Vagabond: Returning To Autoethnography As A Doctoral Nomad

Karyn McElroy
National Louis University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss
Part of the Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons

Recommended Citation
VAGABOND:
RETURNING TO AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A DOCTORAL NOMAD

Karyn McElroy
Curriculum and Social Inquiry/Curriculum Advocacy and Policy

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education

National College of Education
National Louis University
August 2016
(signature page)
Abstract

_Vagabond: Returning to Autoethnography as a Doctoral Nomad_ is a journey into what is described as a purposeful and rhizomatic inquiry of spaces and places in knowing. It prompts questioning within the author such as, “What has this doctoral journey come to mean, and where do I go now as I step outside the roots which have planted in me this need to wander? How do I navigate this struggle?” The work is a coming-to-terms piece. It is a hopeful wandering and documented artifact capturing an organic process of unlearning, relearning, and examining locations of _being_, while recognizing the emergent need to embrace fracture, fiction, and multiple conflicting positions. By returning to ethnographies or artifacts constructed throughout the doctoral journey as a “doctoral neophyte,” the stage is set for an interpretative performance in poststructural fashion. Positioning and contrasting interviews, poems, and essays written during the coursework as a doctoral student begins to capture the intersecting positions of walking as a mother, teacher, and woman. These narratives are offered as data and then juxtaposed with cultural artifacts authored by some of the _Riot Grrrl_ “zinesters” of the 1990s. Through the folding and positioning of such work, the readers are invited to participate in a poststructural journey as a nomadic inquirer, walking with the author in the hopes to _become-other_. In documenting this journey or doctoral-audit-trail of deconstruction, the middle ground is worked between the spaces of academic curriculum and lived experiences. This Deleuzian _line of flight_ takes the reader through stories of vulnerability, challenges commonsense assumptions, defines metanarratives, and questions certainty. In regards to curriculum studies, this work is a coming to: a
becoming. It celebrates and embraces curriculum as a life event that can be used as a tool for transformation.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Antonina Lukenchuk, Dr. Patrick Roberts, Dr. Eleanor Binstock, and Dr. Virginia Jagla for becoming nomads with me as I walked myself into a new location as a woman, mother, and teacher. Your dedication, support, and investment in my work was graciously embraced as you entertained and embraced my wandering mind, helping me move to a place where I could work this middle ground. Your words are what gave me the strength and courage to write from a place of vulnerability. Without you walking with me, making meaning in becoming-other, I would not have arrived home. I deeply thank you for this. I feel each of you is a part of me and I am a part of you.

Without the support of my family, this journey would not have been possible. I will forever be indebted to you. You have given me more than I can ever give you. You are my inspiration and have brought me to life. You are my strength, my rock, my everything. To my husband Luke, “love you more.” To my mother and “Nana,” “que sera sera.” And to my father, I hope that I have made you proud. I will forever be here to listen and walk with each of you in your stories as we travel the spaces and places in this thing we call life.
Dedication

Finn and Briella, this work is for you. You have taught me more than I will ever be able teach you. Each day that I walk this earth, I look to you to guide me. I want you to know that deep within you, you hold everything you will ever need. Remember that. Hang onto it. Cherish it. Cradle it.

My hope for you is to always speak your story. Never be afraid to be vulnerable in your words and your actions. I hope you always walk into life with the spirit of adventure that you hold now. Keep discovering, running, dancing, creating, and building your greatest dreams. Write your own story, your own way, and simmer on it. I can’t wait to walk this life beside you and watch you discover what it is in life that moves you. You are my inspiration. I love you. Always and forever, Mom.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

*Doctoral Wanderlust*

*Purposeful, Hopeful Wandering: A Coming to Terms*

*Theoretical Positioning of the Study: Locating the Nomad Within a Poststructuralist’s Rhizome*

*Writing Rhizomatically: Folding and Layering Positions*

*Significance of Wanderlust*

*On Wanderlust*

*The demarcations of being: Blurring lines*

**CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

*Inlet to Review of Literature*

*The Currency of Intellectuals*

*A Patriarchal Visa: The Permission to Wander*

*An Eye to the Terrain*

*Intellect Beyond What is Seen*

*Poststructuralism: A Tool for Dismantling Bricks*

*Subjectification*

*Education Ideology and the Exclusion of Subjectivities*

*Feminisms and Poststructuralism*

*A Father’s Tongue and Epistemic Authority*

*No “We”? Femocrats, Post-Posts, and Whiteness*

*Challenges to Address in Research: Just a Middle Class White Woman*

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

*Layering Methodological Techniques: Constructing a Topography of Self*

*Vulnerability in Traveling Alone*

*Vulnerability captured: Essays, excerpts, poems, and interview*
| Poststructuralist Art Forms as a Methodological Technique for Journeying | 95 |
| The Art of Deconstruction and Criticism with Ethnography | 96 |
| Assessing this poststructuralist work | 104 |
| Cultural ARTifacts: Zines | 108 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: PERFORMING THE DATA | 114 |
| The Journey Into Feminist ARTifacts and Topography of Self | 114 |
| Artifact 1: “My Son, I Cannot Let Go of Your Hand (Spring, 2013) | 117 |
| Artifact 2: “Shifting Power to the Children: Ideological Pluralism, the Standardistas, and the Call for Narratives” (Excerpt) (Spring, 2014) | 122 |
| Artifact 3: “Know Thyself” (Spring, 2014) | 141 |
| Artifact 4: “Awakening” (Spring, 2013) | 147 |
| Artifact 5: “Yoga as Discourse” (Spring, 2013) Entwined with Artifact 6: “Death” (Fall, 2013) | 155 |
| Artifact 7: “This Sucks, I Should Have Written a Quantitative Dissertation (June, 2016) | 176 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: COMING TO TERMS | 179 |
| An Interpretative Performance | 179 |
| Walking Myself into a New Woman: On Experiences, Epiphanies, and Becoming-Other | 179 |
| Writing for epiphanies | 180 |
| On the “findings”: Finding and locating the reader’s experience | 183 |
| Versions upon versions: Difference and deferral | 183 |
| Journeying the Open-Ended Terrain as an Autoethnographer: The Gaze | 186 |
| Stories and becoming-other | 186 |
| A Final Performance | 191 |
| There Must Be Reason | 202 |
| Future Research | 211 |
| References | 215 |
Chapter One: Introduction

I was running and deliberately lost my way. The world far off and nothing but my breath and the very next step and it’s like hypnosis. The feeling of conquering my own aliveness with no task but to keep going, making every way the right way and that’s a metaphor for everything.


Doctoral Wanderlust

*Purposeful, Hopeful Wandering: A Coming to Terms*

Like Eriksson’s quote, I am deliberately losing my way, attempting to capture my aliveness, using metaphor for all around me. Boundaries are crackling, borders are breaking, my world is shaking. The quake, which I am myself creating, is a hopeful wandering to unlearn, relearn, and question. I am losing my way to find my way. There is no set path. The lostness I inhabit embraces the steps I must take; it is an attempt to push the boundaries of knowing.
I am in a temporal space. Temporary, always moving, evolving, and unfolding. In this space I occupy, I face a most challenging quest. I am in the age of exploration—self-exploration, more specifically. I am in need of returning to my primordial self to gain a second look. I am also morphing into a space where I am readying my mind and body for the isolated and daunting task of what I hope will be an electrifying journey into my dissertation. As I write this reflection, I realize the pieces I have constructed in this space are much different than the presentation of a traditional academic review. It is more the playful wandering of a nomad. For I am a “nomadic inquirer” and this is my journey (Richardson, 1994; St. Pierre, 1997). On this zine-like production, processing and touring my reflection through my current doctoral space of wanderlust, I hope to stop in some places along the way for you, my reader, with the purpose of providing what I see as shards—broken pieces fallen from this glass house known as curriculum and life—to possibly see an alternative view. My quest is to deconstruct this journey in an attempt to arrive at some point, a seed, perhaps I should say, which may lead me to further research. Therefore, I inquire in self-reflection, sent wondering, “What has this doctoral journey come to mean and where do I go now as I step outside the roots which have planted in me this need to wander? How do I navigate this struggle?” This is a coming-to-terms piece. It is a psychoanalytic deconstruction. I am working through my ideas to come to some kind of understanding on where to go next. It is an examination of this culminating moment within the experiences tied to earning a degree in one of the highest levels of education one can acquire in America, and I lay on this red velvet couch questioning, “What do I know? Where is my location?”
I do not hope to capture a thing or product, to obtain some grand result or construct some universally applicable model for curriculum. Rather, I want to capture this moment, this temporality and ever-evolving nomad moment. And this nomad has spent her entire life researching knowledge for others. In meeting others’ criteria regarding what counts in the world of knowledge. In this most hopeful transformational space, I am sent spinning into wonder, questioning with lust. For this research is for me. This is a return to myself. It is an inner journey, a place of reflection where primordial thinking is welcomed. Primordial is a term I use in this work to refer to a space where intuition and instinct, as well as free flow of thought, are encouraged and welcomed. Primordial in this work refers to a self which is attempting to break further away, reexamining (as impossible as that may be) from the effects of subjectification (Davies, Flemmen, Gannon, Laws, & Watson, 2002; Derrida, 1976).

To clarify my location, I have tapped into work from Creswell (2013) who provides a useful “road map” for navigating towards a defined purpose statement. Using pieces of Creswell’s template, I am suggesting the following study: The purpose of this poststructural autoethnographic study is to analyze and critique my documented lived experiences as a beginning, female doctoral student within cultural, historical, and social contexts. Through this process of critical self-reflection and psychoanalytic deconstruction, I hope to get in touch with my primordial self in an attempt to be present, open, and available for others by moving towards a space of deeper awareness in my location, thus becoming responsible for my own existence. With this poststructural stance, I embrace curriculum as nomadic, hoping to bridge some middle ground between
curriculum and lived experiences (Hwu, 2004; Reynolds & Webber, 2004). Through an eclectic deconstruction of my autoethnographies, I am proposing to begin this journey.

In regards to curriculum studies, this work is a coming to: a becoming. It is, as Semetsky (2004) writes, a Deluzian sense of becoming-other. She states, “Free expression and free speech contribute to self-becoming-other, thus constituting the very process of subject-formation. The new subjectivity is manifested by expressing itself passionately and freely as so ‘to bring something to life, to free life from where it’s trapped, to trace lines of flight’” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 141, as cited in Semetsky, 2004, p. 319). These tracings, or lines of flight, are working the middle spaces in a poststructuralist way. Reynolds and Webber (2004) write, “Perhaps we should live and research in the middle, in spaces that are neither terroristic nor nihilistic, neither exclusively political nor exclusively technological” (p. 16). In this space of “dis/position,” in “lines of flight,” there is a “shared concern for viewing educational phenomena from alternative perspectives that are not method driven, but instead derived from the insights of a disposition that seeks to disentangle research from its traditional dependence on formalities” (Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. 10). Further Reynolds and Webber (2004) argue the following:

Research in this nomadic/line of flight matter would share an undisclosed disillusionment with viewing education from the perspective of curriculum criticizing or from formal training. Research could be derived from theorists whose experiences in their nonprofessional lives have dictated their focus of study. In a sense, they would be nomads, both professionally and theoretically, preferring to “do curriculum” on an alternative playing field. The Deleuzian nomad would view curriculum theorizing and research from this perspective, viewing its role in theory construction as one that comes from uninhabited (and perhaps uninhabitable) spaces and speaks about the unspeakable. Irreverent, mobile, and at times offensive, the nomad finds knowledge and feeling in unframed, ambiguous, and common places. (p. 11)
Finding knowledge and feeling in “unframed, ambiguous, and common places” opens possibility for others and self-becoming-others. It is a working of the middle ground, this nomadic inquiry, in a way that can bring life into curriculum not only for myself, but possibly for others. It may be used in a desire for other doctoral students to feel less lost, less unsure of who they are, and less doubtful of their passions known by suggesting they look to their lives, their life events, to find new revealing places in living curriculum.

As cited in Hwu (2004), “Daignault (1986) believed, ‘Education is the undying trace of the text of our day-to-day life, and such a text, which I call an expression, is nothing but the boundary itself’ (p. 8)” (p. 192). This boundary suffocates social realities and meaningful experiences in life because these occurrences are filled with events that can be used as curriculum. For according to Hwu (2004), curriculum is an event. The notion of curriculum as an event is an occurrence underexamined and out of play in many current educational settings. Instead, Hwu argues that “prevailing structuralist-minded schooling has excluded the dynamics among student/teachers; that it offers false hope of certainty in achieving educational excellence; that it overlooks the social matrix embodied within itself; and that it diminishes the tensions of race, gender, class, and ethnicity by creating a homogeneous educational enterprise” (p. 181). With this argument surfacing in my work, I have hopes that the reader may begin to examine his or her own middle ground—this untapped space in their lives—in working the bridge between predetermined curricular objectives and their potentially meaningful life experiences, or events, that have the awaiting momentum for new understandings which are transient, nomadic, and filled with the recognition of paradoxical instance. Paradoxical instance “is the movement of forces that circulates between two series of oppositions and moves in
both directions at the same time” (Hwu, 2004, p. 199). Such a paradoxical instance refers to the division between atomized, predetermined objectives within common, universal curriculum and lived experiences endured by very different and unique students from various environments. Daignault suggests that if one bridges binaries and constructs multiple definitions regarding what counts as curriculum, it is possible to reexamine education in new light. Hwu (2004) writes, “There is a whole ‘geography’ in people—with lines of flight, series of events” (p. 184). These lines of flights and series of events—the “geography” in people—holds the potential for a reworking of education through the nomadic journey of their middle ground. This work I am suggesting is an examination of my lines of flight, my life as events, my lived curriculum as an additional layer that I hope can surface as relevant and metamorphic data leading to insights on how to work the middle ground between curriculum as a predetermined product, dropped at the door in a box, and the lines of flight underexamined in the pursuit of knowing. It is a nomadic journey. I am proposing with hopes of suggesting new interpretations regarding what counts as curriculum. It is an attempt to move away from curriculum being viewed as the “stepchild” to other disciplines, as argued by Daignault (Hwu, 2004, p. 182).

**Theoretical Positioning of the Study: Locating the Nomad Within a Poststructuralist’s Rhizome**

I must preface this exploration with a confession that may change the way in which you view my work. I am a feminist. I am a woman in my own right and the life I lead wears “woman” first across every inch of my body. And I consider myself poststructuralist. I will attempt to describe these positions in depth in Chapter Two. The lenses of poststructuralism are complex and lengthy, and are more appropriately explored within the following chapter. However, I will gently brush the skin of poststructuralism
in passing here to begin a reflection into my theoretical positioning. I am prefacing this dialogue in this way as it is the genesis of clearing up the film of some murky waters. I am not apologizing for this categorization of both poststructuralist and feminist, but rather attempting to be visible—just a bit more transparent. For the work that I do isn’t quite like that of the norm in academia and I work to “unshackle” the chains that have bound me. Some of it is messy, some of it is raw, and some of it is uneasy. I do not always know where I will go, where I will journey, but in order for you to move into this space with me, there is one thing you must know: I am not an authority of any sort. The more I attempt to know, the less I feel I actually do, and so the lines are blurred on these pages. Sections are flowing from one into another, back and forth, and returning again. My work draws on thinkers like Heidegger (1927), Greene (1995), Foucault (1994), Derrida (1976), Deleuze (2009), Semetsky (2012), Baudrillard (1985), Lather (1991), Lyotard (1984), St. Pierre and Pillow (2000), and Weedon (1997) (discussed in depth in Chapter Two). Not only do I question ways of thinking, writing, and conceptualization, but I also question the very sense of being in the world, and specifically how these notions weave within poststructural curriculum, and thus life, while being concurrently embedded within and among social and historical constructs. While I examine being in the world and being-with-others, I follow poststructuralist inquiry by attempting to deconstruct the taken-for-granted knowledge upheld by institutions and the norms in academia. My theoretical position questions systemic knowledge, evolving from the continued favoring of Enlightenment constructions tied to what counts as “valuable” and “useable” knowledge. With the hierarchical favoring of specific values which have refused to move beyond and/or forward by a lack of deconstructing common sense
assumptions in education, prevailing positions regarding curriculum seem unmovable. These constructions, which I discuss in social and historical contexts within the review of literature in Chapter Two, have developed a limited and linguistically controversial position on defining what counts as curriculum, thus continuing the binary opposition of education within and among real life events and contexts. What knowledge is constituted as worthy from the position of educators can no longer simply be recognized and assumed as unquestioned, universal truths and “common sense” powering the way in which we act in the world and within ourselves (Kohli & Burbules, 2013). It is acknowledged here that the Enlightenment was a revolutionary, moving, and extremely progressive time, resulting in a magnitude and wealth of indisputably remarkable and transformative innovations in thinking. In regards to the Enlightenment, the work I examine strives to push beyond current assumptions and question the ways in which it may be possible to relearn or rework our understandings of education that seem to be fixed and bound to specific ideologies that stem from the Enlightenment time, but do not define it in its entirety. In fact, poststructuralists are not anti-Enlightenment, but are suggesting thinking beyond it. Thus, the poststructuralist position I value dramatically shapes the way I approach inquiry as well as the extent to which I navigate this struggle.

Organically emerging from my poststructuralist lens are rhizomatic methodological techniques. Methodology “reflects an overarching process or plan for researching phenomena” (Lukenchuk, 2013, p. 73). I propose using methodological techniques in my research as it suggests multiple ways of knowing, rather than framing my position in a singular way. When exploring multidimensional and conceptually complex avenues of research to foster creativity, it seems methodological techniques is a

The rhizome network represents a space with no beginnings or endings, with no tracing capacity, defined as an emerging term from Deleuze and Guattari’s (2009) work in *A Thousand Plateaus*. As further described by Alverman (as cited in St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000), “This rhizomatous image of a map, in contrast to the rooted knowledge one obtains from the tree (a symbol of received knowledge passed down from the humanism of Enlightenment time), is what distinguishes it from a tracing” (p. 116). As I work through the reflection of my doctoral journey, hoping to come to a space where I may move into a new one, I envision the rhizome as my process. This is the wandering I speak of.

**Writing Rhizomatically: Folding and Layering Positions**

The manner in which I write aims at reclaiming my own self through the narration of story, the discussion of voices I have a biased value for in the field, and the use of art in the form of poetics, lyrics, and image. I use these media as they weave meaningfully throughout my life, reminding me of the *feeling* within language and rhythms. To separate those experiences from who I am would present the reader with an even more distorted picture than the one I am about to paint. I will clearly make mistakes in this journey as a nomad, but it is in the struggle where I hope to find a new space to inquire. I may fail. For me, the significance of this project is not diminished by the recognition that I may fail. No, I *will* fail at times. However, *not* attempting to capture this journey, *not* creating a work that represented all that I feel I am working through, would be a much bigger failure. For that would not be an attempt at exposing my multiple and conflicting
layers of “truth” telling. I then would be taking the stance of authority, bending and manipulating in a portrayal of an all-knowing being, and the perpetuation of power would remain. It would be of even less truth than the fiction I lay before you. At least here, in this temporal space, I can attempt to diminish the idea and admit to myself that a title I may earn someday—Dr.—does not give me some authority or power on what it is I know and can honestly tell you as a singular truth.

As touched upon previously, my work is a coming-to-terms piece. This is very much tied to my theoretical positioning because it fashions the way that I view research and the aims of my study. Further, I am coming to terms because I am working through the ideas I hope to research in a way that embraces uncertainty, curiosity, and raw wonder, in a way that feels natural and organic, and in a way that already feels like a first step in returning home. My hope in examining my doctoral journey on all fronts—autobiographically, socially, and historically tied to women’s studies through the use of literature and art in a multidimensional attempt—does not offer one truth. It simply embraces tension, in a poststructuralist manner.

Significance of Wanderlust

On one front, I am sharing this nomadic inquiry in a desire for other lifelong learners or education junkies like me to question certainty. Perhaps it could foster risk taking, creativity, and the questioning of self-locations. I am hoping it acts as a call to welcome complexity, challenges, and the examination of surroundings from the temporary position in which one stands, especially if the experience of disconnection in and among institutions of education has them feeling powerless. And clearly, it is a purposeful journey for me as it is an attempt at moving to a new space on this canvas of
curriculum. It is not an advertisement or attempt to solicit or convince others to buy in, but rather to expose the process—the journey, the inquiry. I would like to document this evolutionary journey of my thoughts so that others might feel compelled to do the same, not in a matter of repetition, not in a form of following this inquiry as a template, not in a way that allows me to act as a universal model for others. This is a responsibility I do not want to have. It is more a rhizomatic questioning of sorts, a questioning that I admit I feel others can benefit from as they move through systems of education, but through this mystery known as life. This kind of freedom has unexpected results. And the creative play with ideas stifles the restlessness I encounter when reading and reflecting upon assumed-to-be-factual knowledge that is considered commonsensical flooding the institutional spaces that I breathe.

I am working to come to terms with authority and power issues associated with my position as a doctoral student. I am coming to terms with how to navigate the constant pressure to leave my “self” at the door. This work is needed, for it can serve as an original way to embrace the plurality of story and self, illustrating the way that bias seeps into language as well as how knowledge constructions are reliant upon the sociohistorical and cultural contexts of specific ideologies. It is an act of resistance in order to attempt to stop the perpetuation of a push for the demarcation between who I am and what I know as an educator, forever student, mother, and woman. This work is important to me because I am attempting to return to my primordial self and bloodline of autoethnography, which I consider a vulnerable attempt at producing the kind of research that cannot be replicated, does not claim authority, and exposes bias in attempts at transparency. Narrative autoethnography is significant because it can serve as an audit
trail of this vulnerability and risk taking, which I consider to be a rare happening in educational research (discussed in detail in Chapter Two). This work can document my footprints. An audit trail of ethnographies can capture not only my first acts of rebellion in the doctoral sphere, but my way at resisting authority and recording tension. The nature of this work is powerful because I feel education should be arguably tied to strands of transformation and becoming.

**On Wanderlust**

Wanderlust is a word of German origin, from wandern (to wander) + lust (desire).

Its definition: strong longing for or impulse towards wandering. (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wanderlust)

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.”

Hellen Keller

A daring adventure. A journey of wonderment and awe. Is this the pedagogy of life? The roads crossed in life are up for grabs (I wander in my thoughts); events and opportunities, changes, and unexpected moments appear along the journey, altering and swaying the way in which one places a foot in front of the other, stepping towards a new direction. Or is it? Of this I am still unsure. I am unsure on this meaning of life. What the definition is. How the structure of reality can be defined. But I know—I feel—my mind and my body are connected in this journey. My soul, my breath, my thoughts; they are not separate from what I know. They are not separate from the vibrations of what I feel. The knowledge I gain is not separated from who I am, floating in a tight sealed capsule, a separate entity, a demarcated boundary that has no influence on the steps I take. Does much of what I know; what I think I know, or feel, come from the culture in which I was raised? I question, in what ways? Was I born into this life freely choosing how I define
my life in becoming woman or the notions associated with it? Here in the space below this, I hope to unfold for you, continuing the questions of life. I hope you do not mind too much (St. Pierre, 1997).

Below is a traditional folk song that has been sung many times by various artists (see Chris Curtis’ quote below the song). “The Wayfaring Stranger” has been carried through spaces and places of time for decades. In my interpretation, it is about walking through struggle and strife in hopes of reaching the afterlife for a final chance at peace. I’ve placed it here as a token of the messages one may hear regarding living a better life after death, rather than in the present moment, despite struggle and strife.

