white people, including educators, “claim that privilege is simply a reflection of hard work and virtue” although “the existence of structural inequality undermines [that]” (p. 60). In other words, they see it as that “their financial and professional successes are the result of their own efforts while ignoring the fact of white privilege” (p. 61). These unspoken lessons are reiterated through how we talk about the classics. With confidence, teachers stake their claims in arguments about the literary canon. There need not be further examination; if someone argues, we're reminded that everyone knows Shakespeare was the son of a tanner, Thoreau lived off in the woods and made it on his own, and Steinbeck literally wrote the book on poverty and migration.

Colorblindness has reinforced the appearance of success in White middle- and upper-class schools and continues to foster classist hegemony. It uses a physical metaphor to deny the lived experiences of bodies that are not white, especially when those bodies are in a lower socioeconomic stratum. This is compounded because “schools in high-poverty, low-income communities, adopt scripted curriculum more often than those in more affluent communities” (Ede, 2006). In recent years, as a result of “new reform initiatives, primarily those related to the influx of scripted curriculums (also known as canned curriculum because like a soup, it comes complete with all ingredients and is ready to be consumed) ... teachers [are left] feeling disenfranchised as

professionals” (Eisenbach, 2012, p. 153). Teaching is distilled to the actions and performance of a script; the body of a teacher is all that is required. It prevents teachers from doing the work necessary to decolonize themselves, their teacherhood, and their curriculum because it permits a life unexamined (West, Plato, & Aristophanes, 1998).

I embodied whiteness in my mannerisms, my outfit choices, the way I did my hair, the way I codeswitched; this was learned from my experiences as a student and reified in my education as a teacher. The artifact that this chapter revolves around demonstrates the journey of subverting that replication of hegemony in an image; the ID is a means to show how the body of teaching manifests, while these anecdotes uncover the way in which teachers are expected to perform their role.

A teacher’s curriculum is sedimented, formed over time by the experiences that teacher has during their own education, teacher preparation program, and years of experience (Butler, 1988; Heidegger, 2010). If the canonical curriculum is questioned during the formation of these layers, one witnesses “how deep-seated is the fear that any de-centering of Western civilizations, of the white male canon, is really an act of cultural genocide” (bell hooks, 1994, p. 32). Thankfully, a professor during that formative year of student teaching assigned me *Critical Encounters in High School English*, by Deborah Appleman (2000). It was as powerful as that childhood trip into Canyonlands, decentering the traditional Western narrative and allowing me to look beyond what I had been taught. I began questioning the canon and my role as a teacher.

What is the hidden curriculum of SpringBoard? What is the hidden message behind telling teachers they must abandon their sedimented curriculum and fall in line? Scripted curriculum is harmful because it does not provide space for truly intersectional

scholarship. It does not allow for innovation and subversion of the type demanded by a modern classroom (Leckenby & Hesse-Biber, 2007). In fact, the “current view is that scripted curriculum and culturally responsive teaching are mutually exclusive in educating culturally and linguistically diverse students” (Wyatt, 2014, p. 447). The project of crafting culturally responsive curriculum is inherently subversive because it seeks to undermine the traditional hegemony. In those shallow, unexamined scripted curricula, “only exceptional individuals, the superheroes of history from among that race or cultural group, are acknowledged” (Abdal-Haqq, 1994, p. 2). There certainly isn’t room for teachers to acknowledge intersectionality or use their pedagogy to question their ontological teacherhood.

Reading the Appleman text was my first real look into using the lenses of critical race theory, feminism, and Marxism to examine the texts we all believed were essential. Instead of replacing the literary canon, this method allows for teachers to subvert expectations and teach students to question authority, performing one of the necessary tasks of transformative pedagogy according to bell hooks (1990).

The Department

I dragged the clanking desks back into their formations, running off at the mouth to my colleague as we righted her room after the department meeting. The 2016 semester was nearly at an end. Bad news layered on top of bad news, hand in hand with exhausting standardized testing, and it tore the fight out of us. New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez dictated through her proxy Hanna Skandera, unconfirmed secretary of education, even more testing measures than we’d ever seen in the classroom. Scratch that... Many of those testing days weren’t in the classroom. They were spent in ice-cold

computer labs with ratty headphones crusted with the ear juices of students from years past, tapping on keyboards and manipulating the cursor with unfamiliar dynamics to the average touch-screen digital native freshman. I spent much of that spring hauling a cart of testing materials, headphones, blankets for the cold kids, and illicit snack items we all conspired to keep hidden from the particularly dominating tech specialist who ran the computer labs. This wasn't the conspiracy bell hooks demands; this was getting our basic needs met. I was low on the hierarchy of needs, as were my students; we were in the very pit of despair and it was about to get a whole lot worse.