Momentary Pause with “The Wayfaring Stranger”

I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger
Traveling through this world of woe
There's no sickness, toil nor danger
In that fair land to which I go
I'm going there to see my father
I'm going there no more to roam
I'm just a-going over Jordan
I'm just a-going over home

I know dark clouds will hover o'er me
I know my path way is rough and steep
But golden fields lie out before me
Where weary eyes no more will weep
I'm going there to see my mother
She said she'd meet me when I come
I'm only going over Jordan
I'm only going over home

I'll soon be free, from every trial
This form shall rest beneath the sun
I'll drop the cross of self-denial
And enter in the home with God.
I'm going there to see my Saviour
I'm going home no more to roam
I'm just a-going over Jordan
I'm just a-going over home

Poor “Wayfaring Stranger” is a traditional folk song of unknown origin. There are many and varied opinions as to its origin. Some of the theories include Appalachian Folk, Old Irish, and Catskills Folk. One theory is that it originates from the Negro Spirituals and there was a deliberate concealment of the song’s origins. Clearly the song is of a spiritual nature as “The Wayfaring Stranger” sings of the hardships of his temporal life passing by and speaks of his journeying on to a better place. Regardless of its origins, it is a hauntingly beautiful piece of music. This song has been recorded countless times. Included in those recording artists mentioned by Curtis are Burl Ives, Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, Dolly Parton, Alison Krauss, Jack White, Neil Young, the Blackberries, Jerry Garcia, Natalie Merchant, Trace Atkins, Ed Sheeran, and others. –Chris Curtis

The demarcations of being: Blurring lines.

As a mother, teacher, and woman, there seems to be a stark contrast—a demarcation line, if you will—between the institutions of formal schooling and my position of being. My desire and yearning to embrace love, moments providing evidence of feeling, of awareness, of walking through life with the wide awakeness that I so very much need in order to breathe, seem to me to stand as itself an isolated form of dysfunction within the walls of the public school. For within the defined walls of such a school, I feel a pressure from the system for this sense of life-feeling to be lost. For my being present and wide awakeness to subside, to die out. For my eyes to close and no longer look within, but to blink and peer out and above myself in a need for answers and in decision of how to action my life. For my inner world of reflection has pressure to dissipate. Dissolve. Disperse. So there and right now, in my current space, my own sense of being must stand alone, holding its composure, fighting the current as if an
undiscovered and unimaginable sea creature making its way through the dark green, cold abyss.

I hold many degrees and certifications of accomplishments, and have achieved the maximum on our school district’s pay scale. I always carry a book or two in my purse and have been known to read things like Sontag’s (2003) Regarding the Pain of Others, or bell hooks’ (1994) Teaching to Transgress, while gnawing carefully in my isolated classroom during lunch each day. My pursuit of knowledge never ends. I listen to audiobooks in the car, search for songs describing life as I plumage through the radio, and talk thoughts into my journal as I drive. My critical reflexivity is an attempt, honest and raw, wrong and right, working from binary truths of oppressor and oppressed which have complicated my being beyond Fifty Shades of Grey (James, 2011). I read academic work, nonfiction, and philosophical books that get my blood going. I search for the ones that cause a feeling of shouting out with joy for the confirmation of theory or feeling. Or ones that saturate in tension. I simmer on quotes that tend to capture the very essence of a struggle itself. One that wraps language up, portraying an experience so complicated it hurts, pushing into a single path of syllables and twenty words or less. Playing with sense of knowing is my life. It is my passion. It is my breath. And it is my way of feeling connected with the world. I embrace this passion because there are tensions. And to me, life is nothing but a tension, a struggle: one to embrace the most amount of happiness, aliveness, and love one can in this short period of time. These struggles are good and bad and all in between. Life is filled with expectations and assumed truths of what matters most to achieve being in this space. In this battle, I see myself as a woman, a mother, and a teacher, and I wonder how these identities have come from the experiences of my life,
the moments of my childhood, my youth, my yesterday. I look at how I define myself and the entities of mother, woman, and teacher—the core drives of my life—and how I understand the identities surfacing at the forefront of whom I am. I think of this and I wonder with a deep sense of curiosity. I wonder how much my identities of these descriptors can be morphed into something different in education than what they are. Can they? Can I come to new understandings of my positions? Can I not move from the space of one definition to another? My knowledge is not static. I see myself as a fluid learner, dynamic, present. And since I hold the sense of wonderment as the premise of who I am, noting and embracing the mind–body connection, feeling as if I am wanting to be an all-encompassing person in every sense, trying to break the mold and live in the moment, I see life as an art. I see life as an organic canvas filled with curriculum, with subjective experiences.

This beating to a new and different rhythm requires a return to my primordial self in this space that I write and this space that I breathe. It IS an improvisation and a place of risk filled with possibility. It is terrifying, but liberating. Confident, but questioning. Spirited and filled with the aliveness referred to by Eriksson in the opening of this piece. Thus I reflect on my life and embrace the moment. I look back. Who am I and what do I know? And there I discover a new layer of myself, a layer that has always been there but has not yet been captured or realized. I am a nomad. I am a nomad.
The Art of Methodological Techniques: Ethnographies, Artifacts, and the Bricoleur
Eclectic Travels: Ethnography in my Blood

I embrace the notion of curriculum as a journey referred to as a “nomadic journey” (Richardson, 1994; St. Pierre, 1997). I am a nomadic inquirer. In reflecting upon this term, it is not something I had recognized until I had thought to pause, had read the writings of Elizabeth A. St. Pierre, and am now writing it. I feel connected, paralleled in journey with St. Pierre (1997) when she writes:

The problem of this essay is that I need to do some fieldwork but I don’t know where to go. For quite some time now I have been stalled in an ethnography—stopped, stuck, dead in the water. And since I am convinced that technology called the essay can take me places I have been unable to imagine, I have decided to attempt a nomadic journey, to, in fact, travel in the thinking that writing produces in search of the field. Nomadic inquiry is quite appropriate for an armchair ethnographer unsure of her destination. (p. 258)

I am unsure of my destination, but I am sure it is the journey I appreciate the most. The wanderer spirit has been breeding in me from the time of my youth, I suppose. As a child, I would spend weeks, months, journeying to the vast parts of the world, third world countries as they were then named, exploring and touring with my most frequently single father. When returning to the United States, no more than three days would span before I was packing for another location, being split as a product of divorce. I write this with no desire to fictionalize or create an American drama, but simply to say it as it was. There was no time in my life in which I was not part of a journey—a movement, an adventure. Whether intense or smooth, my life has always been filled with travel.

My father has written a journal of our travels, from the very first Atlantic crossing, to the trip down the Zambezi River. The intimate stories have been recorded in a self-documented journal from the typewriter now accumulating dust on his mahogany desk. As a pilot he also passed down the documented events of how and why and by what
means we traveled. This precision strategy is recorded in a logistical text known in the aviation industry as a “log book.” So perhaps it is in my blood, or in my culture, or a combination of the two that I have come to know myself as a traveler, not afraid of the dark spaces of the unknown, the quiet space to reflect, holding a crooked smile and glimmer in my eye as the wanderlust beat pumps through my blood. And like my father, I write.

As a child the only space in which I could speak my thoughts was with pen. I still remember my first journal, put together with a cheap white vinyl and cushy jacket. It had a rainbow running diagonally across it that emerged from a purple cloud in the lower left-hand corner. It held my secrets, my desires, and wonderments with a lock and key. I couldn’t speak my reality, talk of my discomfort, and/or use my struggles as a way to foster strength. I could only, in secret, record them under my pink flowered sheets with a flashlight in one hand and my pen in the other. This was a routine I would repeat over and over again, page after page, recording stories filled with dreams and desires, hopes of one day standing peacefully on a beach with a flowered dress and holding the hands of a family. My writing I felt, each word carefully selected to try and capture the emotional waves of my visions. I look back now on those writings, pieces filled with yearning and lust, and I see how I was never quite there. Never quite in the present moment. I was imagining, dreaming, and creating a world where I had one day wanted to breathe. An environment anew. I always began those writings with the pain, the struggle, the injustices in my world and moved to a space of fiction and vision. It was the lens of which I would often see the world and my way of creating hope. Perhaps then I was hoping to come to terms. And I suppose that was the beginning of my voice. There was
the recognition of my tension in seeing the world as a nomad and then returning to my life filled with very small places of misguided priorities. Even in my youth, I wrote of women as third class citizens, children with no childhood, and schooling that missed the mark. It was much like what Maxine Greene (1995) describes as Virginia Woolf’s “shock receiving capacity.” She expresses her connection to Woolf’s style of writing and working through jolts of her reality in the following excerpt:

In my life it has been extraordinarily important to identify myself in what I think of as a dialectic relation with the forces around that determine and condition and (now and then) manipulate. Some of those forces have to do with my history and my gender; some of them inhere in the social and political environment. It is when I experience those forces as inhibiting, demeaning, and interfering with my freedom that I am moved very often to tell about them. The shocks I receive are very often those that come when I feel the spaces of my choosing (and my acting) narrowing. It is by writing that I often manage to name alternatives and to open myself to possibilities. This is what I think learning ought to be. (p. 107)

Writing was my way of naming alternatives and opening my thoughts to new possibilities. The “shocks” jolted me enough to react. The method for that reaction was writing. These experiences shaped me, and shaped my sense of self and have influenced what has now become my biggest endeavor. They have created an identity I hold now as my roots as a woman, mother, and teacher. This is the content of my stories. And whether I fictionalized my endings or was opening myself to possibilities, it was, as I look back, a coping mechanism for my tension. In this sense, it is here in which I attempted to be a “liquid learner,” a dynamic agent of change, moving from one space to the next, folding backward, journeying into an unknown space before me (Su, 2001). There was no one linear, static, singular path. I was circling, traveling, creating a way for my life’s journey: my life as a nomad.
For these reasons, I consider myself an ethnographer. It is here that I’ve attempted to know myself, working to discover new layers, and pushing for deeper understandings. Here is my journey captured: held, framed, snapshotted and placed in a space all of its own, hung like a painting in the museum of my mind. I speak of ethnographies in plural because I have, since childhood, experiences many versions of life. There have been many journeys.

What I’ve come to think through my ethnographies is that I have always been questioning. From the time I walked the streets of India, looking down upon a child with no legs and the rattling coins in a tattered cup, to experiencing the sunset over the backdrop of the Sphinx, I’ve always questioned, “Why?” My experiences with the world, within and outside, have been filled with struggle. Struggle within, as in feelings of pain, abandonment, loss, and a childhood of detachment from a place to call home. I longed, and in some ways still do, for the American happy ending, the nuclear family, the idea of some American dream and some space of contentment. A way of normal. And I see that now. I look back on my writings and see how I tried to make sense of it all. How I fictionalized the endings, made it all into my own plot, and tried to package my story, my life, into a way that makes it seem like it all makes sense. That it is how it is supposed to go. That I am on the journey I am on and was always supposed to be. That there is reasoning for what happens in life.

I have darkness. Yet it is this darkness that does let me see some light. Both will always remain. In this study I hope to go deeper into the night in hopes of finding brighter days. I do not wish for all persons to encounter the darkness, or to encounter deep pain, or to abandon their marriages, or leave their lives in search of something else.
Many people need their stories with a happy ending; even if it is not, well, true happiness and a coming to terms. But for me, in this moment that I write, I can only fashion myself here and now and simply hug the tensions and darkness that I am among.

With this acceptance, I must confess to one more space in which I am journeying. It is that of this doctoral trail: the dissertation itself. I cannot say it will fit into a neat package or follow the flow of a five-chapter product. I cannot say all will be free reflection like this introduction, or heavy into referencing like I work in the second chapter. I cannot say much about where I hope to venture after this proposal, other than it will be an adventure. I do not know what will evolve because I am not there in the moment, reworking and circling the artifacts before me. I say this because anything else, any other predetermined ending would not be research I can live with. It would be an end producing a means. I am a nomad. And in the nomadic inquiry that is my own, I can only say it is time to venture into journey like a vagabond looking for home. I can only say that to find that freedom and experience the coming to terms I spoke of in the beginning of this writing, I must be loyal to nomadism, in a rhizomatic fashion, following an unmarked map, a blank, three-dimensional canvas emerging from a source of love and passion.

**Being a Bricoleur**

According to Rogers (2012), “The etymological foundation of *bricolage* comes from a traditional French expression which denotes crafts-people who creatively use materials left over from other projects to construct new artifacts” (p. 1). He further posits that the work is the opposite work of engineers who follow predetermined procedures and very specific tools to plan out their traditional flow of construction. The term emerged
from the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss and was used further by Denzin and Lincoln in *The Savage Mind* (Hatton, 1989; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Rogers, 2012). Rogers also notes, “When the metaphor is used within the domain of qualitative research, it denotes methodological practices explicitly based on notions of eclecticism, emergent design, flexibility and plurality. Further, it signifies approaches that examine phenomena from multiple, and sometimes competing, theoretical and methodological perspectives” (2012, p. 1). Kincheloe and Berry (2004) call for the bricoleur to embrace this theory grounded on an “epistemology of complexity.” They continue, “As one labors to expose the various structures that covertly shape our own and other scholars’ research narratives, the bricolage highlights the relationship between a researcher’s way of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history” (p. 2). This is a study of culture, power, and linguistic artifact.

As I do not wish to use a template for my research, and I am examining the self-awareness and tension of my actions, and am attempting to *act* or research as a way of resistance to the passive collection of knowledge without opposition, I consider myself a *bricoleur* (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). In nomadism, one carries the things one has on her back as she journeys through various locations. Tools for surviving are with her, as if a second skin. As I hope to travel into this next space, before venturing into the world after this study, I will walk to pay homage to the layers that have actively played a part in the construction of this scenery. I will walk with the work of feminists and poststructuralists. I hope to revisit, rework, and unlearn to relearn in this space, embracing the plurality and bias in my voice as it trembles in the echo of these utterances. I hope to be brave and courageous, making struggle visible. I hope to no longer hide my face, walking without
the strength of my gaze. I walk not to the “gateway of learning” or the university as a container of template, but cyclically and three-dimensionally in a middle ground or space of lived experience with theory (Leander, Phillips, Taylor, Nespor, & Lewis, 2010). It is here that I propose to take ownership of my actions and examine the layers. In this space, I hope to work as a bricoleur, pulling mosaics of story onto the page from the conglomerate of memories, language, and “truths,” and using it as a reexamination of positions considered both objective and subjective. Here, I hope whole-heartedly to layer them on the page before you. I yearn to hug the incongruity of thought and action, all while holding hands with deconstruction and hypocrisy. This is the method to my madness.

**Artifacts as a Neophyte: Issues of Doctoral Power**

Very early in my doctoral work, I took an elective class with a professor whose flexibility, creativity, and open classroom allowed for a space for innovation. Choice, real world texts, and dialogue were the premise of this course with an emphasis on education that not only provided the academic, scholarly language at the doctoral level, but it was a space where *the personal was political*. Through the creativity celebrated in this realm, and as a self-reflective woman, I embarked on a journey of autobiographical writing that spanned months of intensive work. What evolved in an organic, independent, and nonreplicating way was the construction of essays, all of which were addressing the connection between my life experience as a woman, mother, and teacher and my interactions within cultures, society, and education. These pieces of evidence—journals, and essays, my ethnographies, capturing my prejourney into the scholarly world—were an act of rebellion. The original assignment was to create a prospectus, a beginning
chapter, for an edited book on curriculum studies. The chapter was to outline essays we as individual doctoral students would include in an anthology for an educational publisher. Rather than select essays, I wrote them. I felt a need to write about the real world, my world, before I could even begin to suggest a new one. At that moment in time of entering into the doctoral program, my attempt at reflection and connection was vulnerable and raw. My theory and research were minimal at best. I concur with Kimpson (2005) in the description of her beginning research words which state: “In the narrative constructed as part of the research, I characterized myself as a ‘neophyte’ researcher who struggled with important research issues in a self-reflective way” (p. 77). I wonder, in looking back at this “neophyte” stage, what would I say about my positions as a woman, mother, and teacher if I were to return to the pages on which they were written?

While I spent one of the first classes of my doctoral journey “mucking” around with my writing, I never thought I’d really do anything with it. In fact, I viewed it as a playful opportunity to enjoy an elective while the other “core” classes took a break from the course catalogue that term. I surprised myself in the method of how I went about writing for this class, immersed in a self-discovery session where time never seemed to have boundaries. My writing could not be stopped. I was purging my experiences onto the page as if I had to rid myself of them before I could get to the “real” research. I wrote in the morning, I wrote in the afternoon, I wrote throughout the night. I spoke texts into my phone, I jotted notes on brown napkins, and I looked for authors with a struggle and style similar to mine. I heard songs on the radio that muttered my world and I became frantic in a search for other lyrics to juxtaposition each story. I constructed an accompanying soundtrack for my manuscript as well as an inclusion of memes, sketches,
and notes. I was obsessed, manic, thrilled, and engulfed. I breathed recollection of experience.

And when it was over and the last page was written, the table of contents in order, and the cover complete, I set it aside and began my real work. Neuroscience. Interpersonal neurobiology. A deconstruction of the Common Core State Standards. The lack of creativity in education. I researched, I reported, I recreated. I did my work. I turned it in. I found moments of life captured in qualitative research when interviewing my children, found a breath of fresh air with the interview of a home-schooling mother and yoga instructor, and tested my artistic ability with a mural representing my curriculum field work. I continued to write stories and include my reflexivity, but I never considered it worthy. I want to this to explore this issue and include these pieces in my research as well.

I did/still do hold a love for interpersonal neurobiology, the study of emotions and the interplay with the brain. I will forever be intrigued by the emerging research and its connection to current educational debates. But I was in it for all the wrong reasons. The problem with my pursuit was that I felt a need to find some reason to push my own agenda, to validate, solidify, verify, and prove that there is a lack of creativity in education and that I was able to fix it. I wanted hard data to prove my positions, illuminating my knowledge and creating a research-based, proven ideology and pedagogy for myself as a curricularist. It was a “beat them at their own game” mentality, a space where I could create the manipulation of ideas and research to articulate a predetermined agenda and research question I already knew the answer to. The grander question really shouldn’t have been at the time related to how my positions could be backed up by
research. The grand-*er* question should have been related to issues of power. Why was I so concerned with proving my point? What knowledge counts as proof? Why is proof needed? Why did I need to prove myself? Why did I feel the need to validate my position through a specific paradigm? How creative was that? Where was the reliability and validity in my hypocritical stance? Why was I not secure enough in my own feminine being to trust the work that I so passionately thought of and felt to my core? Why was I disregarding my experience and yearning so deeply to try and control the thoughts of others to a point of abandoning my own inner drives towards the organic evolution of inquiry?

Fortunately and unfortunately, I have returned to my roots, to my nomadic pattern of discovery. I no longer yearn to sway or manipulate the critics or reader in a method of deconstruction, and then to prove through the very paradigm I am so wanting to resist. In this space is my rebellion. It is a space where I do not feel a need to force my ideas or prove my worth. I no longer have a yearning to fit somewhere in a place which has been established as the only way for me to know what can be defined as curriculum, the possibilities of curriculum, and the canvas of life. I no longer need to feel validated by the outside. I am committed to my journey as I search for meaning within.

I am in this writing, in this study, on this page, journeying into a critical, cyclical, intense, and deeply historical of my experiences as a woman, mother, and teacher in this moment compared with the last. Here in this culminating evolution of my identity as a doctoral student, and through the deconstruction of my essays and journals which were written at the beginning of my *possible* transformation, I wonder these aforementioned questions. I continue to think…
In my *becoming* into the understanding of the world and life as a result of the scholarly and academic rigor of my doctoral journey, I question my own existence in the past and in the present. Grumet (1988) writes, “As we study the forms of our own experience, not only are we searching for evidence of the external forces that have diminished us; we are also recovering our own possibilities. We work to remember, imagine, and realize ways of knowing and being that can span the chasm presently separating our public and private worlds” (p. xiv-xv).

Mother. Teacher. Woman. White. Middle class. Heterosexual. Past. Present. Future. This is what I will explore. By exposing my deepest thoughts on the page, I stand alone, vulnerable. I step backwards into the unknown and yet known, and in doing so free my silence. Could it allow others to free their silence as well? This I do not know for sure. Yet I do know this method is embracing my identities as woman, mother, and teacher, as perfect and imperfect as they may be. My world is one, undoubtedly influenced by *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1995). The tensions. The stories. Again I look. Mother. Teacher. Woman. White. Middle class. Heterosexual. Past. Present. Future. This is what I hope to deconstruct.

“Research is but a conduit of activism, but if we just *do* without carefully, methodically *doing* we run the risk of perpetuating the very practices and ideas we intend to debunk and rework” (Villaverde, 2007, p. 104).

Maybe then the point is that to be authentic in a pedagogical sense, in inquiry, in life, there has to be a space beyond what is. Beyond *what is* readily accepted. Maybe the core of curriculum, the canvas of curriculum, the platform of life, is to break from the plot of a metanarrative. Perhaps there must be, for me, a reaction and revolt. A
confidence must emerge, in some shape, in some way, in some free flowing fashion that is not predetermined. Maybe the dissertation must break free from tradition in order to break the favored, social efficiency ideologies representing what knowledge is of most worth? At this moment, I feel I parallel Thomkin’s (1997) position when she writes, “This one time I’ve taken off the straightjacket, and it feels so good” (p. 51). It feels so good.
Art by Yoshitaka Amano
“Academia’s inner eyes cannot see her, but the heart of her dilemma is that they affect her ability to see herself as well, hence her lack of ontological resistance. Their inner eyes are not her inner eyes and yet these eyes distort and refract much like a funhouse mirror” (Taliaferro-Baszile, 2010, p. 489).

**Inlet to Review of Literature**

This piece begins with the current spaces of struggle that I navigate and hold in disquietude. I am having trouble seeing, like I am looking in a funhouse mirror. Distortion has infused my journey. I’m hoping to travel, beating to the drum of wanderlust. In preparing for my walk, I’ve laid tools before me, getting ready to roll them up in the canvas on which they lie. As of now, these tools, these contrivances, they seem meaningless. I am looking at these things I hold: little currency and my visa-less passport. I look down and then I look to the terrain. I fear the journey. But then, I close my eyes. I know I must still walk. And I remember the words of the poststructuralist intellects: those words move me. As I step towards the land, I face many walls. Walls made of bricks. And I know I will need to carefully dismantle these bricks so I may move along. The bricklayers will hold resentment towards this nomad and may try to stop my journey.
They will think that as a woman, my travel should end. That I should not travel this land 
vulnerably. But I will still walk, recording the multidimensionality of this landscape I am 
experiencing.

The tensions in the dialogue below begin with scenery, the terrain, and the 
atmosphere in this space. The work following is a brief mosaic of research synthesized 
together to lightly touch the canvas of the poststructuralist movement. It is my first brick 
to dismantle in order to move beyond the space that is. Deepening the layers and 
complexity of my location, I bring in research on feminism in the context of 
poststructuralism as well as other issues bulging in the dialogue. I work these concepts in 
a fragmented way, displacing notions of a single feminism, a context I am hoping to 
examine in the remaining chapters of my proposed research.