“Any news on SpringBoard?” I asked.

“Do you really want to know?” she said with a grimace.

I worked at a bilingual school which offered students both Spanish and English Language Arts courses; balancing the two was the department's central task. But all teachers were required to attend the SpringBoard training, in English, for English-only resources that could only be used in ELA classrooms. Normally, we adopted specific novels or master texts and could use our department money flexibly to fill the needs of the bookroom, alternating between Spanish and English works. In addition, many teachers in the district taught two different grade levels. They'd only be given one Teacher's Edition at the training and had to make their choice.

“Not only that, but I found out I have to reschedule my surgery this summer,” she said. The district told her if she chose to miss the training, she'd be responsible for finding a substitute and attending a makeup session during the first month of school, a time when we are just barely beginning to craft our class culture. The threat of missing work also came with additional putative measures from the Public Education Department,

who decided that a teacher did not qualify as “effective” if they miss more than ten days, no matter the reason for the absence. Nobody knows if their body will hold up during the school year. Capitalism demands that we sacrifice our bodies and our labor (Marx, Engels, & Tucker, 1972).

The Training

The district held the training at a certain school in the foothills of Albuquerque. The gospel hits differently when someone is hungry. We were being paid less than half of what we get on an Inservice day and lunch wasn’t provided. Maybe that’s why I didn’t buy in as I listened to the preacher from this canned curriculum company go on about how to access the website. “This is completely irrelevant,” I thought, “because I am in a school that has three computer labs for 1800 students. I can’t assign students work on the computer, because there simply aren’t enough resources and over 60% don’t have a computer or internet access at home.” But these physical realities were ignored; the presenter droned on.

On Wednesday, June 6, halfway through the training, I received a checklist of SpringBoard Success Indicators. This list included what administrators might do on so-called Learning Walks in our classroom. It served as a reminder that our bodies belonged to our jobs: even our intonations and gestures would be analyzed. It was a manifestation of Foucault’s panopticon, in which a constant monitor ensures that everyone internalizes their own policing until the work of the administrator doing surprise walkthroughs is no longer required (1980).

Often, the response to the overwhelmingly white narrative in English Language Arts curriculum is tokenistic multiculturalism. One might experience this, for instance, in

a classroom where the teacher only teaches Black voices during Black History Month, rather than integrating all voices throughout the curriculum. This is what is meant by “multiculturalism or diversification [providing] a much prettier fig leaf for policies of laissez-faire vis-a-vis continuing racial exclusion and inequality than any intransigent white supremacy could ever have off” (Winant, 2000, p. 171). This is called “representative blackness” and it “also affords the familiar devices of Booker T. Washington-ism through which blackness is presented to white America in a filtered, acceptable form” (Rose et al., 2005, p. 44). In other words, only assimilated and so-called acceptable Blackness is allowed. For example, the textbook might use speeches from Martin Luther King, Jr., but it only includes the palatable snippets and also doesn’t include perspectives from more radical figures like Malcolm X. To combat this, “educators must take note of this crucial academic effort in order to see how whiteness studies get framed and how that framing affects educational practices” (Warren, 1999, p. 186). In a healthy classroom, “curriculum development process [continues] in the classroom” (Yavuz Konokman, Yanpar Yelken, Karasolak, & Cesur, 2017, p. 57). Scripted curriculum does not provide room for the kind of growth necessary in this case.

Diversity is diagnosed as subversion and given a prescription for curriculum that centers the hegemony and reifies its place as the holder of knowledge. One example, found in a sample lesson on close reading from SpringBoard, displays this: the students are to be given a text from a Netherlands immigrant named Edward Bok who ultimately says of America: “I owe to her the most priceless gift that any nation can offer, and that is opportunity” (College Board, 2014, p. 2). He goes on to say the immigrant “must develop and mould his character by overcoming the habits resulting from national shortcomings”

(p. 2). Finally, the teacher mentor text explains to teachers that what Bok means is that “the American emphasis on material wealth is only a “front” used to support the greater ideals of hard work and fair play” (p. 6). The shadow curriculum here is clear: immigrants must adapt to the American hegemony and forgo their own ontology in favor of American hegemony, which is superior. By choosing to include this narrative perspective, to frame it in this way, SpringBoard is making a statement about America, American values, and model immigrants who adapt quickly and see the superiority of the United States as a given. It reinforces the ideas of white supremacy, manifest destiny, and ultimately cultural imperialism.

I came away from the SpringBoard training not with 180 lessons, but with one: my district demands compartmentalization; my voice and body are only valuable when they act out the performance of teacherhood in compliance with prescriptive hegemony.

The Body Keeps the Score

I felt violently ill even picking up the training manual. The body keeps the score of one’s trauma, and I was left feeling stripped bare of my dignity and all the years I’d spent crafting my unique teacher’s voice (van der Kolk, 2014). But bell hooks (1994) writes that “teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (p. 15).

A big issue with SpringBoard and other canned curriculum has always been that it takes away teachers’ rights to decide when and where a student is evaluated, and especially that it pushes for far too many inauthentic evaluations rather than the more common, practical formative assessments most teachers use to check for understanding

throughout the lesson. It denies teacher professionalism and distills our profession to an untrue and unexamined recitation in the way that Heidegger (1977) describes as an advance of the technologization of the world, pushing us toward robotic interfaces. Imagine that every single page has blank tasks and questions to fill out, and that administrators would be walking through and pressuring teachers to make sure their students used these consumable textbooks with fidelity. No skipping false narratives, no adjusting for the student who wasn't getting it. Everyone was expected to be on the same unit, interpreting the text in the same fashion, at the same point in the year.

With the way Generation Z is adapting to technology, it's incredibly tempting to let someone else do the heavy lifting. After all, the experts can make sure the curriculum aligns to the standards. Conformity is comforting, and it allows us to avoid putting so much of ourselves into the curriculum. This is nefarious because "the objectification of the teacher within bourgeois educational structures seemed to denigrate notions of wholeness and uphold the idea of a mind/body split, one that promotes and supports compartmentalization" (bell hooks, 1994, p. 16). But also, to struggle against scripted curriculum mandates feels futile. These can feel like wasted efforts when we are being attacked from every corner, ceilings of under-maintained infrastructure both literally and figuratively crashing down upon our browbeat heads. It would have been so much easier to let things slide, especially given the other fights cooking up in the district. But whenever I got those feelings of being too insignificant, too little to fight, I remembered bell hooks.

An Eye Toward the Future

Responsive curriculum is the living, beating heart of the classroom. It allows us to confront the ways in which “racism and sexism are interlocking systems of domination which uphold and sustain one another” (bell hooks, 1990, p. 59). Students often endure a curriculum that often has nothing to do with them, leading teachers to fumble when confronted with questions about the relevance of old dead white men (Quigley, 2018, p. 2). Because so many teachers lack a non-white perspective, they must be explicitly taught how to teach a culturally responsive curriculum (p. 2).

It is established that the majority of today’s teachers are ill-prepared to investigate race and culture (Howard, 2014). Not only that, but most teachers are middle-class white women (Hochschild, 2003). Too many of these teachers pretend they do not see color and that race is not important (Pollock, 2004). This is often termed colorblindness or colormuteness (Pollock, 2004). This is problematic because pretending that they do not see color causes them to develop deficit thinking (Watson, 2011, p. 24). At school, there is a set of social skills, behavior, and knowledge that requires cultural capital to understand (Lewis, 2003). In addition, there exists a hidden curriculum that is made up of unspoken values; this hidden curriculum is interposed by race (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008, p. 593). The underlying function of our educational system tends to do a disservice to certain students, especially if they come from a low-income family or identify with ethnic minorities. These students have fallen a measurable amount behind classmates from wealthy and / or white families when it comes to academic achievement (Hochschild, 2003; Mahari de Silva, Gleditsch, Job, Jesme, Urness, & Hunter, 2018; Langhout & Mitchell, 2008). Thus, the hidden curriculum and the way schools currently

function are both rooted in practices that result in harm to certain groups of students, specifically students of color. The very structure of our education system has a hidden curriculum rooted in success for mainstream White culture and oppression to students of color.