The Currency of Intellectuals

In traditional literature reviews, research may be synthesized in a predicted way. 
In texts such as Roberts’ (2010) The Dissertation Journey, expectations reveal a review 
of literature should not be fragmented, should be written in an authoritative manner, and 
should not include any opinion articles. However, I believe that all narratives, even 
research quests and literature reviews, are partial, complex, and multilayered. Many 
traditional reviews are embedded with opinion, masked as truth in an authoritative tone. 
My attempt in this space, in this nontraditional review, is to include detailed reviews of 
literature and to also address my positions relating to the conceptual analysis of the 
review. Part of my research purpose is to envelope contradictions, embracing and 
recognizing the multiplicity of subjectivities through a deconstruction of knowledge 
acquisition. I strive to do this as I write since I’ve come to a place where I can no longer
act as what Kaplan (1997) names a “dutiful daughter” in academia (p. 39). I cannot write for others out of obligation to patriarchy. Much language flopping around academia does not “accurately” reflect my experience, as I discuss in detail in this essay and review. Nor does it account for the multiple subjectivities of the self. Jacques Derrida (1967) argues that we must not force clarity in language, but embrace the tensions. Williams (2005) captures Derrida’s position by writing:

> The demand for clarity is dangerous because clarity justifies violent judgments and exclusions on the basis of a promise of a world of understanding and togetherness (in a purely rational society, or one based on a common religion, or a commonly understood principle of tolerance). (p. 51)

Interpretation can never fully be captured through words. Thus, throughout this work, I juxtapose art such as zines, song lyrics, and poetry as an additional layer to the positions of my research, some of which cannot be traced to its original owner. This does not provide complete clarity for the reader. Instead, pieces are placed alongside specific parts of the scholarly research and journaling in order to promote inner conversations. The artifacts weaved throughout my work are to generate reflective questioning rather offer explanation. My interpretation or vision of significance is not included as an endeavor towards avoiding “speech without response” (Baudrillard & Maclean, 1985).

**A Patriarchal Visa: The Permission to Wander**

Again I return to wanderlust. As I ponder, I question dimensions of language. I have a voice inside myself that suggests I need permission for some outside force to grant
me the “okay” to wander. I feel this voice is nudging me, like an urge, in the voice of a
man, telling me I should question my process of thinking and documenting my journey.
For a man to tell me I am on the right track. Like I’ll be reprimanded for capturing my
thoughts on paper. It’s a scary place to wander. I hold fear and worry that I will be
laughed out of the university for my emotional words. For my connection to the
messiness and irrationalism of real life. That I will be shunned. That my voice is so
absurd that I may find myself in exile. For reasons I define in this layered research, I am
lusting for more than a disconnected regurgitation of source. I am feeling disconnected
and displaced. And I question, are my hands truly tied? Or is this a result of my position
as a woman breathing in the institutional environments of education?

As I referenced in Chapter One, life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.
A daring adventure. Or it is nothing. I believe this whole-heartedly. And I feel that I need
to lasso my adventurer spirit, which tends to slip away as I am pressed to fit into a jar. I
am stepped on, smashed, keeping one eye open at the puppet masters above me that have
and continue to orchestrate my strings. I question why I feel encaged. Why I feel I must
be tamed. My yearning for creativity, desire, longing, urges, and inner forces lusting after
rigorous happiness are constantly barraged by buckets of cold water in an attempt to soak
my fire with a chilling conformity. It is as if my emotions and passions should be left at
the doorstep of institutions because institutions represent societal expectations and
“reality.” In those moments, there have been times I have surrendered to the struggle,
trading my lust for the commodity or capital of another predetermined, subjective form of
intellectual currency. This currency, the degree, the “right” signifying nod opening the
gates for opportunity, was willingly, at times, traded. I traded the fear of uncertainty and
intellectual struggle for academic ease. I traded it for institutional peace and uneventful mediocrity. I traded it at times for a single vowel. For the A. My lust for learning and exploration suffocated for a single phoneme, a piece of language representing who I had hoped to become. And in my profession, it was the rating of “excellent.” These things became the currency for dream attainment. I traded the beauty of adventure into the uncharted waters of wonder for templates and boundaries. I chose to savor and chew on replication in the name of materialism and social capital.

What knowledge is of most worth? Is it knowledge that leaves passion at the door? What are the messages sent by mass institutions of education? From my stance, a lust for learning has not been in the mix of institutions I’ve encountered. I’ve sat in rooms with an expectation of knowledge consumption like the pour of water into a glass. My mouth has not salivated viewing 88 slides on best practice. Lust does not translate as worth in the degrees for economic promotion. I question again, what knowledge is of most worth? What knowledge is of most worth to me?

A nomad filled with wanderlust and journey, blood pumping with the need to explore running through such veins; pulsating, breathing, contracting and expanding with every heartbeat has a yearning to discover, ponder, and reflect. I work to hang onto my aliveness and to forever feel connected in this space I inhabit. A nomad on a rhizomatic journey, I think, is not married to linear directions because she is not concerned of the end destination, only of the journey. At times, she may retreat, turn in a new direction,
step backwards into the path she has traveled before in hopes of finding a path that may have been hidden by the brush of the spring. Yet, while a nomad embraces journey, a nomad can only walk so far if the land in which she journeys is surrounded by walls, ones constructed brick by brick, year after year, by the inhabitants before her, spreading the perimeter of the land she travels. A nomad whose desire to explore is so strong that she breathes it each moment has no choice but to pause and attempt to break down the bricks to move out of the boundaried terrain. In this space I am now working, I must break down the bricks, peek above the ledge, and see what I may in the horizon.

This anew I speak of is a location. A position of being. I am attempting to move closer to my primordial self by examining the positions in which I inhabit. It is the motive of this nomad to look to the horizon, examine the land I stand on, look back into the travels I have ventured, and pause like a slow motion moment suspended in air before stepping forward. Using this metaphor, I hope to question my positions in relation to the social and historical infusions of action and language in which I occupy. This is my charge. I do not want to simply replicate knowledge as my only action in this exploration. I want to create anew. I do not want walls. I am yearning for a freedom. I must be committed to the recognition of my emotions and attempt to remove the bricks that lay around me in order to see what lies beyond the perimeter, as well as the bricks I have built up inside me. Breaking down the bricks is my act of resistance. I will no longer remain within the perimeter of walls set by the inhabitants before me. I will no longer hide as a fearful and helpless wanderer, afraid to leave the forest and be exposed in the open land. I will resist conformity. For a true journey knows no boundaries. It has no limits. And I am committed to myself in this journey, no longer abiding by the rules of
the bricklayers before me—or the ones who maintain its protection now. This is my journey into new land. And researching poststructuralism is the tool I hold to break the brick wall before me.

An Eye to the Terrain

In an Americanized academic world in which I inhabit, there is an expectation, or a widely accepted conglomerate of assumptions, regarding knowledge acquisition in the educational system. From my perspective, the process of acquiring knowledge has thinned out, morphing into an act of blind consumption. For the act of processing or process implies a sense of partaking in a series of actions or steps associated with working through or towards a greater understanding. I view process as peeling the layers of an onion, only to stumble upon the many other onions that may lead to the desire to remove the integument and begin the process again. In a historical context, process is a word derived from early 14th century Old French, proces, meaning a journey or continuation, and traced to the 13th century Latin word processus, meaning going forward or advancement. Frequently, the word process is associated with the word product in educational conversations. Product is traced to the 15th century, referring to mathematical multiplication, and also emerging from Medieval Latin, productum, and in Classical Latin, something produced, which currently refers to anything made or produced in a general sense. In education, the terms process versus product can fall into a thinking and understanding versus a doing and producing binary. The product end can be easily

observed, as objectives and packaged programs for educational initiatives emphasize their alignment to very specific, predetermined common standards. The objectives and standards are tied heavily to assumptions of validity and reliability, through language categorizing knowledge that is “research-based” as the pinnacle of a hierarchal scheme. In Western societies, even “thick forms” of qualitative research are continually challenged by reductionist modes of “evidence-based research” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). In addition to an emphasis on the product end of education, processes of acquiring knowledge have changed. For example, the rise of “Googling” has become a method of receiving quick and instantaneous answers. This phenomenon has surfaced as a dominant approach to gaining knowledge within and outside of the system walls. Thus, the process of attaining information and ideas has in many ways become an act that has removed the engagement of an in-depth process of analyzing and tracing informational sources. Answers are simply “there.” This can be problematic. As a simple example, take the growing number of anxiety-ridden consumers participating in the mis- and self-diagnosis of disease from symptom-related medical searches. Cyberchondria, the name for this interactive space of hypochondria and mis- and self-diagnosis, is a concerning challenge for the knowledge-driven patient and highly trained doctor relationship (Aiken & Kirwan, 2012). There are an extensive number of misdiagnoses occurring from health-related searches on medical sites. The emergence of language such as cyberchondria represents just one example of knowledge consumption and application without a context of experience and multiple dialogical interpretations in the flesh. This suggests a phenomenon of consumers who readily accept what is read on the Internet as truth without a welcoming of counternarratives. Traces of this effect can be seen in research
reporting that while humans are gaining an edge in categorizing, locating partial information, and quickly gaining “truth,” humans are also losing a wealth of brain cells. According to Carr (2010), these brain cells are “the ones we use in traversing a lengthy narrative or an involved argument, the ones we draw on when we reflect on our experiences or contemplate an outward or inward phenomenon” (p. 14). Reflection and contemplation are diminishing, it seems. The technocratic landscape of “gaining knowledge” at a fast, consuming rate is abounding.

One might say it is possible to think of the dominant objective of education as a systematic endeavor with a primary role of preparing citizens for needs defined by the economy. The Common Core State Standards’ College and Career Readiness is a prime example as well as its lack of philosophical discussions. As Stein, Connell, and Gardner (2008) write, “In our view, the claim that we do not have philosophical commitments underpinning our educational institutions and methods is a sign that we are doing bad curriculum and/or poor pedagogy” (p. 402). In working within the educational system for sixteen years, I’ve recognized the division between knowledge acquisition and philosophy. Each has moved to opposite ends of a spectrum. Philosophizing on the objectives of education, the aims of education, and the purpose of education has diminished as an integrated part of the system’s process. Evidence of this can be seen in the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, as well as in the deconstruction of the standards in work such as that of Anderson (2015), who argues the standards are nothing more than a reductionist attempt to “reduce complex human activity to finite measurable units.” He calls for a “sound philosophical objection to be considered as ‘evidence’ that demonstrates the necessity of revision, or abandonment, of the Common Core State
Standards, in order to seek a humanizing pedagogy” (p. 89). Lather’s (2010) words ring in my ears describing this “rage in accountability” (p. 73). The CCSS have defined formal education and obtaining knowledge for all students, while ignoring the engagement of philosophy in education, thus contributing to the promotion of a product-orientated approach to knowledge attainment. While the expectation of common knowledge promotes a singularity of truth, businesses are cashing in. Ohanian (2013) sums this up nicely in the following excerpt:

I looked at two months’ worth of press citations praising the Common Core—August and September, 2012—and then looked up how much the praise givers had received from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This list ranges from the American Federation of Teachers ($1,000,000) to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction ($823,637), from the neo-liberal Center for American Progress ($2,998,809) to the neo-conservative Thomas B. Fordham Institute ($5,711,462). The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) received $2,005,000; so did the National Writing Project in the amount of $2,645,593. And so on and so on. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) raked in $71,302,833. He who pays the piper calls the tune, and with money in their pockets, many are eager to sing and dance to the Common Core Song. In fact, I couldn’t find any press willing to publish these findings so finally I posed a short piece at Daily Censored. (p. 10)

While big businesses are profiting on the monopolizing arena of education, humans around me are chomping at the mainstream. Humans are consuming more and more knowledge with limited reflection or tracing of source. At work is the commodification of knowledge (Frieshtat & Sandlin, 2010; Trifonas, 2000). Some argue that the lack of tracing a source of knowledge across the educational arena as well as the Internet has become commodification of our minds. This is seeping into how humans action themselves across arenas in their lives. Smyth and Hattam (2000) talk of this specifically when exploring conversations and actions of academics. They describe the “intellectual as hustler.” This analogy describes those of us in the university who are a commodity; having voices treated as a commodity while being pressured to hustle knowledge and
doing the “economic dirty work of the government” by competing in an educational market while simultaneously working against it (p. 171). Beyond the university, knowledge has transformed and become increasingly commodified as a result of the information era. Moser (2015) comments on this commodification in his essay exploring Jean Baudrillard and Michael Serres, who believe the information era is filled with simulations creating a “sterile atmosphere epitomized by an endless barrage of (mis)-information” (as cited in Moser, p. 95). Moser writes, “Serres and Baudrillard both prophetically suggest that the age of information has come with a great price tag: the destruction of all meaning.” In this space, “the subject no longer has time to think or reflect; he or she must impulsively obey the messages urging him or her to consume” (2015, p. 106). While the time to think or reflect slips, the act of consuming targeted information grows. Take for example the habit@, which is a computer user’s profile and pattern of browsing behavior which is tracked and used to create a home online page. As Luke (2003) writes, “The habit@ is in turn used to construct larger profiles and patterns of consumption which are then sold back to the user” (p. 333). Luke further states that users need to learn to “escape from a technological determinism that seeks to construct a digital citizen solely under the rubric of consumption” (2003, p. 333-334). If the medium of knowledge acquisition, or the premise to the way that knowledge is obtained through consumption, it is dispersed primarily as a singular story, it is singular in spaces such as the ones constructed by mass media. Baudrillard and Maclean’s (1985) definition of mass media, “speech without response,” is an example (p. 577). The definition is simplistic but stresses the bottom line. It is a story told or constructed for an audience, not meant for the inclusion of a response. It is set for the consumption of a singular position and thus
emerges into commoditized knowledge. Baudrillard and Maclean (1985) go on to say that media “are what finally forbids response, what renders impossible any process of exchange (except in the shape of a simulation of a response, which is itself integrated into the process of emission, and that changes nothing in the unilaterality of communication)” (p. 577-578). In the same publication, Baudrillard and Maclean further posit:

And the addiction that we have for the media, the impossibility of doing without them, is a deep result of this phenomenon: it is not a result of a desire for culture, communication, and information, but of this perversion of truth and falsehood, of this destruction of meaning in the operation of the medium. The desire for a show, the desire for simulation, which is at the same time a desire for dissimulation. This is a vital reaction. It is spontaneous, total resistance to the ultimatum of historical and political reason. (p. 587)
This talk of technology, of consumption, of perversion of
truth, and of falsehood represents a perspective of some
current reality which I inhabit. It is the now, for myself, at
least. And while Baudrillard and Maclean had written these
words some 31 years ago and the world of technology has
morphed, encapsulating much daily movement and great
breadth since that time, I feel their words echo a description of my immediate scenery. It
is the terrain I am attempting to walk. While the world is moving faster and faster, I am
moving back. Almost like I am stopping, hovering among the present, not ready to hear
the next phrase or walk forward because I am still stuck on the past. I see space around me and I see
little Pac-Men, moving among the single-spaced
path of the school hallways, munching up the data.
Collecting the points like a Pac-Man. Eating each
little dot in the accumulation of things, things of which
I have no idea the consistency of. As if these bits, these
points, this accumulation of things are all that are
needed in order to win some game, some product, some endpoint. That itself is the only
driving force of some unknown purpose in life, ceasing only at death. And all while being
chased by ghosts. Gailey (1993) suggests that successful games like Pac-Man replicate
the structure of the primary ideology dominant in mass culture. She writes, “The goal for
corporations, of course, is expanded sales—customers eager for the next series of games.
The effect of cultural domination—restricted control over the creation and development
of cultural messages—can be readily seen” (p. 82). I cannot help but think of the reflection I see between the structural procedure of Pac-Man and the way that I view the current dominant ideologies of acquiring knowledge, in and out of educational settings. I have simmered on these worthwhile correlations in the arena of education more than can be captured in this study.

Beyond the process of knowledge acquisition lies these age-old questions: What knowledge is of most worth? Who determines which knowledge is of most worth? Going deeper are inquiries such as: Where did that knowledge come from? What are the positions or schools of thought associated with these perspectives? What are the biases associated with these sources? Questions like these rarely float through the conversations I hear among the educator dialogues around me. Fliers and programs flood my mailbox with assumptions of what knowledge IS of the most worth and from ideologies of which I contest. This process—the endless barrage of information with no recognition of care for themes such as perspective, context, social-historical construction, and social-emotional processes of learning—can be considered mass manipulation. Horsthemke (2014) writes:

Owing to the increasing demand for clipped, bite-sized information that has accompanied the communications revolution, research and the quest for factual evidence become less meticulous. With not enough truth to go around there is a greater incentive for bullshitting and mindfucking, as well as a greater proneness to being so manipulated. (p. 43)

Fricker (2007) refers to this as “credibility excess” in her discussion of “epistemic injustices” (cited in Horsthemke, 2014). One of my biases is that education is filled with epistemic injustices.

Intellect Beyond What is Seen
In equine events, animals can be seen wearing blinders to keep their focus forward. This narrows the vision of the animal, which has nearly 360 degree vision otherwise. Blinders prevent the animal from seeing sideways and backwards, thus causing a commotion and reaction from the horse. It keeps the horse “on track.” Describing the use of equine blinders can be suited as a metaphor for the cultural expectations of institutions in which I have participated. The expectation of wearing blinders has created artificiality in knowing and the atomization of disciplines. Assumptions regarding *what knowledge is of most worth* has become a foundation for given truths in building curriculum. Narrow educational initiatives have made it difficult to cross the boundaries of this landscape filled with the infiltration of the technocratic.

In reaction to this landscape with these atrocities on consumption and my place in it, I reflect upon academic Edward W. Said (1994), who suggests that intellectuals should approach *intellectualism* in a different way than is seen in his experience of working with academics. According to Said, intellectuals should fall the umbrella of *amateurism*. In this space, the intellectuals would be “fueled by care and affection rather than by profit and selfish, narrow specialization” (p. 82). Said additionally posits:

> The intellectual today ought to be an amateur, someone who considers that to be a thinking and concerned member of a society, one is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity as it involves one’s country, its power, its mode of interacting with its citizens as well as with other societies. In addition, the intellectual’s spirit as an amateur can enter and transform the merely professional routine most of us go through into something much more lively and radical; instead of doing what one is supposed to do, one can ask why one does it, who benefits from it, how can it reconnect with a personal project and original thoughts. (pp. 82-83)

In addition to the specialized, professional routine addressed by Said and the suggestion that one enters a more lively and radical space connecting to a personal project when
approaching study and reflection as an amateur, I concur with Kincheloe and Berry (2004) in that a way to nurture this sense of wonder and curiosity is through employing the metaphor of the bricolage. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) write:

> Bricoleurs move from convergent to divergent forms of meaning-making, abandoning the short-sightedness of prespecified, correct patterns of analysis in favour of more holistic, inclusive, and eclectic models. In this context the “present awareness” of numerous cultural, historical, and philosophical traditions is explored for insights into new ways of thinking, seeing, being, and researching. (p. 21)

In the same work, Kincheloe and Berry go on to say that this need is present for a scholarly rigour that cannot happen in a reductionist model of the West, paralleling scientific research which cultural studies have already indicated is not necessarily clean, and certainly “jerry-rigged to a degree” (p. 1).

From this stance, it is suggested that researchers must return to themselves and become in touch with their primordial selves in order to embrace the wonderment of discovery as an amateur. It is time to remove the blinders. Further, as Fideler (2014) remarked, Plato suggested we must become humans which move beyond intellect and find a way to tap into nonverbal ways of perception in order to find an intimate connection with our world. Fideler captures the call for intellectuals to return to themselves, reflecting on their intimate connection to the world with wonder. He speaks of intellect in this way, “Like a finely crafted car, it can take us far, but at the end of the drive we need to get out, enter the living world, and travel on foot with a valued companion along the most beautiful part of our journey” (2014, p. 39). Fideler describes the movement of going beyond the intellectual’s narrow specialization in the metaphor above. Moving deeper into the multiple ways of knowing through an exploration of beauty, passion, and art with a deep sense of wonder and yearning to feel connected to
our world can be the motive of the “rhapsodic intellect” (2014). The amateur, the nomad, the bricoleur, and the rhapsodic intellect; I view them all as artists. I see them, with blinders or not, as brave souls in process striving to displace the blinders.

Interlude with a Film Monologue

Good Will Hunting
Written by Matt Damon and Ben Affleck

(Sean and Will are sitting together on a park bench. Will doesn't look at him throughout the speech; he looks away. The scene ends with Sean's walking away, leaving Will there, contemplating Sean's words.)

Will: So what's this? A Taster's Choice moment between guys? This is really nice. You got a thing for swans? Is this like a fetish? It's something, like, maybe we need to devote some time to?

Sean: I thought about what you said to me the other day, about my painting. Stayed up half the night thinking about it. Something occurred to me and I fell into a deep, peaceful sleep and haven't thought about you since. You know what occurred to me?

Will: No.

Sean: You're just a kid. You don't have the faintest idea what you're talking about.

Will: Why, thank you.

Sean: It's all right. You've never been out of Boston.

Will: Nope.

Sean: So if I asked you about art, you’d probably give me the skinny on every art book ever written. Michelangelo? You know a lot about him. Life's work, political aspirations, him and the pope, sexual orientation, the whole works, right? But I bet you can't tell me what it smells like in the Sistine Chapel. You've never actually stood there and looked up at that beautiful ceiling. Seen that. If I asked you about women you'd probably give me a syllabus of your personal favorites. You may have even been laid a few times. But you can't tell me what it feels like to wake up next to a woman and feel truly happy. You're a tough kid. I ask you about war, and you'd probably—uh—throw Shakespeare at me, right? "Once more into the breach, dear friends." But you've never been near one. You've never held your best friend's head in your lap and watched him gasp his last breath, looking to you for help. And if I asked you about love, you’d probably quote me a sonnet. But you've never looked at a woman and been totally vulnerable. Known someone could level you with her eyes. Feeling like, God put an angel on earth just for you...who could...
rescue you from the depths of hell. And you wouldn't know what it’s like to be her angel and to have that love for her to be there forever. Through anything. Through cancer. You wouldn't know about sleeping sittin’ up in a hospital room for two months holding her hand because the doctors could see in your eyes that the term visiting hours don't apply to you. You don't know about real loss, because that only occurs when you love something more than you love yourself. I doubt you've ever dared to love anybody that much. I look at you; I don't see an intelligent, confident man; I see a cocky, scared shitless kid. But you're a genius, Will. No one denies that. No one could possibly understand the depths of you. But you presume to know everything about me because you saw a painting of mine and you ripped my fuckin' life apart. You’re an orphan right? (Will nods.) Do you think I'd know the first thing about how hard your life has been, how you feel, who you are because I read _Oliver Twist_? Does that encapsulate you? Personally, I don't give a shit about all that, because you know what? I can't learn anything from you I can't read in some fuckin' book. Unless you wanna talk about you, who you are. And I'm fascinated. I'm in. But you don't wanna do that, do you, sport? You're terrified of what you might say. Your move, chief. (Sean stands and walks away.)

(http://www.whysanity.net/monos/goodwill2.html)

**Poststructuralism: A Tool for Dismantling Bricks**

I’ve come to this space through deep-seated feelings of fear. I feel that in remaining silent, I am presenting open arms to what I am currently, thus welcoming a betrayal to whom I someday might be. Without exploring my resistance to dominant ideology and pedagogy, I would be living in a space of falsehood. In my rhapsodic quest to discover why I feel I am on the brink of betrayal, I stumbled upon poststructuralist thought.