If we are ever to address this, we must make the hidden curriculum explicit. According to Howard (2014), our classrooms desperately need conversations about race and racism (p. 108).

In addition, as demographics shift, educational institutions must make race a mandatory topic any time research, practice, or policy is involved (Howard, 2014, p. 108). In order to address this, schools must provide ongoing professional development on race and inequity (Watson, 2011, p. 33). It would be an egregious error to ignore the hidden curriculum and continue business as usual. Instead, teachers must confront this hidden curriculum and recognize how it influences educational outcomes (Howard, 2014, p. 108). This necessitates a curricular move.

The strategy to confront these problems is to make culturally responsive curriculum. Schools must seek out pedagogical practices that target the performance of non-White students (McCarthy, 1994). By seeking a culturally comprehensive curriculum, the school culture might find itself more balanced (Abdal-Haqq, 1994, p. 1). However, the underlying structures that have resulted in our schools reflecting a White ideology also must be examined (McCarthy, 1994). Culturally responsive curriculum benefits from diversity, rather than seeking to sweep it under the rug (Abdal-Haqq, 1994, p. 1). Teachers should be trained to craft their own curriculum, because they are the point

of contact closest to the realities of our students in need. It helps us interrogate our praxis and our pedagogy.

Our work sometimes forces us to replicate systems of oppression; for instance, “the culturally hegemonic priorities of math and reading under NCLB are undeniable” (Lewis, 2010, p. 138). When we consider this hidden curriculum, we start to see that even the objective truth of math and science is not actually objective. Here is where teachers can make the most meaningful impact. An important factor to remember is:

Unlike other areas of scientific inquiry, the subjects of social inquiry can be read and influenced by what is said and written about them. This introduces the likelihood of self-fulfilling prophecies and other feedback effects in both the doing and dissemination of social research and imposes on social researchers a unique set of moral and political responsibilities to reflect on such effects in the conception and execution of their studies.

(Kohli & Burbules, 2012, p. 73)

Thus, if teachers, especially teacher-researchers, study how the hidden curriculum encourages compliance to hegemony, they can actually be effective catalysts for change in our classrooms. After all, they embody authority. Culturally relevant curriculum offers a way in which to engage in the research that Kohli & Burbules (2012) suggest.

To truly decolonize the English Language Arts classroom and undergo a radical change, both teachers and students must seek not just to decenter the white male lens, but to actually critique why it has prevailed for so long. I have used the materials from my doctoral journey to critique my position on curriculum and probe what we can do better to meet the cultural and holistic needs of our students. My autoethnography will continue

this necessary, intersectional, antiracist work in my pedagogy. This nontraditional dissertation is only the beginning.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: TRINITIZING TEACHING

In this epilogue, I review how my autoethnography trinitizes teaching. This dissertation problematizes the traditional views, practices, and ethos of teacherhood and offers a Marxist method for decolonizing teacherhood. It takes an autoethnographical approach to the work of anti-racism, class solidarity, and feminist teaching. I offer three pieces that delve into my own decolonization work; these pieces are divided into the theme of mind, body, and spirit. Using the artifacts of identification cards throughout my life as a teacher and a student, I explore my past and present as an educator (Bennett, 2005; Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). I use critical theory as my framework in order to put forth the argument that autoethnography can be used as critical inquiry into our teaching (Prince & Levy, 2017; Walker, 2017). Ultimately, autoethnography is the process of critical interrogation of education for the purpose of transformative pedagogy.

The primacy of my argument involves Hegelian dialectics. In my literature review, I synthesize the philosophical implications of using dialectics to analyze the dualism of career and self, which encompasses my terminology of teacherhood. Dialectics here means the conversation that happens between two seemingly opposed sides of the same coin and the tension that exists between them; here, the two concepts are theory and praxis, but also career and self, as it pertains to the role of educators in both transforming and maintaining society. When I discuss autoethnography as a tool of

decolonization, I argue that praxis itself is the drive to “alter the natural and social world [and shed] light on the historical specificity and structural foundations of that world” (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, Brown, & McLaren, 2018, p. 550). I wanted to become a teacher because I was idealistic and wanted to change the world, but I argue that unless we critique what we want to change and how, we risk replicating the same injustices that spurred us to enter education.

Hegel founded the concept of dialectics and Marx and Engels built upon it the concept of dialectical materialism, which Freire and Vygotsky translated and applied to education. Together, these philosophical works underpin my argument for the potential transformative power of education. However, the concept of neoliberalism in a capitalist and educational sense stands looming in the background, ready to latch onto the concepts of identity for the purpose of further exploiting and dividing the working class.

Education serves as “a significant state apparatus in the reproduction and replication of the capitalist social form” (Hill & Kumar, 2009). This means that it supports the hegemonic social order conceptualized by Gramsci (1971) and discussed in terms of its oppression in queer, feminist, and Chicana theory by Anzaldua (1987). It is important to note that “class is not the only form of oppression in contemporary society, yet it is also a fact that class is... essential for producing and reproducing the cultural and economic activities of humans under a capitalist mode of production” (Hill & Kumar, 2009). Neoliberalism itself is an attempt to color capitalism as friendly to education and freedom, when in fact it is a contradictory entanglement that prevents students from using education in the Freirean sense to overthrow the shackles of oppression. This dissertation

demonstrates using autoethnography to interrogate education through a critical lens with Marxist, feminist, and decolonizing intents.

Autoethnography demands that we “examine where our social forms of consciousness are derived from; to ask how do we know what we know and where do our forms of knowledge come from” (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, Brown, & McLaren, 2018, p. 557). By diving into who I am as a teacher, I am wrestling with the very concept of knowledge and the project of its arbitration. In my life, I have helped maintain the hegemony while also being a victim of it. The argument is that education replicates hegemony so that the “dominant class no longer [needs] to resort to force so as to manipulate the thought processes and actions of the ruled” (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, Brown, & McLaren, 2018, p. 560). Students and teachers are trapped mentally into maintaining their own cage through everything from grade point average, dress code, the notion of classroom authority, the literary canon, and the very purpose of education. This, in turn, reinforces and reifies white supremacy, capitalism, and the patriarchy. The act of autoethnography is itself a dialectic between who I am as a colonizer and as an artifact of colonization.

The methodology of using artifacts, both the physical and the digital, lends itself to this type of introspection because it focuses the act of remembering (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). Throughout my dissertation, I have interrogated my self as I am represented in these identification cards. I also included digital artifacts stamped with my impressions of teaching experiences. These artifacts are compiled into a story in three acts, and I use the metaphorical trinity of mind, body, and spirit to discuss how teacherhood develops in the face of oppression.

In my first piece, I discuss the spirit of teacherhood. The dialectics of teacherhood involve both action and identity and the tensions between them. Teacherhood is “an embodied, lived, and dynamic set of social practices” (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, Brown, & McLaren, 2018, p. 556). Teacherhood encompasses the verb “to teach,” as in the day-to-day activity that comprises teaching, but it also goes deeper into the ontology of teaching; it asks, “Who am I as a teacher?” In a Heideggerian *Dasein* sense, this means that teacherhood is Being as a teacher (Heidegger, 2010; Griffiths, 2017). It takes place behind the scenes but is also the performance of teaching and the history and cultural identity of the performer as an audience all at once. The spirit of teacherhood involves the way teaching changes oneself down to the core. This piece also presents the purity and naivety of the soul of a first-year teacher. In much of Western theology, we are born with a soul; it is the only thing we have as we begin navigating the world. My soul drew me to my soulmate: teaching called out to me from the time I was six. My soul and the spirit of teacherhood are the same; they’ll be seen in the ghost I’ll leave behind to wander my old classrooms when I die, the crypt where this final manuscript will be repositied, and the memories my students will take of me to their graves.

The public space has only just begun to recognize the deep and mostly invisible work of teaching through the global pandemic and crisis that brings schooling to the forefront. As the classroom becomes a panopticon in which families, administrators, students, and teachers act under the presence of digitized authority and the awareness of the permanence of recordings, the performance of education has higher stakes (Foucault, 1980). More than ever, the role of education in radicalizing and uplifting the oppressed is on display, for better or worse. This necessitates a conversation about teacherhood and

how it inadvertently and explicitly complies with the colonist agenda of modern education. This piece also offers a path of resistance against this colonization of the spirit.