Poststructuralism requires a discourse embracing uncertainty. It is a complex movement, much like the bricolage metaphor, which has no simple model and follows an “eclectic terrain,” moving through, across and between disciplines (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Poststructuralism—*from my poststructuralist eye*—resists. It questions. It challenges dominant assumptions. It is a continual state of process. It is the reshaping of a linear path of consumption, a Pac-Man style of attainment, and never stops weaving, looking, seeping, reworking, and creating the construction of some dynamic,
multidimensional space that is welcoming plurality. It does so interconnectedly, with ties to the past, with the multiplicity of voice, and with a breath of bravery which resists a singularity of “truth.” It embraces the ghost, walks backwards and forwards, and resists the replication of its journey. It resists product, finality, and equation. For even to define poststructuralism itself is an act of resisting dominant forms of knowledge acquisition. Some readers may become impatient, frustrated, and resistant to ideas regarding poststructuralism as it contrasts the most prevalent, common ways of thinking or positions. There are no instantaneous answers to resolve the problems of education in poststructural research, no singular definition, and no immediate way to fully understand its premise, especially from an authoritative stance. For it is a process of transformation, leading explorers down an avenue for reexamination and offers a nudge towards creating an endless study of discovering uncharted ways of examining positions. It is a continual process of reflection. It urges us to stop and pause—even in our temporary spaces—and question all that is around us. It is not an endeavor for the light-hearted, the wishy-washy, and the whatever-goes. For it involves the reexamination of voice, subjectivity, structure, and power while critically questioning the sociohistorical and political construction of knowledge. In a quick-to-answer, quick-to-move, thought-less, do-more society that I myself inhabit, I view poststructuralism as a defiant position. It is one holding the potential to disrupt what is considered the most commonsensical forms of knowing. And while I had hopes of poststructuralism being the engine which brought me back to myself, I’ve come to see poststructuralism as the engine which has made me less sure, less knowing, and more comfortable with the absence of ultimate truths. For I am questioning, “Do I even know myself?” before I even ask, “What do I know?” While
poststructuralism can be viewed as a venture towards less certainty and without reserve, as a reaction to the scientific infusion of knowledge into educational objectives, I find more certitude. But this is the certitude of continual temporality and the constant examinations tied to trips of power.

To *define* is “to fix or mark the limits,” and “to determine or identify the essential qualities or meaning of” (http://www.meriam-webster.com/dictionary/define). Peters and Burbules (2004) write, “Poststructuralism can be characterized as a mode of thinking, a style of philosophizing, and a kind of writing, yet the term should not be used to convey a sense of homogeneity, singularity, or unity. The very term ‘poststructuralism’ is contested” (p. 17). Poststructuralism resists being defined, as there are no fixed limits on its potential. There is no ultimate method or nature, no proper class to categorize it, or singular way in which it can be described. Poststructuralism is a *movement*, not static, always fluctuating, reshaping, and in constant motion. It is an “intellectual movement” which has emerged as a reaction to the deconstruction of structuralism (Peters & Burbules, 2004). Poststructuralism is a migration from the study of structuralism, one that turned against itself, a *post*, meaning beyond the time and space of structuralism, suggesting a movement beyond prior modes of thought and practice (Cherryholmes, 1994). Even as I begin to write to capture the essence of this word, I am holding back. For a real essence does not exist (Gavey, 1989). I am resisting. Unsettled. For to define poststructuralism in a sentence or two would be to diminish the movement and place it into a space which works against its claim of nonsingularity. And I do not want these words to be used as a story to define all poststructuralists. There is no universal definition, and for poststructuralism, certainly none that can be summed up in a few short
phrases. To attempt to do so would be to imply that all language could be universally understood in a metanarrative type fashion: transparent, clear, and assumed in the same manner by all who read it. To define or identify poststructuralism in one way would promote repetition of falsehood. Poststructuralism resists this approach, for all is questioned, all can be deconstructed, and singular meaning, universal truths, are dead. Poststructuralism emerged as a reaction to structuralism. It was a reaction much like the separation of nature and humanity, the premise of the Scientific Revolution.

The movement looked at the world as a “dead clockwork mechanism, perpetually ticking along according to eternal laws,” rather than being alive in the cosmos (Fideler, 2014, p. 3). Reflecting in the cultural phenomena of the Scientific Revolution, God became a newly defined entity who observed the universe as a rational, analytic spectator. The Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment perspectives seeped into messages of prioritized knowledge, methods, and assumed realities based on science, a science promoting singular truth (Fideler, 2014; Ozmon & Craver, 1999; Peters & Burbules, 2004). Fideler writes, “Fortunately, scientific knowledge—and the mythic visions that inspire it—continues to unfold over time” (2014, p. 5). The complexity of the challenge to deconstruct Enlightenment and structuralism can be seen in the work of poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism is a movement traced from and weaving together through the work of multidisciplinary academics and researchers responding to the world of linguistics. The reaction to structuralism erupted through the deconstruction of Ferdinand de Saussure’s lectures at the University of Geneva, published after his death in 1916. Saussure’s (1916) work in Cours de Linguistique Générale attempted to create a science
of language illustrating fixed structures through a series of signs (cited in Peters & Burbules, 2004). The sign, according to Saussure, is constructed of a signifier (the sound in language) and a signified (which is the meaning language holds). The relationship between the signifier and signified is described as arbitrary (Cherryholmes, 1988; Howarth, 2013; Howell, 2013; Palmer, 1997; Peters & Burbules, 2004; Weedon, 1997). Because there is a relationship between sound and meaning that is purposeless, the result is a relationship formed through social construction rather than by an intrinsic phenomenon. Howell (2013) writes that the signifier and signified form a solid “one-to-one correspondence” (p. 106). In understanding language and meaning then, Saussure (1916) attempted to relay the way in which meanings are constructed through the comparison and difference among and between objects and terms. With Saussure’s notes and the furthering of French structuralism in the 1950s and 1960s by Roman Jackobson, a megaparadigm developed around the “centrality of language and its scientific analysis in human social and cultural alike, considered as self-reflexive signifying or semiotic systems or subsystems” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 8). This science of structures became the primary linguistic curricula and theory in which to respond, seeping across disciplines at the hands of academics such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan, Michael Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Helene Cixous, Jacques Derrida, and Juliet Kristeva. Strauss, Barthes, and Lacan were the primary human and social science structuralists, with Strauss being arguably the most influential structuralist (Cherryholmes, 1988; Howarth, 2013; Williams, 2005). Strauss’s work, married to scientific explanation in the social sciences, stood entrenched in study carrying the following theory: “Mathematical formalization and structural linguistics can in
principle read the ‘underlying reality’ of all human societies, as the search for complete empirical explanation is complemented with the desire to furnish transcendental laws and rules, that are applicable to all societies” (Howarth, 2013, p. 37-38). Universal.

It is through an analysis of structuralist studies that one can gather a historical understanding of poststructuralism. Poststructuralists took issue with the stable one-to-one correspondence and the fixed meaning of the signifier and signified. As such, according to Howell (2013), “Any attempt to identify the meaning of a word involves a circular pursuit of signifiers” (p. 106). This circular pursuit became an influential movement coined *différance*, and was/is a prime initiation into the poststructuralist way of thinking. Différance, or difference and deferral, is a term that emerged in a dialogue from Derrida (see *Of Grammatology*, 1967) in response to structuralism’s claims, and with roots tied to the work of Fredrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, both of whom critiqued rationality and common sense as a foundation for universal truths that can be seen in the work of structuralism. For Derrida, meaning is temporary and always in process. In his work, he shifts the oral component of language to written text where, for Derrida, meanings cannot be static. No sounds or concepts (in Saussureian terms, the signified and signifier) are fastened permanently, as context itself is a space of endless
deferral. This *difference* shifts language representational of fixed meanings to a place of lively plurality. It is coined *différance*, a complicated Derridean pun that “captures the way in which meaning is produced both by the interplay of different traces and by the necessary deferment of some possibilities not actualized or is signified by the play of traces” (cited in Howarth, 2013, p. 53). Howarth refers to “traces” in an analogy of “a particular footprint or a distinctive smell that enables us to locate an absent origin” or a linguistic trace which is not there or completely constructed (2013, p. 51). According to Weedon (1997), “Language neither reflects nor expresses meaning, but constructs it through an infinite process of what Derrida calls *différance*, that is, difference and deferral. The temporary fixing of meaning is never a neutral act; it involves both interests and questions of power” (p. 171). Through deconstruction of texts, one can examine issues of power. In this way, language is subjective and subject to issues of power which suppress ways of knowing. Cherryholmes (1988) encapsulates an example of deconstruction in the following dialogue:

How can the meaning of a word be fixed if it points to a definition composed of words that point to multiple definitions composed of yet more words that point to…and so on without end. Where do we begin? Where do we end? What limits this chasing after origins and centers of language and discourse? If we use a dictionary we tend to stop after finding a definition or two because there are practical and situational limits on our need for rigor and closure determined, in part, by dominant discourses—practices that constrain our search for meanings. The structure, rigor, and orderliness promised by structuralism is illusionary. Settling upon a foundation is situational and pragmatic. Authors of record choose to press certain ideas rhetorically or logically, and readers choose to stop deconstructing the text at certain moments. (p. 37-38)

Howarth’s (2013) description of the transcendental signified through the footprint analogy is suggestive that meaning will forever allude to something that is not there. This posits, from a poststructural standpoint, from a temporary pause at this momentary
analysis of text, that there are a multitude of interpretations constructed by meanings that are not permanent. Cherryholmes (1988) suggests that dominant discourses “constrain research for meaning.” Weedon (1997) explains, “This does not mean that meaning disappears altogether but that any interpretation is at best temporary, specific to the discourse within which it is produced and open to challenge” (p. 82). In an example of this, Weedon writes, “The meaning of the signifier ‘woman’ varies from ideal to victim to object of sexual desire, according to its context. Consequently, it is always open to challenge and redefinition with shifts in its discursive context” (p. 25).

Derrida questions structure itself as well as a center. A center of meaning relays ties to the historical and artificial construction of a specific essence in humanity. This metaphysical perception of a human essence has worked to fixate and inhibit human subjects over time. Derrida does not believe that we can escape metaphysics. However, in deconstructing language one can see that meaning is not always rational and scientific, logical and justified (Cherryholmes, 1998; Peters & Burbules, 2004; Weedon, 1997; Williams, 2005). In Derridian work, there is a critique of logocentrism, deriving from the Greek word logos, or rational principles that reflect the external world within the human mind (Ozmon & Craver, 1999). The work of Derrida became a critical turning point for structuralism as it challenged this rationalism. It became the post, the “with but also different,” in relation to structuralism (Williams, 2005, p. 25). According to Howarth (2013), “In short, in this view, the signifier ‘post’ in poststructuralist theory signifies a refusal either to completely reject or totally endorse structuralism; instead, it signifies a ‘both/and’ strategy whereby the resources of the structuralist paradigm are liberated from the essentialist strictures of its metaphysical impulses” (p. 10). The continual difference
and deferral shattered notions of absolute truth and linguistically sound constructions used to capture experience. Peters and Burbules (2004) write:

Derrida’s aim then, is to question at a deep cultural level the metaphorical coding of Western metaphysics and the way in which its history has been determined by a succession of what we might call substitution metaphors, where any number of humanist terms have been substituted for centre (the structurality of structure). This stunning insight reveals the extent to which in the West, the history of metaphysics had not been thought through until Heidegger radically revealed it for what it was: ideological constructions. Taking a leaf from Heidegger, Derrida begins the process of decentering structure and all its substitutions. This decentering calls into question both the transcendental signified and the sovereign subject, and also announces Derrida’s sources of inspiration for this radical move in Nietzsche’s critique and Heidegger’s deconstruction of metaphysics, and in Freud’s critique of self-presence (questioning whether we are transparent to ourselves). (p. 68)

Nietzsche’s critique is skepticism of assumed truths in the West. Western metaphysics has historically created a privileging of specific values, thought processes, and universal rationality masked as reality, all of which promote binaries such as mind/body, male/female, reason/madness, and rationality/emotions (Hughes 2002; Lather 1991; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). This skepticism of truth can be traced in the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida, among others, who worked to “decenter the ‘structures,’” the systematicity and scientific status of structuralism, to critique its underlying metaphysics and to extend it in a number of different directions, while at the same time preserving central elements of structuralism’s critique of the humanist subject” (Peters & Burbules 2004, p. 8). In this sense, poststructuralism began as and continues to be a movement and a philosophical response to structuralism.

To grasp the referenced concept of “ideological constructions” and the history of metaphysics in the West, it is crucial to understand humanist perceptions tied to subjectivity emerging from Western Europe, where “the God-given socially fixed, unfree
subject of the feudal order became the free, rational, self-determining subject of modern political, legal, social, and aesthetic discourses” (Weedon, 1997, p. 75). It is in this context that, following the death of God proclaimed by Nietzsche (Ozmon & Craver, 1999; Peters and Burbules, 2004) that there is a decentering of the subject by a break from an absolute authority. God then places humanity in charge of itself.

Derived from https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/254564

From this modern rise, individuals were perceived as rational, reasonable, and value-laden, capable of being in control of their lives, and filled with a human essence which is self-knowing and steady (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). This mainstream perception is dominant today in America. Weedon (1997) writes:

From early childhood we learn to see ourselves as unified, rational beings, able to perceive the truth of reality. We learn that, as rational individuals, we should be noncontradictory and in control of the meaning of our lives. This understanding of subjectivity is guaranteed by common sense and the liberal-humanist theory of meaning which underpins it. (pp. 76-77)

This human essence, or human nature, solidifies reality. It is, as Weedon writes, “the medium through which already fixed ‘truths’ about the world, society, and individuals are expressed” (p. 74). The fixed knowledge which Weedon refers to is known to individuals as common sense, a seemingly transparent, undisputable, rational, and fixed body of knowledge which functions as a root to the way the world is approached by mass individuals in a society. Common sense then holds power because it holds an assertion that all individuals share a rational view of the world. It seeps and sears into the language of institutions and research, carried by the everyday implementation of its use. From this
stance, ideology has no role in the discourse of common sense, as common sense is stagnant and perceived as neutral. Therefore, it is taken for granted and not up for challenge. However, common sense is relevant in language, and the language specifically in institutions because the current, dominant discourses assume certain truths and hold power in the outcome of dialogues. Gavey (1989) writes, “The dominant discourses appear ‘natural,’ denying their own partiality and gaining their authority by appealing to common sense” (p. 464). Thus truths formed at the end of the feudal order that became the basis for common sense created a belief that all humans hold an essence of rational consciousness filled with commonsense truths. In this way, there became reliance upon experience as the method for articulating one’s reality, resting on an assumption that there is transparency in language as evidenced by commonsense truths. From this, a state of universal truths, or metanarratives, became the basis for the Enlightenment period and the Scientific Revolution (Lather 1991; Weedon, 1997). Grasping knowledge which is natural, rational, easily articulated, and logical became linked to the ideas defining intelligence (McCoy, as cited in St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). Peters and Burbules (2004) write:

Therefore, humanism, as a movement, especially in its Enlightenment guise, begins to construct a very powerful picture of the self as a knowing subject: The self both knows itself and the world through reason, and reason or rationality is posited as the highest form of human functioning. This view of the rational self then becomes the basis for a mode of knowing that is considered “scientific” in the sense that it can provide truths about the world. Such knowledge produced by science is deemed to be both “true” and “objective.” This kind of knowledge—scientific knowledge produced by the rational knowing self—is believed to lead to progress, improvement, and moral perfectibility in human affairs. The human sciences can be seen in one sense as a development out of humanist thought based upon the sovereignty of the human subject or self. (p. 40)
This position implies an ideology suggesting “moral perfectibility” can be achieved through common sense, rationality, and objective truths. This “modern” position still floods through institutions today.

According to Williams (2005), “Poststructuralism must be thought of as deconstruction, and not the opposite. This is because poststructuralism is nothing other than a series of works that have come to define it. There is no separate determining definition of poststructuralism” (p. 25). The series of works I’ve discussed has given me great insight into poststructuralism. In addition to these scholars, there are many more that have greatly influenced the movement. I cannot explore all of them on the pages of this study. However, there are a few academics I must speak more about which have been integral participants in poststructuralist thoughts.

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984), in The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, reflects upon the “grand narratives” of modern society and then partakes in the act of rebellion by defining “postmodernism” as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (p. xxiv). Cherryholmes (1988) writes, “The modern attitude is part of the Enlightenment tradition. It is concerned with rational control of our lives, beliefs, values, and aesthetic sensibilities. But the required metanarrative(s) that spell out such rationality have not been forthcoming” (p. 10). He further posits, “Metanarratives are similar to paradigms that guide thought and practice in a discipline or profession. Metanarratives guide by rules; paradigms, by example in the form of concrete examples and puzzle solutions” (p. 11). However, Lyotard’s work in The Postmodern Condition is not his most influential work, especially in regards to poststructuralism. His poststructural work can be seen in texts such as The Differend, Libidinal Economy, and Discourse, Figure, where his writing
illustrates the clash between feelings and desires versus structures such as the economy. In short, these works highlight the movement towards understanding the complexity and impossibility in resolving arguments and the need to embrace a skeptical position about knowledge, as there are limits to any view of reality (Williams, 2005). Williams writes, “So Lyotard’s poststructuralism seeks to explain the changes, evolutions, and revolutions of discourses as well as their relation to what they refer to. It does so by appealing to a special matter, the figural, and to figural events where feelings flow through language and reality” (pp. 89-90).

Foucault (1994) is another important scholar who is recognized for exploring issues of power associated with poststructuralism. Foucault was an intellectual who studied the technical processes in institutions and concepts such as prisons, schools, hospitals, govermentality, sexuality, subjectivity, ethics, neoliberalism, biopower, and grammar (Cherryholmes, 1988; Howarth, 2013; Peters & Burbules, 2004). Foucault was concerned with “the history of the ways in which human beings are constituted as subjects, as process that involved power relations as an integral part of the production of discourses involving truth” (Peters, 2003). While Foucault is cited frequently in poststructural history, this is more a result of his beliefs paralleling thoughts of poststructuralists. He does not directly define himself as a poststructuralist. Foucault is hesitant to construct and reinforce any term associated with the “fixing of” or related to a common narrative. Placing himself in the poststructural category would be adhering to structure, thus openly adhering to a demarcation of structuralism and poststructuralism. To structure himself would be humanist, as part of defining this term would, for Foucault, do little to promote the theoretical deconstruction of binaries “that lead either to the
positing of sharp discontinuities between historical periods, or which assume necessary or teleological continuities amongst dispersed phenomena” (Howarth, 2013, p. 58). Foucault is most associated, however, with postmodernism, as he examines humanity through deconstructing the ways in which language and knowledge are exchanged as a result of the industrial, modern society in which we live (Ozmon & Craver, 1999).

Nietzsche’s (1968) work emphasized the breakdown of truth, foregrounding plurality, temporality, and the will to power which expanded discussions of the will to truth and will to knowledge. Nietzsche’s Kantian and Platonic criticisms have been instrumental in the development of poststructuralist thought (Williams, 2005). Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, Heidegger, and Saussure all built upon Nietzsche’s stress on style and self-becoming. These intellectuals explored the ways by which context, issues of will, and emergence of thought all have acted as instrumental waves which have interplayed among the ever-changing subject (Peters & Burbules, 2004). From deep thinkers such as these crossing the boundaries of disciplines, the movement of poststructuralism surfaced.

**Subjectification**

In returning to the Western, rational idea that language is transparent and untouched by ideology, one may assume the poststructuralist frame of thought embraces subjectivity as the essence of individuals (Weedon, 1997). This idea is complex within a poststructuralist frame of reference, as there are conflicting perspectives on issues related to the subjectivity dialogue. However, what is consistent in most poststructuralist discussions is the idea that subjectivity is not innate, but socially produced having been tied to the cultural and historical contexts of the subject. Thus there is no essence defining
subjectivities that are common among all individuals other than language. According to Davies et al. (2002), the subject does not disappear, but the subject is incapable of reliably informing anyone about itself, and is in Derrida’s perception “an effect of subjectification.” Davies et al. continue this explanation by referencing Derrida and writing, “Derrida thus resituates the subject from being one that has a transcendental, prediscursive identity, to the *subject inscribed, and continuously reinscribed in language*” (p. 292). Further, the authors insist that Foucault “installs the subject as one who can be aware of the effects of subjectification and disrupt or refuse its apparent imperatives” (p. 292). These positions couple and weave with the poststructuralist dialogue on language and meanings as plural, temporary, and opaque. Subjectivity is characterized this way because it migrates as a result of its inability to remain unified and coalesced from location to location and dialogue to dialogue (Weedon, 1997).

Given that language and subjectivity are socially constructed, an analysis of an individual’s consciousness, dialogues exploring power, and an examination of societal interactions are possible through deconstruction, thus transforming the meaning of experience. According to Weedon (1997), language does not reflect experience. Experience is constituted in language. She writes, “Language offers a range of ways of interpreting our lives which imply different versions of experience. In the process of interacting with the world, we give meaning to things by learning the linguistic processes of thought and speech, drawing on the ways of understanding the world to which we have access” (p. 82). Therefore, the cultural ways in which one acquires language deeply affects, in turn, the way in which one articulates his or her understanding of the world. The recognition of this notion is a primary difference between poststructural stances on
subjectivity and humanist perspectives (Gavey, 1989). This does not mean that the way a person interprets experiences cannot change. Layering subjectivities to examine practices such as positions and struggles in a sociohistorical context can create new avenues in conscious and unconscious thought, thus embracing the redefinition of self. Again, however, transformation is not unified and universal, nor comparable in degrees of certainty. Nor is it fixed. Addressing an internal, subjective stance, Weedon (1997) crucially states:

As individuals we are not the mere objects of language but the sites of discursive struggle, a struggle which takes place in the consciousness of the individual. In the battle for subjectivity, and for the supremacy of particular versions of meaning, which is part of that battle, the individual is not merely the passive site of discursive struggle. The individual, who has a memory and an already discursively constituted sense of identity, may resist particular interpellations or produce new versions of meaning from the conflicts and contradictions between existing discourses. Knowledge of more than one discourse and the recognition that meaning is plural allows for a measure of choice on the part of the individual, and even where choice is not available, resistance is still possible. (p. 102)

From examining various positions (all positions are subjective) and in examining our own versions of meaning, there are choices that are faced through resistance, recognition, assimilation, and/or the countering of various meanings. The brain is not passive. Whether through physical action or through the examination of articulation and thought construction, there are acts of resistance involved in choosing to change within ourselves, thus producing agency. For language is not transparent. It is filled with assumptions and inferences. It is unable to universally capture experience. Language conveys a multitude of meanings, all of which are illustrative of a discursive battle within the subject. To layer this position, I place Lather’s (1991) quote which states that language is seen as the “carrier and creator of a culture’s epistemological codes.” She posits, “The ways we
speak and write are held to influence our conceptual boundaries and to create areas of silence as language organizes meaning in terms of preestablished categories” (p. 111).

Poststructuralism can embrace this notion of influencing our conceptual boundaries by, as Lather (1991) states, demanding “radical reflection on our interpretative frames” (p. 111). In this sense, researchers can dig deep into interpretation by pulling back assumptions to examine silences created from the promotion of specific language, as well as examine motives for such language application. In addition, poststructuralism suggests tracing the sources of language in relation to contexts of power. In this way, Lather (1991) writes, “We enter the Foucauldian shift from paradigm to discourse, from a focus on researcher ontology and epistemology in the shaping of paradigmatic choice, to a focus on the productivity of language in the construction of the objects of investigation” (p. 111). For example, rather than questioning what skills are most essential for preparing third graders for college and career readiness, poststructuralist researchers might ask, “Why are curricularists molding third graders into predetermined positions involving their futures, thus silencing their interests, passions, and intrinsic drive for learning by not constructing curriculum which places their interests at the forefront of learning?”

**Education Ideology and the Exclusion of Subjectivities**

Much of the research I am suggesting in this space is tied to an examination of discourse and deconstruction. As this exploration of fragmentation and split subjectivity unravels, I feel issues regarding my position on educational initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are self-defined by the reader. Nonetheless, a brief argument highlighting the difference between paradigm and discourse can be seen
in the contrast between the *discourses* examining poststructuralist movements and the

*paradigm* of the CCSS.

The CCSS are tied to a Social Efficiency ideology, evidenced in a model which was constructed to prepare students for college and career readiness. Shiro (2013) describes the Social Efficiency ideology in the following way:

Social Efficiency educators consider their aim to be the efficient carrying out of a task for a client. In fulfilling this aim, they see themselves as educational engineers who design and implement educational programs that shape the behavior of people in much the same way as industrial engineers design and manufacture railroad rails from steel. This analogy involves the assumption that the educational engineer and the industrial engineer both obtain their tasks from a client; both are evaluated by the ability of their product to fulfill the needs of a client (both are accountable to a client in the final analysis); both use a precise, particularized, and atomistic approach to accomplishing their purposes; both plan with a high degree of care and explicitness; both pay rigorous attention to empirical events and standards; both value sophisticated use of scientific techniques; and both take a programmatic approach to transforming their raw material into a finished product. (p. 84)

The Social Efficiency ideology has an “interpretative frame” suggesting and embracing a humanist, atomistic, and scientific orientation which can “fix” society. Its presence did not evolve alone with the CCSS, “Race to the Top,” or “No Child Left Behind.” The Social Efficiency ideology has a long history in education, dating back to the early 1900s with John Franklin Bobbitt. Bobbitt, the leading promoter of “efficient” education, published his first recognized work entitled “The Elimination of Waste in Education” in 1912. Kliebard (2004) cites his theory of Social Efficiency in 1918:

The central theory is simple. Human life, however varied, consists in the performance of specific activities. Education that prepares for life is one that prepares definitely and adequately for these specific activities. However numerous and diverse they may be for any social class, they can be discovered. This requires only that one go out into the world of affairs and discover the particulars of which these affairs consist. These will show the abilities, attitudes, habits, appreciations, and forms of knowledge that men need. These will be the objectives of the curriculum. They will be numerous, definite, and particularized.
The curriculum will then be that series of experiences children and youth must have by way of attaining those objectives. (Bobbitt, as cited in Kliebard, p. 98)

This series of statements assumes that no matter the type of human involved, one can and should acquire an education. Education is defined as something that prepares one for life. In the CCSS, life’s primary purpose is connected to the economy through job fulfillment and production. The abilities, attitudes, habits, appreciations, and forms of knowledge clearly defined through an application of definite and particular skills through standards for all, give a template for what knowledge students should acquire. Other forms of knowledge, like philosophies of teaching that are subjective and “emotional,” are not worthy of addressing. Hence diversity within society should not be diversified in education. All should acquire the same skills and knowledge because all will participate in the world in the same way. Education should be attained with this assumption in the form of a truth.

Charlie Chaplin in the movie Modern Times, 1936

Cherryholmes’ (1988) work outlines clear connections between the Social Efficiency ideology and structuralism in education since at least World War II. His deconstruction of Tyler’s Rationale (1949), Schwab’s The Practical 4 (1983), and Bloom et al.’s Taxonomy (1948), which promises order, organization, certainty, accountability,
control, and efficiency is consistent with “teaching for objectives, standardized educational assessment, quantitative empirical research, systematic instruction, rationalized bureaucracies, and scientific management” (p. 30). This rational and standardized space of certainty has attempted to construct human beings who are atomized, categorical, and egotistical in the sense of knowing all truths. In this realm, the subject/self fails to grasp plurality and multiplicity in knowing. Strega (2005) writes:

Enlightenment epistemology inscribes a subject/self that is autonomous, rational, neutral, unitary, and abstracted from its context. Liberal humanism, rooted in Enlightenment epistemology, posits a subject/self that has agency: this self is “self-conscious,” in control of itself, and capable of and required to create an identity from an allegedly unlimited range of choices. (p. 220)

The pseudoequality myth speaks for others. It suggests that all people who have worked hard enough, despite their positions or locations, can and will, as evidenced by history, have success if they attain the knowledge presented for them by elite “standardistas” (Ohanion, 1999). It assumes that whether your parents went to Yale or no college at all, you hold the ability to create yourself from, like Strega (2005) writes, an unlimited range of choices. It suggests that no matter where you come from and whom you are, despite any factors stacked against you, you can have an equal opportunity to access quality, rational, logical education which results in an attainment of any and all dreams. Yet, this authoritative and universal narrative speaks with a crooked smile. For an example of this crooked smile shining in its finest, see the book Savage Inequalities (1991) by Jonathan Kozol. Ironically, a primary criticism against poststructuralism is that poststructuralists live in a utopia. To the contrary, one may suggest that the real utopia lies within the academic rationalism of American education. But, that is a subjective position.
Before going deeper into this unfold, I’m pausing to think on Richardson’s (2000) stance on being visible in texts. She writes, “We are always present in our texts, no matter how we try to suppress ourselves. We are always writing in particular contexts—contexts that affect what and how we write and who we become. Power relationships are always present” (p. 154). I am deliberately bringing this issue to surface in this spot, countering notions of “being in control of oneself,” because from my stance, the Social Efficiency ideology in past and present educational initiatives seems to illustrate a reality where individuals are not, as Davies et al. (2002) write, effects of subjectification (referencing work with Derrida). In this world, where subjectification untouches individuals, the constructors of knowledge too must be free from subjectification. Thus, their discourse is truth, real, and untouched by subjectivity. There are no fragments of self that fluctuate and weave, but rather work in a space where environment has no effect on thought or action.

By book artist Emma Lloyd

**Feminisms and Poststructuralism**

**A Father’s Tongue and Epistemic Authority**
As I build the remainder of this section on subjectivity and move into feminism, I face the recognition of a deep personal battle. For no matter how much I learn or how far I go, I am still a white woman, on the brink of 40 years old, from a middle class town in Illinois. I was still the girl who faced deep emotional trauma, who traveled the world, who resided primarily with her father, who struggled with conformity, and who questioned authority. I am still the girl that had to do that, be that person, who had to go through that to get to where I am now. Or perhaps I wouldn’t be here. There were times in my life of glorified rebellion and times when it was simply an effort to breathe. There was joy and there was pain. And in some of those spaces, the only thing I could do to make it through the day was to exist. I was incapable of anything else during those moments. Those moments and experiences were where I was in my life and was all I could do. Therefore, for some notion suggesting that I was in the same position, ready to consume the same rational knowledge as some girl who did not spend the majority of her youth falling asleep in the booth of some bar, is a misunderstanding of epic proportion. To ignore the raw vulnerability of my youth as a factor in my position lacks responsibility and holds enormous insensitivity on the tellers of such truth. For if someone came to me with talk of achievement percentages or doing better in school, I would have stared at them blindly. I couldn’t see beyond my own struggles. It was not in the same space as others. My nights were filled with the anxiety of darkness and the displacements associated with living out of a suitcase. As I think of my silences, I also think of my anger. I settle on Kaplan’s (1997) words that echo in my ear: “My childhood and adolescence was one long struggle with a paternal authority which had imagined a gentler, more docile daughter” (p. 38). As a result of such a childhood, I resisted. I
discovered the power of my convictions in a self-induced hunger strike at age eight, as a protest to stop attending a specific school. I became dehydrated, hospitalized, and wore my crooked smile when it was announced that my rebellion had worked. Working among tensions in the system, my passions came late. Rationalism didn’t save me. Social Efficiency never conformed me. Educators didn’t know me. No one did reach me.

My lust for knowledge and lifelong learning did not occur until midway into my college experience. I touched on it briefly in high school through every art class I could take, and I had my world momentarily suspended with the reading of four texts in “multicultural” literature: The Joy Luck Club (Tan, 1989), A Handmaid’s Tale (Atwood, 1985), Iron and Silk (Salzman, 1986), and There are No Children Here (Kotlowitz, 1992). But it wasn’t until I took a class on “alternate” humanities, suggesting a “humanities” course that was different than the traditional humanities, where I became angered and wanted to walk and talk with other women. From the oral histories and essays in my most memorable texts, Mothers of the Revolution: The War Experiences of Thirty Zimbabwean Women (Staunton, 1991), Sandino’s Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua (Randall, 1994), Freedom from Fear: And Other Writings (Suu Kyi, 1995), and Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change (Gluck, 1988), I found something within myself. My story wasn’t like theirs, but I felt a deep connection to their words. It was the first time I read true stories capturing such experience that were so very different than mine, but at the same time shared something similar. There, in those spaces, their writing made me feel more than I ever would in my classes on English literature or on topics like tabula rasa and Romeo and Juliet. For the first time, every time, their words spoke to me. I would spend that time of my life, continuing into this
current space, ravishing texts and earning degrees. Their words had sparked something within me. I felt then that I was no longer alone. From them, I found more within me and began a new quest. I would move from my bachelor’s degree in journalism, to a master’s in the art of teaching, to a second master’s as a certificate of advanced study specializing in reading, to certification as an English language learner teacher, onto two levels of certification for leadership coaching, and onto a pursuit of a doctorate degree.

I would write my first statistical research project on the in-validity of the Miller Analogies Test; produce a “disturbing” presentation on critical literacy, which my colleagues would say would make white parents shrill; and create multimedia presentations with music, art, poetry, and narrative. My projects were always embracing subjectivities and filled with uncertainty, challenging dominant assumptions about knowledge. Does this mean my pursuits were unworthy? I hope not. I believe not. Yet, at the same time, despite all this education and lust, I will always feel behind. The “facts” put before me will always have me thinking I need more. And that fill will never be reached. I will, when reading Foucault or Derrida, or academics of this kind of intensity, always, always, always feel small. I feel like I don’t get it. I don’t get the certainty. I don’t get the world they live in. And in this space I walk a tightrope. Wanting more, more to challenge, but still not worthy. Because I speak in a different way. And it is a less of. I will always feel less. Wrong. Not like. Different. I have no choice but to embrace this and overcome it or walk in a false space. I do recognize that because I began my pursuit of knowledge later in life, starting from locations of white trash drama, and I used that as fuel to get to where I am, that I will never be equal in my attainment of knowledge. I will
always be two steps behind. But this position is the effect of subjectification. Thus, it should not matter in the attainment of knowledge. So why does it?

In navigating these feelings of worthlessness, I battle tensions regarding this form of currency and my skepticism of it never reaching mainstream academic writing. I battle positions regarding why vulnerability is viewed as a “lack” in educational spaces. More specifically, why vulnerability is looked at as a negative quality that must be masked, veiled, and covered. And why authoritative writing is so widely accepted. Egotistical certitude has me spinning. I find it seeping into my writing even as I resist it. I, like Kaplan (1997), feel that “in some upside down way writing became saturated with a set of ethical prescriptions that I could neither refuse nor wholly accept. It became what others desired of me, and only sometimes what I wanted for and of myself” (p. 38-39).

Brene Brown, social researcher who wrote Rising Strong, said, “Hiding out, pretending, and armoring up against vulnerability are killing us: killing our spirits, our hopes, our potential, our creativity, our ability to lead, our love, our faith, and our joy” (2015, p. xix). Academia in its everydayness has little space for discussions of hope, potential, creativity, love, faith, and joy when there is an atomized focus on rigor and text complexity constructed to get kids ready for future jobs that we don’t even know will exist. Instead, it has major investments wrapped up in conversations on behavioristic attempts to control the masses, leaving untapped potential blowing in the wind.
This public–private dichotomy, or as Tompkins (1997) states, “public–private hierarchy,” is a foundation for female oppression (p. 45). She comments in this way:

Alison Jaggar gave a lecture recently that crystallized the problem. Western epistemology, she argues, is shaped by the belief that emotion should be excluded from the process of attaining knowledge. Because women in our culture are not simply encouraged but required to be the bearers of emotion, which men are culturally conditioned to repress, and epistemology which excludes emotions from the process of attaining knowledge radically undercuts women’s epistemic authority. The idea that the conventions defining legitimate sources of knowledge overlapped with the conventions defining appropriate gender behavior (male) came to me as a blinding insight. I saw that I had been socialized from birth to feel and act in ways that automatically excluded me from participating in the culture’s most valued activities. No wonder I felt so uncomfortable in the postures academic prose forced me to assume; it was like wearing men’s jeans. (p. 46)

While this suggestion does promote binary thinking of men and women’s feelings and stances, my subjective stance feels it. I can speak for myself and say that I concur with Tompkins’ position on feeling oppressed by the domination of the linguistic limit relating to vulnerability and uncertainty on academic research. It is like I’m supposed to further technologize my language usage in order to move higher up in education and in order for anything I say to be considered relevant. It is the technocratic, the rational, the logical, the efficient, the scientific and research-based notions that it seems I must use as the premise for all I think and do in educational settings (if I hope to participate in the culture’s most valued activities like politics, activism, and education).

In layering these positions and highlighting the deconstruction of humanism, I am not rejecting all theory or all forms of certainty. I’m merely pointing to the fractures. The
feminism I see myself settling into is not rejecting all scientific research, but is choosing
theory that challenges the status quo while welcoming the fragmentation of self and
others (Kemp & Squires, 1997). And as much as I wish to move beyond myself and the
humanism that is an effect of my subjectification, it is not fully possible. While I hope to
transform into a new space, the language that I have utilized to get where I am, the
“father tongue,” is something I cannot escape (Tompkins, 1997, p. 47). I will never be
able to reject humanism entirely, nor will I be able to articulate my perceptions fully. St.
Pierre and Pillow (2000) speak of this as “always speaking within the language of
humanism, our mother tongue, a discourse that spawns structure after structure after
structure—binaries, categories, hierarchies, and other grids of regularity that are not only
linguistic but also very material” (p. 4). Spivak (1993) also speaks of humanism as the
“mother tongue.” However, Tompkins’ perception resonates most fulfilling to me, by
stating that in academic research, “we all speak the father tongue, which is impersonal,
while decrying the fathers’ ideas.” To further illustrate this point, she writes, “You can’t
get behind the thing that casts the shadow. You cast the shadow. As soon as you turn, the
shadow falls in another place. It is still your shadow. You have not got ‘behind’ yourself”
(p. 48). This contradiction, this struggle, this hypocrisy, is something I wish to admit to
rather than mask. I will never be able to escape the “father’s tongue,” but I can enter into
this space, a closer space within me, fighting a discursive battle to examine the silences,
and bring forth language radiating plurality in the fight against false metanarratives. I can
hold and nurture this “split subjectivity” (Kaplan, 1997).

No “We”? Femocrats, Post-Posts, and Whiteness
As I wrote in Chapter One, *I am not an authority of any sort*. This is especially true when it comes to feminism. I am not a college professor in the field and have constructed no scholarly work directly reflecting feminisms. My feet are barely wet on the topic and I have not been keeping a pulse on the field. In discussing published feminist reflections, Kemp and Squires (1997) write:

Those who most frequently and assuredly lay claim to the title “feminist” now tend to be those who have defined their career in no small part through this identity. As a result, it is not marginalization but institutionalization, not silencing but selling-out, which appears to preoccupy current feminist self-reflections. Whilst this development is positive to the extent that it represents an institutional recognition of feminists, there is concern that the emergence of “femocrats”—a new breed who have used feminism as a tool to engineer professional success—generates a language of feminist theory and criticism which can be exclusive and alienating to those who are not a part of such professions. Countering this trend, one strategy is to turn to a “popular feminism,” which interestingly does not name itself feminist, which is to be found in the everyday—in plots of TV soaps, in the narratives of popular fiction, in the battles over employment legislation and maternity rights, etc... (p. 5)

As I have written previously, this is a coming-to-terms piece. I’m working through my position as a so-called poststructuralist and as a feminist. However, I am experiencing this sense of exclusiveness and alienation Kemp and Squires speak of. I question: Am I a feminist when there are so many feminisms which I can’t seem to get the meat of in terms of what some feminists are proposing? Am I feminist when the reading I do on feminism only makes me less connected to the feminists who author such work? I question, where does all this work leave me? Why does everything which has influenced me in my life correlate strongly to my position as a woman? What does this even mean when there is no essence in humanity and woman? I don’t feel academic enough to be in with the femocrats. Where does this leave me? A case in point: Braidotti (2010) writes:

By 1995, the game will be over and the counteroffensive against poststructuralism will have won the day. Gayatri Spivak, looking back over this period in 2003,
speaks of the death of a discipline to indicate the decline and fall of poststructuralist-driven literary theory and comparative literature in the U.S. academy. Nonetheless, the hegemonic hold that high poststructuralist thought had over the most critical and creative minds of that academic generation endures. (p. 225)

Braidotti also uses language to describe the feminist philosophers who came after poststructuralism. She states, “The post-poststructuralists of the intermediate generation ended up altering the very theoretical premises from which they had started, innovating on content and concepts. They also established a firm corpus of feminist scholarship that institutionalized the idea of collective teamwork as a key feminist method” (p. 235).

In some ways, the portions of Braidotti’s reflections on poststructuralism which suggest poststructuralism was most alive during a specific generation, and Howarth’s (2013) discussions of poststructuralism in the text Poststructuralism and After, don’t help in my feelings of displacement or disconnection. Parts of me feel as if I have missed the boat in participating in the poststructuralist movement. That it has passed. This displacement I feel is twofold. In these readings, I feel frustrated that poststructuralism is a new concept for me. It is an intellectual movement that is only beginning in my studies. It is a radical premise that is jolting me back to my internal positions as I examine every bit of language and assumption that echoes in the dialogues of my location. It is forcing a reexamination, an awareness, a barrage of questions, and a shift in the ways that I am constructing my understanding of history, culture, social phenomenon, and my place in it. It is huge.

At the same time, I feel frustration in the continued demarcation between what I consider “high academia” and the real world in which I live. Some discussions on poststructuralism make me feel foolish, naive, less intellectual, and idiotic in my position,
for I once again have returned to a position where I need validation to progress into new terrain. The division between high academics, discussing complex research in linguistically challenging positions, reminds me of my everydayness (back to that femocrat issue), resulting in a sense of holding an inferior position in the world. It creates a space where the bridge to “knowing” becomes even longer, spanning much greater distances. I suppose this is a challenge for poststructuralism and for myself—a woman, mother, and teacher living in the everydayness of things. Poststructuralism makes me feel vulnerable. For I cannot hide behind truths, realities, and rationalities of humanism if I am to be in touch with my primordial self. Nor can I live in an isolated world of academia where the language in which I speak and write becomes inaccessible to many inhabitants of my location. It is a space of humility. Braidotti reminds me of this when she writes, “Feminist philosophers confront the third millennium of Western philosophical history fully aware that they are historically relative newcomers in this discipline and have only just started to play an active role in it” (2010, p. 244). Finding ways to shorten that bridge as I stand in the middle of it without falling into the valleys of the rocks below is the quest I must face. Braidotti (2010) writes of her participation in poststructuralism and others in the following way:

Because of the diasporic nature of poststructuralist philosophies of difference and subjectivity, however, and as a result of their enormous generative force, feminist philosophies in the 1980-95 period simply explode in an outburst of creativity. So much so that it is daunting to even attempt to account for the successful social and intellectual revolution that marks the coming of age of an entirely new generation of feminist philosophers who grew up with and after high poststructuralism. (p. 226)

This perspective illustrates Braidotti in a location where poststructuralism was as an exploding social and intellectual revolution. However, from my location, a newly
identified feminist just diving into poststructuralism thought, there is/was nothing of the sort trickling down into mainstream education and society. I briefly heard the term “poststructuralism” thrown around from a professor or two from time to time during philosophical discussions, and it remained foreign to me, having not been worked into my doctoral studies deeply. It was rather one of many “theories,” like an appendage to various paradigms in education, but never a “movement” or revolution. I do not see it as a social revolution as it does not, from my location, seem evident in and among the work I do as a mother, teacher, and woman in my everydayness. The institutions where I work as an educator continue to push specific ideologies in a commonsensical fashion, based on what is coded as scientific research. This is both in collegiate and most of my post-graduate classes, as well as in the K-12 environments in which I participate. I do not see traces of it in the adoption of common standards, forms of data, standardized testing, and/or in the welcoming of uncertainties and the plurality of perspective. Local contexts, gender, race, and class issues remain primarily ignored along with forms of deconstruction in the everydayness of things. Universality of curriculum and metanarratives continues to saturate the educational market. Taliaferro-Baszile (2010) writes:

> Although there have been many challenges to it—as we have come to know it—scientific rationality continues to be the cornerstone of academia’s dominant epistemological project, most deeply embedded within those practices considered normal, neutral, and necessary to sustaining academic integrity, rigor, and elitism. The linchpin is objectivity, or rather the pathological distance we must maintain in order to know something not fully, but legitimately. (p. 489)

It is only in my isolated endeavor of reading, studying, and writing that I have begun to wrestle with poststructuralist work, and now it is beginning to trickle into my position as a woman, mother, and teacher fighting to hang on to a final string of wonder. But as I
have reiterated, I stand alone here in this location. Yet, I am, *being-in-the-world-with-others*. This too shall seep into my work.

For me, poststructuralism is a new adventure. It is a tool I have used for validity, a “proof,” that the feelings of resistance to the conformity and commonsense initiatives in education, in knowing, and in life, have a source. A source that can be traced. However inappropriate or wrong this concept might be in claiming to hold a poststructuralist position, I feel this long resistance has finally found a way to surface as voices speaking the multiplicities of knowing. It is a permission I have longed to hear. I feel I can now add layers to the “father’s tongue” which has bound me. I hear the surfacing of new voices and they carry the footprint of something that was once there, but has been hiding in exile as the terrains were ruled by tyrants. The voices I hear inside myself, the inner language that is emerging will always speak from the “father tongue.” Yet, now the voices I hear are slowly morphing, dividing, and gaining strength. Something new is emerging. It is a peaceful welcoming home. It is the permission to move forward as some bricks have become dismantled, crashing structure to the ground.

I take Lather’s words (2010) and question:

What is it to choose uncertainty in our teaching, to insist on limits, to hold up doubt and not knowing as ways of knowing? How might such work address the thought that has been unthinkable for some time and make visible in the name of responsibility and accountability to complexity, multiplicity, becoming, difference, the yes that comes from working the stuck places, and what haunts us? (pp. 76-77)

What will this look like, working the stuck places that haunt me? It is an endeavor I cannot predict the result of. But it is an endeavor I must travel.

**Challenges to Address in Research: Just a Middle Class White Woman**
My research lacks a comparison to Rosi Braidotti’s “Nomadic Theory,” which is a theory I recently discovered through a survey of bibliographies. In my future research, I may dig deeper into this theory and examine her locations in relation to my position as a nomad. While I have not yet read most of her work, I have thumbed through some pages after working the majority of my literature argument and I came across this passage from Braidotti (2011):

A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self—it’s no metaphor. It fulfills the purpose of finding suitable situated locations to make the difference between different locations. Being nomadic, homeless, a migrant, an exile, a refugee, a tourist, a rape-in-war victim, an itinerant migrant, an illegal immigrant, an expatriate, a mail-order bride, a foreign caretaker of the young or the elderly of the economically developed world, a global venture financial expert, a humanitarian relief worker in the UN global system, a citizen of a country that no longer exists (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union)—these are no metaphors, but social locations. (p. 14)

With these words it becomes suggestive that my work will be criticized for my nomad analogy. Others may critique my work as trivial. I am not a rape-in-war victim, or homeless, nor a participant of the struggling places Braidotti describes. I feel what I consider my oppression isn’t big enough or heart-wrenching enough to matter. Perhaps others may feel that I should just be silent.