Teacherhood is first crafted and recognized as such during teacher preparation, which often takes place in a formal program through a university or nonprofit organization. Teacher preparation programs often convey the message that one cannot learn to teach in a secluded classroom without direct application, especially regarding cultural responsiveness (Acquah & Szelei, 2020). In my dissertation, I take this a step further. Student-teaching allows for teaching in practice, but this must be guided by efforts to decolonize lest it replicate the exact system that produces and maintains the deeply racist, anti-feminist, classist, neurotypical hegemony I have experienced and interrogated throughout this dissertation. The threat of replication forced a reaction in me; that reaction might have easily been giving up, feeling hopeless, and being nihilistic about the essence of teaching. I offer, instead, a radically optimistic look at the future. The possibilities are endless when we use critical remembering as the foundation of our teaching (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Bronner, 2011; Dahms, 2011).

The dialectics of teacherhood means that teachers cannot learn to teach in a classroom, but the classroom is the only place to learn how to teach. This seemingly contradictory statement means that teaching is a skill and art learned through both nontraditional and academic means. Teaching happens in the home, in the kindergarten room, in places of worship, in front of the screen, on the playground, and in quiet everyday moments. Teacherhood is shaped by all of these experiences. Only through this dialectical contradiction can we begin to understand teacherness.

In my second piece, I dive into the mind of teacherhood. How has our thinking been colonized? And what can be done about it? Praxis is formed in the mind; because it is influenced by thoughts, it has the potential for replicating the thinking patterns that reinforce unwarranted power and legitimize it. Active remembering is the cure for the malady of colonized minds. Active remembering of our past allows us to uncover our present and determine our future (Anzaldua, 1987). But what method is the most successful for decolonizing the mind? Autoethnography doesn't just enable active remembering; it requires it.

My dissertation focuses on the written form of active remembering known as autoethnography. This methodology can also be done communally, through arts, through digital media, and through multitudinous ways that have yet to be explored, as long as it focuses on how we became and are constantly becoming who we are as teachers. However, it must be informed by marginalized voices. I argue that the mind is made up. By this, I mean three things. First, the mind is something that is cartesian in its existence. Second, it is made up of our memories. And third, the mind of academia has been made up about neurodivergence but this making up can be undone precisely because it is made up of us, the academics doing the scholarship that upholds our profession.

This piece offers ways to accomplish this: I discuss citing scholarly work directly from marginalized sources in order to legitimize it in the eyes of traditional scholars. I also talk about going beyond dismantling the literary canon and actively including voices of the marginalized at every step in the classroom. Finally, I call readers to question who is on the metaphorical and literal committee. This piece's crux is to work toward enacting

a pedagogy that builds off of Vygotsky, Freire, and Anzaldua and carves out the space for students to encounter and create anti-traditional narrative academic work.

My final piece focuses on the body of teaching. Teachers represent the authority we seek to undermine (Byrne, 2017; Horvat, 2003). How can we encourage activism if we quash it in the classroom? This piece navigates my memories of scripted curriculum, but it also shows how it radicalized me. It sums up the arguments I've made toward decolonization of the day to day and of the overall themes in curriculum. I offer practical solutions and research that backs up my argument that this work helps both students and teachers develop a sense of activism, autonomy, and self-efficacy (Kreber & Klampfleitner, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

As the climactic third act of my autoethnography, this piece represents a final ultimate struggle between who I am and who I have been. The battles I've had against myself throughout the dissertation come to a head in the memories of my fight against a curriculum adoption. This is where I hit rock bottom in my teaching career; the journey back is how I was inspired to join this doctoral program and work through my experiences so that I can resist what tried to kill me.

This dissertation is baptismal; it represents a review of my conduct as a student and as a teacher, but it also offers hope and everlasting salvation in that here, at the end, I am ready to fight again. My project of autoethnography requires that I continue unpacking what it means to be a teacher, who I was, who I became, and how I got here. Ultimately, "the task of educators is to work with people, so they develop their capacity for praxiological modes of thinking that ultimately lead to action" (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, Brown, & McLaren, 2018, p. 563). This is the heavy, uncomfortable work of

decolonization as praxis, and it is accomplished through a seemingly passive act that turns out to be one of our most painful labors as teachers: remembering. These three pieces contain my journey so far, but the work will never be over.

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IDENTIFICATION CARDS



Figure A.1 Appendix A Photographs of Me