Additionally, Braidotti (2011) further posits:

Having a passport or having too many of them is neither equivalent nor is it merely metaphorical, as some feminist critics of nomadic subjectivity have suggested. These are highly specific geopolitical and historical locations—it’s history tattooed on your body. One may be empowered or beautified by it, but most people are not; some just die of it. (p. 14)

Based on these words and the amount of work I’ve read on feminism, a challenge to my work is whether there is any relevance from my American position. As poststructuralism
and feminism are both intellectual movements in my mind which influence my research, and with my repeated statement of “I am not an authority of any sort,” what does my work really mean for the reader? And who is my reader? While I have hopes of inspiring creativity, examining positions, and layering/exposing the multiplicity of voice, it may be completely disregarded as “hogwash.” I feel more and more that my position as a white female born and raised in America has become stereotyped and crucified, as there are many women who live in a “reality” incomparable to my locations. As a white woman, I feel my injustices will never be bad enough to even count in attempting to hold any form of relevancy or position because of my whiteness. My rape was by someone I knew. It was not relived again and again physically as I was not a victim of war. And while I walked to college on the streets of Chicago wearing turtlenecks for weeks in the spring to hide bruised handprints across my neck, the torture wasn’t something I could not recover from. Thus it does not count in the game of significance. My scars from cancer are symbols of survival rather than abuse, so perhaps my struggle wasn’t real enough because I did not die from it. When my stepfather asked to see my bare chest, I was old enough to say no, so his words and actions don’t matter, are meaningless in life, and are inconsequential in gathering an understanding of positions some women hold. These things are experiences that perhaps should be shoved under the bed. So maybe my tensions as a white woman aren’t real, for white women will not be able to speak in the same value because they have not faced the same oppressions as people who have had lives more difficult than mine. And my privilege in traveling, where I did run out of room on my passport for stamps in and out of countries, only makes me more removed and less relatable to real nomads. Perhaps in viewing myself as a nomad, I have returned again to
the space where my face is pressed to the ground and one eye looks up at the worthy knower looking down, or perhaps I am the presser. Perhaps dismantling the bricks is much more difficult than I envisioned.

Strega (2005) writes that theories challenging Enlightenment philosophies are now recognized by some white males, only because of the “authorization” of such by other white males. She documents how feminist and critical theorists have brought poststructuralism to the surface, but were unrecognized. According to her, these theorists include Brossard (1988), Hill Collins (2000), Penelope (1990), Spender (1980), Williams (1991), and Wittig (1992), as well as W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter Woodson. Strega (2005) writes, “Poststructuralism’s refusal to engage with or acknowledge the legacy of critical race theorists and radical feminists makes its appropriation by those on the margins problematic because this refusal implicitly restates the Enlightenment idea that only certain kinds of minds (white, male, privileged) can make theory” (p. 213). This statement suggests that poststructuralism has a history that was made only by white men who promoted it, validating the idea that radical feminists and critical theorists did not contribute to poststructuralist positions; therefore they do not need a place among poststructuralist work. This seems to be a weakness within writings on poststructuralism. It is evident through the research I have conducted that there is a lack of recognition in the historical context of the theorists presented by Strega. As I have mentioned in several locations of this text, however, my understandings are partial. They are temporary. They speak no ultimate truth and are not attempting to relay a story or narrative for all that would become universal and narrow. Poststructuralism is no formula but rather an intellectual movement into a place of partial knowledge in the discursive battle within.
And it emphasizes that we as people can only speak for ourselves. Strega further posits, “I am also conscious, as a lesbian, that the partnering of feminism and poststructuralism is for the most part an alliance between White (heterosexual) women and White (heterosexual) men that dis-privileges people of colour and lesbians” (2005, pp. 213-214). Later in the same text, Strega places herself as a poststructural feminist (uneasily). The arguments above, including points brought up (in brief) by Braidotti (2011), Strega (2005), and also St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) addressing white women bias, are of a concern to me, as I am a white woman. I feel I am trying to make sense of the world and challenging dominant assumptions regarding knowledge. I recognize Strega’s perception that she feels there is an alliance between white women and men, but to speak for all white women and white men in specific positions is the equivalent of a white woman speaking for all men and women of a specific ethnicity despite their positions in life. It only reinforces polarizations. Thus, while there may very well be a lack of recognition in critical race theory and radical feminism in many texts on poststructuralism, it may be due to themes relating to the resistance in speaking for others. To make matters more complex, Moosa-Mitha (2005) states, “White feminism continues to privilege and single out gender as its focus of analysis. White women’s experiences of injustice are privileged over those of women of colour” (p. 54). In a discussion of equality and feminism, bell hooks (2005) writes, “For years I witnessed the reluctance of white feminist thinkers to acknowledge the importance of race” (p. 58). She later writes:

There is no one path to feminism. Individuals from diverse backgrounds need feminist theory that speaks directly to their lives. As a black woman feminist thinker I find it essential to critically examine gender roles in black life to discover the specific concerns and strategies that must be addressed so that all black people can understand the relevance of feminist struggle in our lives. (2000, p. 116)
hooks (2000) speaks in a way that allows access in feminist theory for “all black people.” I am, on the other hand, speaking more reflexively; I am asking, “What is the basis of my claim to knowledge?” and “Who is the ‘I’ that makes such a claim?” (as cited in Kemp & Squires, 1997, p. 8). I do not speak for all feminists, nor simply white feminists. I do not want to speak for an all of any group. I do not feel I can determine what others need, nor do I believe I have a solution for everyone. Maybe though, I’ll speak to women who went through a childhood of divorce or went through a divorce themselves. Or maybe I’ll speak to teachers who battle with working in education and sending their children into the same system which tears them apart. Maybe I’ll speak to some women and men who are just tired of certitude in knowing and are hoping to transform into new spaces. I’m not sure whom I’ll speak to, but I definitely know I won’t be speaking for an all of anything.

Moosa-Mistha (2005) writes, “Knowledge is understood as situated by one’s social location as a result of privileges and oppression that one has experienced. Hence it is not possible for someone to know what it feels like to be racialized unless one has had the experience of being racialized and even then, there are differences within the experiences” (p. 66). Just as I cannot speak a feminism for racialized peoples, I cannot speak for all women. Or all white people. Just as I cannot speak for wealthy women, I cannot speak for underprivileged ones. Perhaps I cannot speak for anyone.

What is feminism for me? Feminism for me is no longer abandoning my inner urges on what counts as knowledge. It’s coming clean about who I am. It is about how all of these forces around me—the social, the political, the cultural, the class, the race, the sexual orientation, the past, the present—have helped to shaped who I am. It’s about no longer feeling shameful for analyzing my situations, for stopping the perpetuation of
beating myself up for the critical eye I hold regarding the actions I see around me. It is about speaking out and speaking up and not feeling like I’m a bitch for this, or a troublemaker, or a noncompliant worker. It’s about being responsible and honest about my position and location. It is about being raw and still feeling like I am worthy in this system. In these institutions that constantly barrage me with messages that I am unworthy when I am raw, I am going to survive and find a way to feel worthy. But worthy for different standards than the ones imposed by cultural consumption. For me, it’s about trying to be in touch with who I am, embracing it, stopping the obsessive apologizing for things that I shouldn’t be apologizing for in the first place, like, for example, having emotions that severely influence my positions and wearing them. It’s about holding the subjective, fractured, partial, controversial, unfixed location and living more awake, aware, and reflexive in my actions and words. Williams (2005) writes the following of poststructuralism:

It is not a full rejection, but an awareness of violent exclusions, mistaken certainties, and strategic errors. For example, a restrictive definition of thought that overemphasizes rationality excludes aspects of thought that are both important and impossible to eliminate. Poststructuralism charts forms that resist incorporation into rationality, such as feelings or the unconscious. It does not merely do so in order to show a rejection or an incompatibility, but to argue that feelings and the unconscious are present even in the rationality that rejects them. (p. 158)

As suggested by Williams (2005), the purpose of poststructuralism (as well as this work) isn’t simply to propose a rejection to all rationalism. Nor a rejection to all certainty. Nor to science. Nor to Enlightenment constructions. I cannot reject entirely the self which has been inscribed by these phenomena. This is impossible. Yet, I cannot ignore how feelings infiltrate all thought, determining locations and positions. And I cannot ignore the suggested division of such things.
From a rational standpoint, “the decentered, unstable, contradictory poststructuralist subject sounds suspiciously like the emotional, irrational, inferior (dark) female subject of Enlightenment epistemology” (Strega, 2005, p. 222). Perhaps this is so. Either way, I cannot run from this perspective or control it. I can’t control that I may fall into the evil, dark witch stereotype that has an irrational grudge against men. I’m already walking with stereotypes anyway. I already run the risk of rejection. So this is not about a fear of rejection. This is about transformation. To transform, I must face all aspects of my life. Williams (2005) believes poststructuralism is “a movement of addition, but where addition means a transformation rather than collection” (p. 165). For that to happen, I must add power to my fingers and write my reality. I must face my fears. Lather (1991) writes, “Derrida’s ‘the always ready’ means that how we speak and write tells us more about our own inscribed selves, about the way that language writes us, than about the ‘object’ of our gaze. The trick is to see the will to power in our work as clearly as we see the will to truth” (p. 119). I now see this will to power and will to truth Lather speaks of. I will will to power. I will write my history. And I will write my future. And somewhere in between I will write the truth.

Strega (2005) writes, “Having lived so long in a world in which (White, heterosexual, able-bodied) men define their experiences as a reality, it has been critical for women and subjugated others to explore our “realities” (p. 223). The pages that follow are embracing my reality. Welcome, as we step over these bricks, and we together walk in this reality.
YOU ARE EXCLUSIONARY AND ALIENATING TO MEN.

Well excuse me, have I hit a nerve?
I guess its hard for people who have been continually fucking excluded
form everything to make their main priority BEING ACCESSIBLE to the very
people who perpetuate and profit from their exclusion. Duh.
Men/boys need to open their eyes and realize that their is a severe lack
of work in every media and field, made from a female perspective (not
that their is one, singular, female perspective) and that it is really
important that we start making things that make sense to US and to our
friends.
And sure, what we make is gonna be really clouded up with its own shit,
sexism, in many cases, translates to self hatred and girl competitions
for male approval,...and thats gonna show up in our work...as is racism,
classism, speciesism, heterosexism, ageism, etc....BUT if we don't at
least start trying to FUCK WITH THE POWERS THAT BE (outside and inside
ourselves) then we are never gonna make it to the world we are struggling
so desperately to envision and create.
We have been excluded for fucking ever so far as I'm concerned. Our voices,
no matter how loud or impassioned, are still only muffled whispers as
compared to the burly straight white male ones that bellow their stories
and opinions into even the smallest crevice of our lives. For men to claim
exclusion is totally ridiculous and insulting.
Sure, men and boys who're challenging the fact that their gender roles
are suciding them dry of real life and denying them access to our sincerest
forms of respect...these men are excluded, like girls/women, from most
of what the mainstream and supposedly "counter" culture has to offer
them...but these men also recognize our work/experiments as VALID, being
our Brothers in Struggle, why would they feel excluded?????
TO THE MEN WHO DO FEEL EXCLUDED/alienated by what the grrrl revolution
brings:
If you are not firmly committed to finding a way out of the pit of capitalism
and all other "isms", if you are not ready to put the neccesary work in,
to posit yourself in history and recognize your privileges....then maybe
you feel so excluded because, as one who profits from the lie and denies
it, you are excluded from true life and the revolution........TAKE RESPONSIBILITY, DUDE.....go high five your neanderthal brothers on it........
NO ONE EXCLUDED YOU, YOU X'd yourself.

Bikini Kill 2 (Excerpt). (Darms, 2013, p.134)
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Derived from
http://www.picturequotes.com/she
s-broken-quote-1420

layering methodological techniques
Layering Methodological Techniques: Constructing a Topography of Self

Topography is three-dimensional map making. It constructs and deconstructs layers. Topography is an art form that constructs multidimensional representations such as of rock, mountains, and hills as well as captures the deconstruction of crevices of valleys, rivers, and lakes, among other places. Rather than simply constructing a rhizomatic map or a network of roots—which may suggest in its vision flatness—I’ve come to imagine a rhizomatic topography as metaphor. This suggests networks upon networks and a multitude and complexity of three-dimensional spaces. Topography “is the art or practice of graphic delineation in detail usually on maps or charts of natural and man-made features of a place or region especially in a way to show their relative positions and elevations” (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/topography). In an attempt to capture the relative positions and elevations of the location in which I stand as a “bricoleur,” I hope to work through “convergent and divergent forms of meaning making, abandoning the short-sightedness of prespecified, correct patterns of analysis in favour of more holistic, inclusive, and eclectic models” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004,p. 21). I envision my work in a three-dimensional terrain, like the topography of being: no two beings, no two landscapes the same. To begin building this topography as I venture as a nomad, I must begin with what I see as constructions. Then work deconstruction in order to uncover what lies beneath, causing dips in the terrain I travel. A map of one’s mind—one’s topography—cannot exist in any form without others. By “working the ground”—the lived experience—of others in contrast to this ethnographer, perhaps the moving, ever-shifting, and temporal multidimensional terrain can be captured momentarily.
Vulnerability in Traveling Alone

As referenced previously in Chapter One and Chapter Two, poststructuralism is an intellectual movement seeping across borders of theory and dissolving commonsense assumptions. Poststructuralist approaches are not disciplinary-bound. Gavey (1989) suggests any containment of poststructuralism is artificial. Not only do poststructural researchers break boundaries as to what counts as knowledge, education, research, and science, but they continually reexamine themselves in a cyclical way (Peters & Burbules, 2004). Poststructuralism has no “method” as it critiques the technical, universal, and hierarchical way that rational and “scientific” approaches are applied to educational settings, thus attempting to challenge the supremacy of these methods (Cherryholmes, 1988; Howell, 2013; Peters & Burbules, 2004; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Williams, 2005). Research itself is indicative of power relations and how power is used. By constructing research initiatives that resist dominant forms of inquiry, and by jail breaking the government insistency of pedagogical control, poststructuralist researchers can bring life back into their productions of knowledge. I believe this can happen by first examining the ways that specific knowledge has been categorized as most worthy through a historical analysis of Enlightenment constructions as examined in Chapter One, a reconceptualization of such initiatives, and by holding a critical eye to examining authorities of control, most crucially by examining the authorities of oneself. By widening one’s arms and stretching outward and around in attempts to capture the shriveling ends of discipline-bound ropes which are unraveling, one can begin to braid a stronger, thicker, and more useful rope. It would be the construction of a rope that can be
used more reliably in painting a picture of a more visible reality.

How can a researcher handle such a large initiative?

I believe Brene Brown is a heroine bricoleur. Brown is the social scientist most famous for her TED Talk, *The Power of Vulnerability*. This talk is responsible for over 25 million views and is one of the top five TED Talks in the world (see http://www.brenebrown.com). In the prologue of her book *Rising Strong* (2015), she states the following:

In this book, you’ll come across quotes from scholars and singer-songwriters. I’ll quote research and movies. I’ll share a letter from a mentor that helped me get a handle on what it means to get your heart broken and an editorial on nostalgia by a sociologist. I won’t set up Crosby, Stills & Nash as academics, but I also won’t diminish the ability of artists to capture what is true about the human spirit. (p. xiv)

On her website, Brown writes, “Maybe stories are just data with a soul.” *Data with a soul*. If so, Brown has constructed living data. *Living data*. She is an artist, and, too, a bricoleur. Berry (2006) writes of the need for bricolage by stating, “At a time when the discourses of emancipation, inclusiveness, social justice, plurality, multiplicity, diversity, complexity, and chaos are entering academic circles and mainstream communication media, a way of incorporating these discourses and their complementary practices requires new research questions, tools, processes, and ways of reporting” (p. 88).

Bricolage is an art form, a tool for embracing the relationality, multiplicity, and complexity spoken of by Berry. And like Brown, I cannot diminish the ability of artists, such as the songwriters, I included in my preliminary dissertation research recorded at the end of the stories I told in my ethnographies, journal entries, and projects or artifacts. Leavy (2015) writes, “Differing from other methods, the autoethnographic short story

Street art derived from https://www.pinterest.com/pin/482025966338101150/
allows the emotional experience to be conveyed as a part of the knowledge itself; the
writing is not sterile, and is actually even difficult to read” (p. 54). Further, Leavy goes
on to say, “The researcher is also allowed to explore her feelings and experiences, thus
validating her experiences as legitimate data that are just as valid as those of others she
might choose to study” (2015, p. 54). By including lyrics, poetry, short story, cultural
artifacts, and art constructed by additional women and men, as well as with scholarly
research, I feel my work becomes art, thus capturing a fuller and thicker research project.

Vulnerability captured: Essays, excerpts, poems, and interview.

The following chapter is a conglomerate of essays, an interview, and poetry
written in the beginning of and continuation of my doctoral journey selected as part of
my “doctoral audit trail.” I selected pieces of my work that I feel captured my split
subjectivities and fractured self. Each narrative can be interpreted alone or can stand
together as my representation of womanhood and motherhood, as well as a window into
split subjectivities regarding teaching and systems of education. This is the first layer of
the data in my research.
The first essay written in the early part of my studies, labeled Artifact 1 and entitled “My Son I Cannot Let Go of Your Hand” (spring, 2013), explores the tensions of letting my son walk into the system in which I work—the system of schooling—but not wanting to let go of his hand. Not wanting to release him into the place of conformity. I write of him being my education and how I see visions of schooling: routine, objectives, procedures, and data, which I fear hold the possibility of corrupting his breath.

Artifact 2 is constructed from pieces of a paper entitled “Shifting Power to the Children: Ideological Pluralism, the Standardistos, and the Call for Narratives,” written in the spring of 2014, a year later. During this period of study, I conducted qualitative interviews with my two children and four stepchildren. The pieces included are not whole. However, I have hopes that they can capture a picture into the positions I held and the positions recorded through the personal communication of the children. Most of the work is filled with self-reflexivity, in reaction to the responding quotes of my children when asked specific questions regarding their experiences in school.

In March of 2014, when transcribing the interviews of my children for the work mentioned above, I felt a deep sense of unsettling tension. Late one evening, I could hear my children’s voices repeating in my mind from the interviews. As the sun came up, I sat at my kitchen table with a cup of coffee and wrote Artifact 3, the poem “Know Thyself.” I later presented the poem and Prezi, in movie-like scenery at the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies in Philadelphia. It was well received. Or at least that is the story I tell myself.

Returning in typical rhizomatic fashion to the beginning of my doctoral journey, I relive an essay, Artifact 4, entitled “Awakening.” It is a reflection on discovering “truths”
after the evolution of defining myself as a mother and wife. It is an account of willingly moving into a space of blinded trust, and walking through the identities of my expectations of these roles as a consumer of information without reflection.

Artifacts 5 and 6, “Yoga and Discourse” and “Death” are essays I wrote during a field research project in the fall of 2013 and in the spring of 2013, respectively. The first is a narrative written after intersecting events from a meditation seminar with Buddhist monk Bhante Sujatha, a Hunter’s Moon Kundalini and Gong event, and after a series of yoga and meditation engagements at my local yoga studio as well as morning meditations I committed to for the field project. Following the essay is an art piece I attempted to paint in order to break boundaries of research. While I am not an artist by any means, the process of painting and sketching took me to a space of solitude and reflection captured on the canvas. Following the first entry of the field project, I insert the essay “Death” and then return to pieces from “Yoga and Discourse.” I do this as both pieces are related, intertwined in this strive to both escape the feeling of dying and walking closer to the grave, while simultaneously attempting to counter that with the act of embracing each breath and moment. It captures my nomadic journey into trying to locate my position while journeying through the doctoral sphere. It is not a suggestion towards acceptance of specific spiritual or religious preference. It is an exploration into knowing.

Artifact 7 is a short journal entry I wrote a month or so ago. It is titled, “This Sucks, I Should Have Written a Quantitative Dissertation.” It is my moment of doubt in crossing this threshold and making sense of all that there is. It is my feelings of doubt in myself and my project, wandering alone. It is the climax of the story.
Poststructuralist Art Forms as a Methodological Technique for Journeying

I believe if one looks at *poststructural work as an art form*, it can reposition the way in which research is approached. Williams (2005) writes, “In poststructuralism, there are no external valuations of what is good or bad in art, or of what art is or is not. Instead, works of art become parts of wider philosophical reflections where styles of thought, philosophical problems, and works of art interact to transform and broaden the problem” (p. 18). Rather than run, hide, conceal or mask the “problematic” of trying to encompass wider reflections that dismantle walls of containment, a poststructural researcher can welcome the challenge of this position. This occurs through the acknowledgement of fracture, fiction, and falsity, and of resisting as an authoritarian and dominating all-knowing position as researcher. It can occur specifically by broadening the scope of specialization, not in watered down attempts at connections, but by incorporating the work of inhabitants across genres of knowing. For, as Brown (2015) writes on creativity, it is “what we’re learning from our heads to our hearts through our hands. We are born makers, and creativity is the ultimate act of integration—it is how we fold our experiences into our being” (p. 7). The researcher then is capturing a state, embracing creativity through multiple positions of temporality in knowing and discovering as he or she moves and weaves into new states. Williams (2005) furthers, “The poststructuralist work is often itself a part of an aesthetic creative process and a prompt for further creations in art” (p. 18). Thus the research scheme is viewed as temporary as well; a product is constructed, but it is always resisting finality, certainty, and universal application of specific truth. In response to Williams’ prompt of including additional
creations of art, I have called into play two additional layerings that I hope to use as techniques in my work.

**The Art of Deconstruction and Criticism with Ethnography**

Feminist poststructuralism and deconstruction are not methods, but are more a means for analyzing educational critiques (Cherryhomes, 1988; Peters & Burbules, 2004). Feminist poststructuralism relates to studies that can critically examine oppressive gender relations through a multilayered, dialogical discourse (Gavey 1989; Lather 1991). And as Foucault (1994) writes, critical examination is “utterly indispensable” for any transformation to occur. Additionally, “deep transformation can be done in the open and always turbulent atmosphere of a continuous criticism” (p. 457). As a way to embrace this criticism for transformation, methodological techniques of deconstruction (derived from Derrida’s work and discussed in Chapter Two) can be a process by which one can embrace the multidimensional discourse seen in much feminist poststructural work.

Deconstruction is a *methodological technique* I hope to use in my research. The process of deconstruction I wish to subsume is captured conceptually by Howell (2013) in the following way:

> Deconstruction transforms the marginalities of text into centralities and uses methods involving irony, paradox and absurdity to accomplish this. As a methodological technique, deconstruction makes explicit, concealed weaknesses and fractures in the text that undermines its proposed unity. Indeed, deconstruction illustrates that the text fails to come to conclusions based on initial premises. Consequently, every piece of work is flawed and every crack indicates a flaw in the complete work; the true unity of the given text is not that asserted but one concealed and uncovered through the dismantling of the text. (p. 107)

The “concealed weakness” captured in Howell’s words on deconstruction is also visible in the poststructural work of Britzman (2005), but described in her work as the “hidden chapter.” The hidden chapter “offers thoughts about the narrative dilemmas unleashed
when one attempts to write a poststructuralist ethnography or when one attempts to take
seriously the problem of producing an account of social life that bothers the writer’s and
perhaps the reader’s confidence in truth, in the visible, and in the real” (p. 30). As
poststructuralism questions truth, common realities, and singular narratives,
ethnographies have the capability to create one when standing alone. The dichotomy of
this problematic, of attempting to construct an ethnography that is also considered
poststructural, is an occurrence that cannot happen without examination and action. For if
poststructural deconstruction is the methodological technique in study, and I use
autoethnographies as pieces to deconstruct, I must incorporate layers of historical and
cultural artifacts comparing and contrasting similar phenomenon in order to critique the
work and resist hiding in some singular truth. This is the multi- and dialogical layer
described by work from Gavey (1989), Lather (1991), and Britzman (2005). There must
be more than my words presented on the page or the story will suggest singularity in this
narrative, thus promoting an authoritative stance on knowing. For as Britzman (2005)
writes:

> The ground upon which ethnography is built turns out to be a contested and
fictive geography. Those who populate and imagine it (every participant,
including the author and the reader) are, in essence, textualized identities. Their
voices create a cacophony and dialogic display of contradictory desires, fears, and
literary tropes that if carefully “read,” suggest just how slippery speaking, writing,
reading, and desiring subjectivity really are. (p. 28)

With these words in mind, it is clear to me that in order to illustrate my complete
commitment to poststructuralism, I must celebrate a multiplicity of voices, I must
celebrate the slipperiness of speaking and writing, and I must attempt to capture
contradictory desires and fears in hopes of progressing to the undefined transformation of
which I am in pursuit. Lather (1991) writes, “To deconstruct the desire that shapes a
particular act of enframing is to probe the libidinal investment in form and content of the
author–text relationship. It is to mark the belief that our discourse is the meaning of our
longing” (p. 83). Rather than mask, hide, or conceal the weakness of the texts I have
constructed in the beginning of my doctoral work, I hope to engage in exposing this
controversy, which is embracing transformation—the meaning of my longing. Like
Davies et al. (2002), I hope to “look for and work with the lines of fault, the forking and
rupture of knowledges that are already in play” (p. 311). As Britzman (2005) captured,
“textualized identities” create a “cacophony.” A cacophony is (1) a harsh or discordant
sound; dissonance; or (2) specifically, harshness in the sound of words or phrases
(http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/cacophony). This “harshness” and
“dissonance” will be embedded throughout my work as I position, layer, or weave
historical and cultural research against the backdrop of autoethnography. This would
settle my longing or desire to embrace plurality. The cultural artifacts of my
ethnographies are the starting point of the work, as I would begin with my experiences
prior to becoming completely immersed in my doctoral exploration. Like Foucault
(1994), I expect the journey to change me as a result of beginning with the documentation
of these lived experiences. He posits:

   Every time I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of
   elements of my own experience: always in connection with processes I saw
   unfolding around me. It was always because I thought I identified cracks, silent
   tremors, and dysfunctions in things I saw, institutions I was dealing with, or my
   relations with others, that I set out to do a piece of work, and each time was partly
   a fragment of autobiography. (p. 458)

Like Foucault, my journey into “data” or “theoretical work” will begin with my
experiences. As discussed in Chapter One, in the beginning of this journey towards
earning a doctoral degree, I first began my work with the obsession of capturing my
experience. It was a period of expulsion. To enter into this journey, I first felt the need to pour myself onto the page, documenting my lived experiences before moving forward. What came over me? Why was I so obsessed with the documentation and expression of such a personal history? Davies et al. (2002) suggest that poststructuralist, analytic strategies “require us to ‘work on the ground’ of our lived experience, to engage in a reflexive examination of our own discursive practices and to extend our knowledge of how speaking—and writing—as usual create and sustain cultures of practice that we wish to move beyond” (p. 311). Perhaps my urge to “work the ground” of my lived experience was a starting point I needed to document in order to someday challenge the practice I wish to move beyond. Further, I believe my work is deeply, if not fully connected to the position I hold as a woman. Is this part of my desire to return to my emotions? I hope to question this entirely. For as Semetsky (2012) writes, “Becoming-other thus differs in principle from the outlived model of moral or character education. Real-life events become unorthodox ‘texts’ that we should ‘read’ critically and creatively so as to learn from them, thus transgressing formal instruction as a prevalent mode” (p. 47). Further, Semetsky (2010) writes:

It is our learning from experiences and real-life events in their social-cultural and political contexts—that is, becoming ethically, culturally (micropolitically), and ecologically literate—that should help us in overcoming the dualistic split between self and other, to integrate “the other” completely. This is what I call the ethics of integration! The ethics of integration is a precursor, using Deleuze’s term, to the inclusive education. Integration presupposes, first of all, a Deleuzian conjunction “and” between our conscious understanding of other and the unconscious prejudices, outlived habits of thought or deeply engrained comfort zones that comprise our “old” subjectivity. As embedded within the Deleuzian process of becoming-other, it is the ethics of integration that can create the conjunction “and” between I and Thou, between Self and Other in our very praxis: self-becoming-other. (p. 56)
Here, perhaps I-and-Other can challenge notions of truth, of prejudice, of habit. Perhaps here is a starting point to reimagine the future.

Metta (2010) writes, “To place women at the centre of scholarly texts, critical analysis and knowledge making is a highly political act that challenges histories that have long erased women and subjugated their experiences” (p. 29). She argues that women’s “lifewriting” is a way in which contemporary feminists can challenge the hegemonic assumptions and discourses regarding gender, identity, and selfhood by challenging history and aiding in the reimagination of positions for future generations (Metta, 2010). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) write that feminism is an “engaged position” that works to “unearth” women’s subjugated knowledges that have been excluded as a result of “widespread androcentric bias” with the hierarchal ranking of scientific objectivity within research (pp. 22-23). Perhaps my beginning lifewriting, autobiography, or autoethnography was my subliminal attempt at rebellion and my attempt to capture the erased experiences that branded my soul? Perhaps this has been the experience of others as well?

According to Britzman (2005), there is a method to ethnography. Yet poststructuralism has no set “method.” The meat of this position involves a shift in thinking on methodology. Poststructuralist methods are more theories and criticism that embrace various positions from layers within, around, and among oneself. Peters and Burbules (2004) write that poststructuralism “is best referred to as a movement of thought—a complex skein of thought embodying different forms of critical practice. It is decidedly interdisciplinary and has many different but related strands” (p. 18). In using ethnography then, I wish to embrace related strands of practice and areas of exploration,
yet I still feel there must be some sort of outline for this to occur in defining my work. How my research is approached is not uniform and should not be disguised as so. In capturing the defining elements of an ethnography that outlines some process, but is not so narrow as to restrict the way I approach my work, I use Britzman’s (2005) three whimsical descriptions on the subject:

First, ethnography is both a process and a product; there are methods for how to go about narrating a culture, and these social strategies promise a text. Second, good ethnographic texts tell stories that invariably embody a quality of a novel. Implicitly, ethnographies promise pleasure or at least new information to the reader. Third, an ethnography takes the reader into an actual world to reveal the cultural knowledge working in a particular place and time as it is lived through the subjectivities of its inhabitants. Such access persuades readers that they can imaginatively step into this world and act like a native, or, at the very least, understand the imperatives of cultural assimilation. These textualized qualities appear seamless because they blur traditional distinctions among the writer, the reader, the stories, and how the stories are told. (p. 27)

As I have touched upon briefly, I had a rhapsodic passion to capture my life experiences in the beginning of my doctoral journey. I kept a thread of this passion throughout my journey, which I sprinkled here and there when I was offered an invitation towards creative products or presentations in my classes. But I lost some of that creativity and desire for transformation as my driving passion. It was sacrificed as I had more allegiance to others than to myself. I question why this is so and I hope to challenge that now.

As a process, I want to return to these ethnographies, these stories I constructed, and lay the stories before me. My desire is to examine them, deconstruct them, holding a feminist and poststructuralist eye, unsure of the destination to see what emerges. Like Christian (1997) writes, “As risky as that may seem, it is, I believe, what intelligence means—a turned sensitivity to that which is alive and therefore cannot be known until it is known” (p. 78). In this context, I concurrently read deeper into cultural, historical, and
social work in feminist contexts. I explore topics such as sexuality, mothering, marital roles, and teaching. These are subjects that are fragmented, captured in specific essays on the identities and perspectives I’ve exposed in my early ethnography as a neophyte (discussed in Chapter One). I hope to expose the fragmentations of these spaces and roles I occupy, but also have hopes to no longer promote the division of such fragmentation. Rather I hope to come to some sort of way to work through these divisions and transform my mind’s eye on such positions. Here knowledge and self in its tacit conversation with “other” would no longer hide in divisions so that curriculum may be approached in new ways. As such, the nontraditional methodology or methodological technique of this dissertation steps into less charted territory, a space of anew, and therefore starts the first step in challenging the dominant discourses in institutions.

Why these ethnographies and why in the quality of a novel? Why embed the imaginary forces of metaphor and play? Personally, I can no longer pretend to live in certainty and without wonder and emotion. I am no fully rational woman. I do not live logically, easily. I’ve rarely taken the road most traveled, the paved highway, the predetermined path. In this way I have acted in times as my own worst enemy. I live for exploration, for moments, for journey. I consider myself a nomad. I’ve lived chasing love. For love is all I have ever wanted. Love I have chased as if it was an outside form of attainment, an end prize, the ending of a story, a fairytale, perhaps. Much like the persona of knowledge, I’ve viewed love as an endless consumption with little deep tracing into the sociohistorical context in which it resides. I’ve consumed it, blindly. And this was a choice. For to go back, trace back, own, locate, position, come to terms with, was too difficult. But I am ready. I am ready for the accountability in my location of the present.
It has been a search, much like that of knowledge, which has been misrepresented in my mind’s eye.

My position as a white, heterosexual woman has offered a position of which my authority has been abused. Things are not what they seem to be. I’ve lived blindly, like a minnow in a school of fish which has morphed into a whale, creating the tsunami-like splash of inexcusable ease, as I walk the mountain of attainment. I’ve failed to examine my conflicting natures: the mother, the seductress, the teacher, the victim, and the oppressor, to name a few. Nor have I traced the roots of these roles to the landscape of which I breathe, the stories I live. I can no longer talk of knowledge without talking of love. I cannot talk of hate without talking of demons. I cannot talk of education without talking politics. And I cannot talk of mothering without talking of sex. I cannot talk of teaching without talking of silence. All the while, these masked binaries intersect. This dissertation, this journey, it is poststructuralist. It is poststructuralist because it is not discipline-bound and there are no walls. It is of life and love. It is of story. And like the educational system, the attainment of knowledge, the consumption of information, I can no longer be the Pac-Man participant. There are some conversations I need to have, some dialogues that need to be said, not because I claim to be an authority of anything in any way. More because I need to get in touch with what it is I am and where I’ve come to be.

I’m academic. To deny that the pursuit for knowledge hasn’t infused my world would breed the denial of my partiality to a quest for some sort of truth. So I must embed academia into my bias. But I am more. To deny my passions and emotions which make up this being I am would be a contribution to the systemic institutionalized, categorical humanism of thought. Like Richardson, I’m at a moment where I need to “de-discipline”
my life (2000, p. 153). There will be a continued attempt to end the perpetual division of *self* and *academic* knowledge, a breaking down of binaries. I will bleed on the page, no longer resisting the infusion of a person who is supposed to be left at the door in order to walk into the dialogues of education. The purpose of my exploration is to journey rhizomatically, three-dimensionally, organically. That includes lifting boundaries. Removing boundaries. Breaking down bricks. I am cooking a plate for transformation and welcoming it into my home.

**Assessing this poststructuralist work.**

In addition to the ethnographic description outlined by Britzman, I hold Strega’s position on constructing some criteria or outlined standards to assess this feminist poststructuralist work. Paralleling Strega’s position, it would be inapplicable to hold standard measures of validity. Therefore, Strega (2005) suggests three standards that may be useful for constructing poststructural work. First, the research should address the ways in which it is “reconstructive as well as deconstructive” in marginalized communities where there is a need for progressive and antioppressive politics (p. 229). This standard relates to the *needs* of the community. From my position, this suggests not only identifying issues, but also, as Strega suggests, developing ways in which this deconstruction can be processed for various reconstructive purposes that opens avenues for future work and hope. In this sense, it is not enough to simply deconstruct and embrace criticism. While I do not know where my rhizomatic research may take me, I do believe that when I enter the position of finalizing this stage in my work—when I move on with the life “chapter” of my dissertation journey—there will be new spaces to travel. This I cannot completely define. However, I hold optimism that there will be some way
to navigate through this struggle and reconstruct new positions. For this would be transformation.

The second standard Strega suggests involves inquiry related to language, power, and “the people.” She questions, “We must ask ourselves not just ‘about whom?’ but also ‘for whom?’” She writes, “I believe we must ask, in essence, whether we have managed to ‘speak truth to power’ in accessible languages and formats” (2005, p. 229). I will return to this second standard and speak to this momentarily. The third standard Strega offers builds on the notion of “speaking truth to power” through the inclusion of reflexivity in the writing process. What resonates most fulfilling to me is the following excerpt, where she writes, “It makes clear that interpretation is taking place, and by implication calls into question the alleged neutrality and objectivity of other research/researchers, thus offering important political and methodological challenges to standard research practices” (2005, p. 229). She furthers, “By implication, it also calls into question whether standard means of assessing rigor and validity are the ‘proper’ or best means by which to assess research. The measurement of reflexivity lies in the extent to which we consider our assumptions, lay out our processes of inquiry, and consider our ‘effect’ on the research” (2005, pp. 229-230). Strega offers reflexivity as a necessity, but not as the primary means by which a feminist poststructural researcher constructs her work. According to Strega, “the reader must still learn more about the puzzle or experience being analyzed than about the researcher” (2005, p. 230). The third standard addressing reflexivity and analyzing the puzzle or experience outlined by Strega is, I believe, a clear standard which is evident in my work thus far. I’ve acknowledged from the beginning of my work in Chapter One the necessity and urge I hold in no longer
dividing myself into compartments and containing my passions. I have also, and will continue to include a multilayered dialogue between myself and various academic researchers.

The second standard is worthy of deeper discussion here in approaching my methodological technique. *For whom am I writing?* I will address this with two layers. To begin, I would like to extend the dialogue of Strega’s point regarding “accessible language and formats.” As a technique, I hope to offer additional subjectivities to counter my position, and to try to break away from an authoritative position. I’m offering a way to broaden my connection to readers, where we both can simmer on the work of others who also have decided to “work the ground” of lived experience (Davies et al., 2002). My desire, which has been abundantly clear from the beginning of this work, is to push the limits of what counts as knowledge for myself and for others; what counts as knowing. I’ve questioned what defines an intellectual, and suggested that Fidler’s (2014) position of holding a “rhapsodic intellect” and Said’s (1994) position on becoming an “amateur” are ways the academic can return to her inner urges and break down the barriers between the scholarly and utterly academic world which has, throughout history, promoted the division of the self. My work then, has desires to blend and bring together these binaries in an attempt at transformation. From my position, the work I am proposing must illustrate this. How can this be accomplished in this journey?

In Chapter Two, I spoke of alienation and the exclusive club, the “femocrat” club, and my disconnection with some academic and scholarly language produced in the realm of institutions. Kemp and Squires (1997) talk of how popular feminism has been a way to counter this trend. In such an attempt to counter, I need to include feminist writing from
women who have “worked the ground.” I feel I need to also include this because it has paved the way for my positions. I’ve pondered on this concept for quite some time. I’ve wondered how I can include work from women whose work is not primarily utilized in academic realms yet, which also speaks to power. I’ve questioned where such work exists. My conclusion resides in work from the “underground.” It comes from feminist work in constructing *zines*.

_Bikini Kill* 2 (Excerpt from zine). (Darms, 2013, p. 136)
Cultural ARTifacts: Zines

Zines are do-it-yourself publications that infiltrated the “underground,” often exposing a revolutionary culture, most notably during the 1990s. Zines constructed by girls and women in the 1990s through collages, cut-and-paste design, and Xeroxing were part of a grass roots initiative, tackling issues such as body image, sexuality, gender, race, class, violence, standards of beauty, rape, and mental health (Darms 2013; Green & Taormino, 1997; Licona 2012). These “vibrant and vital counterhegemonic sites” worked to break boundaries of the mainstream through lyrics, poetry, personal stories, handwritten notes, sketches, essays, and art (Liacona, 2012 p. 3; Green & Taormino, 1997). According to Duncombe (2008), “Their way of seeing and doing was not borrowed from a book, nor was it carefully cross referenced and cited; rather it was, if you’ll forgive the word, organic. It was a vernacular radicalism, an indigenous strain of utopian thought” (p. 8). Adela Licona, author of *Zines in the Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* (2012), writes:

Zines materialize and reflect borderlands rhetorics through the languages of resistance, opposition, and, most importantly, coalition. They generate knowledge and provide alternative sources of information. They can be theoretically sophisticated, productive, and informed while also being accessible and thereby promoting community literacies. (p. 59)

Being accessible and promoting community leaders is crucial to Strega’s (2005) second standard for feminist poststructural work. Zines offer work that is in accessible languages and formats. They have the power to speak to communities of countercultures. Zines are a powerful, documented, cultural artifact of feminist movements from women who had the guts to capture their experiences “working the ground” of their lives.
According to Green and Taorimo (1997), “Women have historically had limited access to channels of communication, and ultimately, to power. We don’t have to reassess statistics of unequal salaries, gender discrimination, and patriarchal double standards: we know it’s out there. We also know that there are fewer mainstream avenues for women to articulate the injustices and inequalities” (p. xxi). Women’s articulation through work in zines has produced a culture that has and continues to push against the mainstream of consumerism. Duncombe (2008) writes, “Refusing to believe the pundits and politicians who assure us that the laws of the market are synonymous with the laws of nature, the zine community is busy creating a culture whose value isn’t calculated as profit and loss on ruled ledger pages, but is assembled in the margins, using criteria like control, connection, and authenticity” (p. 7). By trading zines or charging minimal amounts, zinesters broke even or made minimal profits. Their work was and is a way to capture expression that might otherwise be invisible. Green and Taormino (1997) write that this expression was needed for young women who had to find truths within themselves in a place uncensored, capturing their own realities. As cited in their text by zinester “Jennifer” from Girl Power, “Sometimes paper is the only thing that will listen to you” (p. xi).

But the paper wasn’t the only thing that listened to some zinesters like those from Riot Grrrl, who mainstream media such as Newsweek (1992) featured across America. In regards to Riot Grrrl, arguably one of the most popular zines, Darms (2013) writes, “By about 1994, the ‘secret’ was out, and most of the women who had started the movement no longer identified as riot grrrls. Some had simply outgrown it; for some others, the inability of the movement to address privilege in a nuanced and effective way rendered it
useless as a model for activism” (p. 12). The concept of privilege thus surfaces again, in the work of early grass roots feminism through this medium, and it is a challenge related to my proposed future work. How this issue is to be solved, or if it can be solved or should be solved, remains currently unknown, from my stance. I wish to speak to this as I research.

Ducombe (2008) writes, “What was amazing to me, coming from years of sterile academic and political debates on the Left, in which culture was often in the past dismissed as irrelevant to the ‘real struggle,’ was that zines seemed to form a true culture of resistance” (p. 8). In my proposed work, I hope to use examples of this culture of resistance to counter my ethnographies and academic research, thus again speaking to Strega’s (2005) second strand of poststructuralist feminist research.

The additional layer of this position questions, “For whom is this writing?” Perhaps this writing is for the woman that questions her location. Or perhaps the man. Perhaps, beyond my own yearn for transformation, it could be for others who are questioning the “Hypocritical Kiss” (written by Jack White; lyrics included in Artifact 4, “Awakening”) within and produced by institutions of thought. Perhaps it is for those that question spaces seeping with alcoholism and emotional abuse. For those, perhaps, who have lived with domestic violence as a celebrity that frequently rings their doorbell, like the whipped cream and cherry put on their ice cream for what is categorized as well deserved efforts for a hard day at work. Maybe it is for women who are working day and night for a better life, wanting to make a difference. For those who want to speak to the silences of and hold the hands of children who don’t want to walk through the doors of the institutions where they work. Perhaps it is for those who are tired of being slapped in
the face with some government initiative for educational “reform” that further positions the well-being of students who need more than technocratic and robotic objectives for all.

Then again, it may be for women undergoing divorce, handling the idea of their own children living in a divided environment, dealing with the peeling off of little fingers who are digging cuts into their back as they are removed from you, the very person who woke up with them three times a night for their first eight years because they just wanted to make sure you were there, as you hand them off to someone who has been indicated by the government as having committed child abuse and neglect, but who still has “rights.” Maybe it is for women dealing with the technology of lure, their husbands’ internet histories showing the footprints of viewing women in dominatrix lace who are giving them the attention they need with the click of a “like” or a thumbs up. It could be for women who secretly swallow a pill to cope with the everyday silence of these things because their struggle to find their way and be who they want in speaking their truth seems to be a threat to the institutions in which they participate. Maybe it is for my daughter. To prepare her for questions and paths which have no certain answer. Maybe it is a call to her, a call for her to see that the education she is now receiving can’t possibly prepare her for the life she is about to lead. Maybe it is so she can embrace alternative ways of thinking, ways of finding herself, ways of questioning so that she isn’t thrown into life jolts that have the capability of destroying her. Perhaps it is a call to her, a narrative telling her that she doesn’t have to hide. A plea for her to know that we all endure struggle and pain. And that pretending and hiding her reality is silence. And I do not have hopes for her to be silent. I can’t speak for certainty in who this writing is for. But maybe it could be for, or speaks to people who have experienced temporary,
fractured, divided spaces and who hope to heal. It could speak to them, in and out of the institutions in which they participate. Maybe some will recognize that they are not alone in struggle. *In life.* For me, it is a reckoning of sorts, a coming to terms. I return to Brown (2015) here, whose work seems to fit somehow into mine. It is her process of *Rising Strong* and it is briefly outlined below, quoted from page 37 of her inspiring work:

Perhaps it is exactly what I need to do to *Rise Strong.* Maybe it is walking into my story and reckoning with it, owning my story and rumbling with it, and then writing a new story, a revolution for it, like Brown says, to “ultimately transform the way we live, love, parent, and lead.” Perhaps it can be a coming to terms for others too: to ignite their journeys into possibility. Or perhaps again, it may not mean anything at all. Either way, my hope is to capture this journey, and rewelcome the curriculum of life back into the family of education—to no longer perpetuate curriculum as what Diagnault called the “stepchild” to other disciplines (Hwu, 2004, p. 182). In capturing this nomad’s story of
working curriculum, I hope to create a portrait of this middle ground for others in becoming and in being-in-the-world-with-others.

Again, my research purpose:

*The purpose of this poststructural autoethnographic study is to analyze and critique my documented lived experiences as a beginning, female doctoral student within cultural, historical, and social contexts. Through this process of critical self-reflection and psychoanalytic deconstruction, I hope to get in touch with my primordial self in an attempt to be present, open, and available for others by moving towards a space of deeper awareness in my location, thus becoming responsible for my own existence. With this poststructural stance, I embrace curriculum as nomadic, hoping to bridge some middle ground between curriculum and lived experiences (Hwu, 2004; Reynolds & Webber, 2004). Through an eclectic deconstruction of my autoethnographies, I am proposing to begin this journey.*
CHAPTER FOUR: PERFORMING THE DATA

A Journey Into Feminist ARTifacts and Topography of Self

In replicating the scent of freedom and fragmentation I breathe when reading zines and in the spirit of The Riot Grrrl Collection, this chapter juxtaposes threads of my journal entries, projects, essays, art, and a section of personal interviews between and among the historical and cultural artifacts of feminists working their lived experiences through zines. These pieces act as freestanding snapshots without immediate interpretation as I contrast and embrace the topography of fractured selves. These stories illustrate the very reflexive, and at the same time, deconstructive journey into the spaces of working the lived experience and middle ground. In Chapter Five, I work deeper into this deconstruction and what it has come to mean—this topography of selves—in order to work toward reconstructive purposes as an autoethnographer and feminist. I open this work with a question posed in one of the Riot Grrrl fliers entitled, “What is Riot Grrrl?” as an opening to this adventure.

As a bricoleur, here are my leftover pieces and products I attempt to use in some form of a reconstructive process in Chapter Five. Your experience and interpretation of
such begins in the pages that follow. Like the stage performance of a play, filled with “acts,” the pieces of this puzzle we can digest together in our attempts to become-other after the show.
What IS RIOT GRRRL?

BECAUSE we will never meet the hierarchical DOY standards of talented, or cool, or smart. They are created to keep us out, and if we ever meet them they will change, or we will become tokens.

BECAUSE I need laughter and I need girl love. We need to build lines of communication so we can be more open and accessible to each other.

BECAUSE we are being divided by our labels and philosophies, and we need to accept and support each other as girls; acknowledging our different approaches to life and accepting all of them as valid.

BECAUSE in every form of media I see us/myself slapped, decapitated, laughed at, objectified, raped, trivialized, pushed, ignored, stereotyped, kicked, scorned, molested, silenced, invalidated, knifed, shot, choked, and killed.

BECAUSE I see the connectedness of all forms of oppression and I believe we need to fight them with this awareness.

BECAUSE a safe space needs to be created for girls where we can open our eyes and reach out to each other without being threatened by this sexist society and our day to day bullshit.

BECAUSE we need to acknowledge that our blood is being spilled that right now a girl is being raped or battered and it might be me or you or your mom or the girl you sat next to on the bus last Tuesday, and she might be dead by the time you finish reading this. I am not making this up.

BECAUSE I can’t smile when my girlfriends are dying inside. We are dying inside and we never even touch each other; we are supposed to hate each other.

BECAUSE I am still fucked up, I am still dealing with internalized racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, etc., and I don’t want to do it alone. BECAUSE we need to talk to each other. Communication/inclusion is key. We will never know if we don’t break the code of silence.

BECAUSE we girls want to create mediums that speak to us. We are tired of boy band after boy band, boy zine after boy zine, boy punk after boy punk after boy.

BECAUSE I am tired of these things happening to me; I’m not a fuck toy. I’m not a punching bag, I’m not a joke.

BECAUSE every time we pick up a pen, or an instrument, or get anything done, we are creating the revolution. We ARE the revolution.

No we are not paranoid.
No we are not manhaters.
No we are not worrying too much.
No we are not taking it too seriously.

Flyer ("What is Riot Grrrl?"). (Darms, 2013, p. 168)
Artifact 1: “My Son, I Cannot Let Go of Your Hand” (Spring, 2013)

I don’t want to let go of your hand. I can feel the soft movement of air that wraps its laughing self around us like a blanket, embracing that same feeling of warmth like it did all these years, all these years of holding your hand. As I take you one step closer, the sounds of bouncing on blacktop, whistles, and screams, I don’t want to move one step closer. One step in front of the other is a movement where a part of you will be left behind. Where your laughter, your hope, your visions of the world will be taken from you. I don’t want to take a step further. I don’t want to let go of your hand.

It feels like no one knows this. No one would know this pain attributed to what they say is natural. Natural to feel, to know, that you are walking your son into a system that will crush his soul. Into a system that will teach him to love less and be more, more they say, more than who he is, more than what he can offer the others, they want him to be more, more like them, more like us, and this is the twist, the wringing of my guts, telling me to pull him away. Yet I can’t, so it shreds my mind.

I foresee the future. My child of ideas, of laughter, of joy, of thoughts so compelling I can learn from his words, his actions, each day, and I know they will not be heard, that they will be lost in the scuffling of straight lines and stoplights, muted, as the ones before him into being like the older ones, with nicely trimmed laces, labels, and boxes. Mimicry at its finest, with the muse, no, the master. And here I walk, I so wanting him to know how I see him now, how he is to me, and what it means to thy own self be true. And I want him to fight. To fight for himself. To fight to speak, to question, to share. To wriggle, to move, to dance, to stand. To offer a hand when hands are told to
keep to oneself, and to talk when there is something to say. I fear all of this will be lost. I know it will. And I don’t want to let him go. I don’t want to let go of his hand.

There are so many things I want to say to him. To tell him. But he is too young to remember and it is so complex that he would forget. I want to say hang on. To stay. To be. This son, this creation I have, has more love, more right, more truth, more education, than any of the leaders ready to enforce their knowledge through these heavy doors. But they won’t see that, will they? They won’t see what he has to give them, to give this world, this education, his education to share because the self has too been taken from them.

I imagine my son looking through the window of an air-conditioned room, trying to keep his swaying feet stuck so flatly on the floor, being able to catch a glimpse of a butterfly, a bird, soaring in the sky, so wishing he could be there to reach, to chase, to feel the tall grasses brush his shins and the sunlight on his cheeks, to start to dream of himself as the soarer, zooming through the mountains only to be pulled back by the master, the soldier, told to stop the silliness, that his dreaming is wrong, and he must be right. Focus, she will say. Focus. Stop. And my son, my love, my dreamer, my education, will lose. He will change. For he does not want to fight. He wants to please. So in this gold heart of his, he will be, he will do, as she wishes. He will do this for her, the master, and she will reward him with a plus, a mark, a visual stroke of acceptance, an offer of the same, a tally among the millions of tallies, and in turn, he will lose part of that golden heart, the one that has taught me so much, that has given me the education worth living for.

To walk in and tell her to comfort his soul will not be enough. She will not be able to see. Her world is so wrapped with the objectives, the procedures, the data. Science
has taken ahold of her drive and it has become routine, so embedded in her movements
that she has not one moment of peace to bathe in the breath of little lungs inviting the
immediate positivity of forgiveness and reconciliation. For she was once there, sitting in
obedience pleasing the teacher, and it was in this realm that she either dreadfully failed or
adamantly succeeded. She entered the realm to save or repeat, either of which makes no
difference now because she has become a machine, mastering the routine, checking the
boxes, filing the papers, stamping the margins with strokes of what it is; defining truth
and sending messages of what it means to succeed. My son, she claims, he must play by
the rules, if he wants to be in their world, for if he doesn’t he will easily be shattered into
the categories defining what they call different. And in this world, different is different.

How can I reach her? How can I reach the ones after her, all of them? How can I
weave in each layer of what we need to question until their fabric, a new fabric, is
constructed of an uncovering of a more humane education? These are questions that
plague me. As I walk down the halls of my own school, they plague me. I talk to my
colleagues, my friends, and I know that they are good people. I know they want to help
and not harm. Still I know that if I were to speak from the lens that is me, I would shake
their core, questioning all that they are, and this would be taken as doubt. To ask them the
questions, to cause them to think outside of what is their world day in and day out, would
not be enough. So I wonder where to start. I think of my journey and know that it has
only been for me. But how can their destination be further than their stoplight? Where
can I start to help ignite a new journey for them- one of their own? Where can I reach
them? Encourage them to grow? How? I feel the need to somehow remove the pieces
from me and share it with them, in an attempt to help them see.
Still, I know my voice or my lens is not THE truth. It is not the truth for anything. It is a single voice, and to explore and embark on this journey, many voices need to be heard. Voices that are as free as they can be and speak from the heart. Voices that value a journey, not the absolute. I question this and I know I can’t be alone, in this question of “Is this it? Is this all we can do?”

We have children who reach out. They have concerns for their friends and family. We see it in the daily movements of their souls across actions from the time they are born till the time it ends. Yet where is that in school? Where is the concern, the compassion, the effort and offering of social justice? To schools, justice and compassion fall in a book, or a box, a program, or a practice concocted by research and rules. It is not natural, so it is not real. Humanity is real. Homelessness is real. Sickness is real. Aging is real. Yet we hide our children from these realities in a way of sheltering them from the world. And when they start to grow, we so rudely throw them to the arena of lions until they become one. So I wonder. Why can’t we nurture the beauty? The creativity? Find it, see it? Are we so lost ourselves that it is difficult for us to see? Why is the mystical lost? The play, the dancing, the joy for life? Where is the purpose? Why are we giving it up? Control? Fear? I’m not sure I know the answer or if questions like these can ever be answered simply, if at all. But don’t they matter? For I am human, not a machine. I do not want to let go of his hand.
“Cupsize 3” (Excerpt). (Darms, 2013, p. 309)
Artifect 2: “Shifting Power to the Children: Ideological Pluralism, the Standardistos, and the Call for Narratives” (Excerpt) (Spring, 2014)

The exact moment he was conceived I remember, not envisioning the encounter per se, but because I knew that I would now become a mother. Overcome with emotions, the tears fell off my cheeks and I knew. I knew it was, in that moment, from some deep place I’ll never be able to explain, the truth: I was beginning my life with my son. Our connection began then, a knowing, a sense of peace, and I knew my soul was to finally be connected with the one person that would understand me more than any other.

At 20 weeks, the doctors confirmed by premonitions, the welcoming of a son, and he announced the date of March 12 for his birth. Quickly though, I corrected them with my truth, my unexplainable knowing, this confident time without doubt, that that in fact was not the truth. “My son,” I said, “will arrive on February 24th.” My friends and colleagues would soon scoff at my mention of this truth, brushing off my prediction. “Scientifically,” I’d say, “he’s due March 12th, but I just know he’ll be born February 24th.” Explaining this knowing, a feeling more valid than any one statement I’ve said in my life, was worth little to people other than me. For months, I’d been having dreams about the number 24; it had been my favored number my entire life, and in the same way that I know I am me, I knew that was it for the date of welcoming him.

At midnight, on the 24th of February, 2014, I felt the first wave of indication and four hours later, I had him in my arms. And for the first time in my life, I loved something, someone more than I had ever loved my own self, and I knew then and I knew there, that there was nothing in the world I wouldn’t do for him. My job was to provide, to hold, to care, to love, to protect, and there was not a thing more important in the world than that for me.
Immediately, my test of protection would be weighed as doctors said that his jaundice levels increased and he would be spending nights in the nursery. I refused, providing research on birth experiences and bonding, on the needed moments of a mother’s care and the rights of being humane. Responses from staff offering me the “positive side” of having him away, my need for sleep, and time to relax, perplexed me. And my lack of understanding persisted. How, I questioned could people state such selfish needs and say them out loud? How could that be considered okay? How could they own those words and expect me to believe them as well? My role as the matriarch was to mother, not to hand off, and I had waited my entire life for this child to enter into my world. Hospital executives would finally hear my case and a convenient bilirubin lamp was brought into our room so that the only thing that was ever some part of me wouldn’t be left without the sound of a second heartbeat and the only voice he had ever known.

Simple rights, human rights, would come into question time and time again since the birth of my son. Scenes of mother’s intuition proving people wrong and being the only life who seemed to understand his point of view. In the early years, signs of autism would emerge, possibilities of sensory disorders would arise, and I would begin to work part-time to support him in his early struggles. I would give him interventions, after a year of nursing him all night, and going for months without more than two hours of sleep. I would rock him, hold him, sing to him, smile at him, and be with him. My son and I, sharing the same air, the same breath, the same self. And soon I would be blessed with another child, Briella. A baby girl, easier than pie, and filled with more beauty and laughs.
than the sun provides. But, just a year later, I would find myself a single mother, fighting again for some humanity.

I see my child. I see my children. I know them. I breathe with them. I cry with them. I smile with them. I share with them. I am for them. And yet when they are forced to be taken from me for hours of a day, no one has asked me what I see for them. Or what they see for them. My voice and their voices are silenced.

My son. My son has become this little beacon of hope. He is me. He is more than me. He is everything that is good in me and none of the bad. He lights up a room and brings on the smiles and he’s smart. Not smart like he has mastered every multiplication fact or memorized every capital in the world. He is smart as in he senses. He knows. He has the awareness. The premonitions. The sensitivity to know and to see and to voice. His dreams are not just of fame and football and money. He dares to dream. HE hopes. He has faith. He has love. And he cares. He will reach out and he isn’t afraid to hold. And he sees. He sees more at eight then many see at 28 or 36 or 45. He questions. He asks. And I am so afraid that all that he is, all the gifts that he holds, will be taken from him. I am so afraid of school. I am so afraid all that he is will be lost.

Finn and I, we know. We just look at each other and we know. Sometimes we don’t even have to say it and we just know. He can shake his head, one sway to the left and then one sway to the right and I understand it all, all that he is saying, all that he is feeling. It’s just that he has so much love for life. And so few people have that in the world. So few people see that every moment is important. But he, my Finn, at eight, he knows. He sees. And he asks the questions that need to be asked. Questions of life. Questions of normalcy. Questions of school. I’ve never seen a child devour these
subjects, tackle the issues, talk to find, to question, to wonder. I’ve only seen it for end results: to win. But Finn, his spirit is alive. Each heartbeat radiating light, pushing the meanings of the world onto all around him.

But I fear for him. I fear for him so deeply because it isn’t easy. The world doesn’t accept people like him—people like me. It’s a battle. A challenge. A constant fight. Not a fight for anger or justice, but a fight for humanity. A fight to be entitled to one’s own reality. And this fight is no more apparent for him or for me, than in school. It is here that we find ourselves in a space of difference. In a space where we scream from deep within our souls for the people around us to hear us, to awaken, to see, or even see just a part of what we see. To let us be free and live by what we see as truth.

~~~

Their perceptions, the children, the students, sadden me. For when asked why children have to go to school or the reason for such, their answers do not reflect any concept related to the joy of learning, the pursuit of happiness, or love. There is no deep appreciation, one felt in the gut associated with coming to the realization of something discovered, or the validation felt when there’s an understanding that we are not alone in our struggles with life. For them, learning is about not standing out. As Raiyn has said, “Because if they don’t go to school, they’ll get dumb and then they’ll be, they won’t be smart and then when they grow up, they’ll like be stupid”. Race too commented on the reason for education by responding with this: “So kids can get an education and be successful in life and like be able to get a job, be smart, not be like dumb, not smart, that’s my answer”. Briella, the second youngest, graduating kindergarten just last Friday, was even aware of the need for learning in order to attain the future status of “smartness”
for getting a job. She said, “…if you want to be a teacher, um, if you wanna learn how to

for teaching your kids, um, you gotta learn the teacher and you gotta go in high school to learn if

for you wanna be a teacher, or a horseback rider or a gymnasticer, like you gotta do that stuff

for if you wanna be, if you wanna be, that you gotta be in college and high school to do those

things”. For all the children, this notion of learning is tied to the future and job

fulfillment. The children felt that the reason for learning in school is tied to attainment;

for an ends, for reaching a position, a job, a title. That one must participate in school to be

“smart,” and that you “get” knowledge from institutions. The idea that learning can be

outside of school and that learning itself is a reward was not a theme present among the

children. There was not a sense of learning tied to wonder, questions, self-fulfillment,

personal growth, or excitement. It was all based on the need to fit in and not be “dumb.”

It was all about getting ready to work. School was about following, not leading, and the

paths students needed to follow were to become prepared—to learn how to be smart—for

future employers.

Finn however, the clear INFJ (Myers Briggs personality type of introversion,

intuition, feeling, judging; the ethical intuitive introvert) like his mother, had some clear

insight into the purpose of schooling. At eight years old, he articulated his understandings

well:

I think because, like, I think like the government wanted the kids like to just learn

more and stuff, to like try to get smarter so when they grow up they can be…like

they could get really good jobs. But I just don’t see it how the government saw it

cause all you do is usually sit in a chair all day, can’t really exercise, and like I’d

rather do more, more something fun. More fun than that.

Then, I asked Finn, “What do you mean more fun? Like what would you rather do?”

He responded with:
Well, I would like, I want to play outside more and play outside more and not just sit with a pencil all day and just write on a dumb piece of paper. That’s not what you are supposed to do in life. You are supposed to get up, be active, and play. You don’t just sit down and play video games either. You have to like get up and play instead of holding a pencil in your hand, a piece of paper in front of you.

*Here,* I felt, *here* it is. Everything I ever wanted a child to know. To see that life, that breath, was more important than a grade. That learning can happen in the world and that the purpose of education is the process itself, the very process itself that mattered, not the result. Not the bubbles filled in, the score of a test, or the entrance into a cubicle job. It was feeling. It was love. Love for learning. Love for self. Love for others. Love for nature. Love for life. Love for breath. For being. My son. My son could see. And while I heard these words flow, rolling off his tongue in the form of a melody, I hoped, I wished, I desired that he would remain strong. That he would never lose it. That the school, the system, wouldn’t’ break him down. I wanted him to have joy. Real joy. And to keep it forever. To keep the hope alive. To always *live* in the fullest sense. Because anything else, as Finn said, is “not what you are supposed to do in life.”

~~~

The human race has done little to preserve the earth. The earth offers beauty, story, poetry, movement, life. And yet the human race, the father of the earth, has taken so much from it. Everyone has allowed the earth to be destroyed, and yet as a race we have done little to reverse the damage we have caused. The earth has fulfilled our needs. Our needs for future success. For money. For fortune. For self. This is much like the system for the children. The children offer beauty, story, poetry, movement, life. And yet the mothers of the children have allowed so much to be taken from them. Everyone has allowed the system to breed conformity versus creativity, and yet, as the mothers of our
children, we have done little to reverse the thinking behind how children learn. Their worth. For fortune. For America.

Not in one interview except for Finn’s are my children and step-children living in the moment. It’s like they are already getting ready for the end, for their jobs, for the accomplishment of attaining it, and they don’t know why. They simply follow the track. And when they get there, I’m afraid they will be working to live, to survive. Survival is not the only thing I want for them. This entire process of preparation, the word \textit{preparation}, is beginning to make me cringe. I want to grab them. I see myself pulling their arms, falling to the ground and bearing all my weight in the present moment. I’m refusing to let go of their hands and they are trying to pull away, confused as to why I’m begging them to stay. To stay here. To sit with me. To breathe with me. I’m so afraid that their minds are so far ahead into the future that their focus isn’t on today. I’m afraid they will reach the end of their own visions, they will reach all that they have prepared themselves for—a job—and that they will have missed out of life. I’m afraid they will waste it. I’m afraid they will not feel true joy. I’m afraid they won’t love in all that they can and in all that they are.

Even in a household with me, with my big, boasty encouragement speeches on life, they have spoken to me about where their truth comes from. Where the truth of knowledge comes from. And in all my work with them, my work as mother and stepmother, I feel I have failed. I question why only Finn seems to have a burning passion for life, and why not all of my children, and my mind swirls with questions of how one child can have it, but not all in the same house do. In our discussions of how students learn, the answer became clear: they don’t see truth from within. Learning, for them, is
about teachers and texts, but not something evolving from inside. Not a process of contemplation. It is for them the idea that if a child, a student, is obedient, one can learn. If a mistake is made, it can be fixed. Sit, behave, and listen, and one will achieve the success of learning, thus success in life. On the question of how students learn, this notion was crystal clear.

Rylan, our third grader, stated:

How teachers are smart, since they are grown-ups, they’ve gone to school and all that. Like if you don’t understand something, ask a teacher, you know. And they learn things by listening, like what they hear from their teacher, reading things till they understand too. Like if it is reading or math, just do it. But if you get it wrong, it’s okay. It’s just a mistake. If you do it wrong on purpose, you know, you’ll get it, but you just practice more till you get it.

The response from Rumor, our youngest, was simply, “Your teacher tells you.” Briella agreed, “…you gotta be your best behavior at, and at kindergarten and at high school and at college…” And later said, “…you gotta use your best behavior…you gotta sit up very tall, you gotta listen to the teacher.” Our eldest son, Race, discussed how students learn in math by taking notes and practicing skills by example; in science, through experiments, group work, and vocabulary; and in social studies, by a single textbook read by all. In contrast to his brother and sisters, Finn recognized that learning could come from within.

When asked how students learn, his response was the following:

I think students learn when, it’s kind of obvious ‘cause there is always like a teacher and there is always a teacher there who like teaches you and stuff. It’s kind of, well there is this other part where it is kind of hard. It is kind of hard to explain because you just grow up and like get smarter. The older you get you get smart because sometimes you just know things and stuff.

I probed him further. I asked, “How do you know things?” He responded with, “It comes from my brain.” I continued: “Okay, so most of the stuff you have learned about, because you seem to know a lot, so where do you think you learned that from?” He stated, “Well
like I know I like a lot of animals and stuff, reptiles, so I just learn them from learning about them, checking out books, doing subjects and stuff about them, and, and that’s really how I do it.” I asked, “Did everything you learn about animals come from school or did you decide to learn it on your own?” Finn replied, “I just wanted to learn it on my own.”

As a child, Finn had always been intelligent. He knew his letters and sounds by 18 months old, and had a heightened awareness with intuition. He could read people, sensed their presence, and knew when he was comfortable and when he was not without anyone even saying a word. This type of knowing posed challenges for him and he struggled to speak up, to speak out. He cried often and easily as a toddler, and suffered with sensory challenges.

Finn was used to routine and stability until becoming the product of a divorced family. As I bounced from place to place, struggling with the challenges of single motherhood, single living with personal struggles, and overcoming the devastation of learning my husband was living a double life, Finn began to lead. He saw a broken mother working to simply function, to make it through the day. He became the man, the big brother, the older son, and at a young age he kept me going. His belief in me—that I was always, despite my mistakes, the world in his eyes. He needed me and I in turn needed him. And as years went by, and I began to pull out of my struggles, breathing again for the first time in a long time, Finn went with me. He began, as I did, to speak up and to speak out. He felt the desire to help others in need. And the challenges we had faced as a family of three, with his sister and I, had become the stepping stones for him to bloom. He turned what was unfamiliar into a new path, and we navigated through the
challenges together. Many times, we were unsure of where we were going, but we always knew that we were moving together. This is the space that allowed Finn to find his voice and no longer live in fear. He had to speak out and so he did. This gave him the courage to trust himself. To believe in himself. And to know that all of the answers were not going to be handed to us in a silver box, but rather they came from within and among; this is what allowed him to know his voice meant something.

I fear that, as a teacher viewing curriculum, there is little space to explore. Little space to overcome challenges. Little space to rise above. This fool-proof system, filled with direct instruction, and objectified initiatives holding the message that if you do this perfectly, you will get that perfectly, allows for little way to stray. Little space for not-knowing. It is as if the world will end if a standard isn’t met. Or perhaps it’s a prediction that the economy will collapse. But for me, for this mother, for this teacher, I know that there must be journeys where the end of the path is unknown. Where the end is not predetermined. For it is in there that one may find the magic of life. That one may find what is within.

~~~

Raiyn was asked if she ever has a choice in what she does at school. She explained that at recess her friends sometimes let her pick what games they are going to play. Rylan said that she has choices during study hall and “free time.” The very definition of free time was a choice space, but choice was in little else. Rylan, the mother hen, the rule follower, the eldest girl, was quick to point out the reason for the lack of choice in schools:

Not always because, the teacher, like if they are normally bad at home or anything they don’t get to make their own choices, because if they got to make their own
choices they would probably just play the whole time, if they get to make their
own choices. If the teacher gets to make their choices then they’ll learn better and
not be so bad at anything and then they can learn instead of just play, play, play.
Instead of just playing, they’ll learn if the teacher gives them choices.

Rylan felt the teacher should only offer choices to students based on teacher preferences.
The teacher’s role is to offer choices tied to learning. Rylan felt that if children had
choices, they would only choose to play and not learn. What became unsettling is that
Rylan, who has consistently received high grades in school, had failed to realize that
choice could be tied to academic learning. Upon this reflection, this researcher’s
perspective felt a wave of disappointment rolling over my conceptual outlook on worth
and value. Rylan had failed to see her voice as worthy. She felt as though the only way in
which knowledge could be explored was under the direction of the teacher. She felt that if
children were in charge, they would simply play; thus, all control over their academic
decisions must rest within the power of the teacher. Rylan did not tap into ideas related to
curriculum and knowing tied to a learner’s within. She held beliefs which illustrated that
she was okay with the teacher making all decisions for her. She viewed herself as
incapable of choosing her own in fear that others would simply “play.” Rylan felt there
needed to be control. They were reserved; that knowledge access reserved for the teacher.

For Briella, choices were tied to roles and responsibilities. Her response indicated
that participation equaled choice. She said, “One day, we got to put up the calendar to see
what day it was for spring and the teacher got to pick us and I never got to do it, but I
already have a job. I get to bring the notes to the office.” Further she said, “I get to toss
out papers and sometimes I get to color at school…” Doing something she is willing or
wanting to do, or fulfilling different roles and responsibilities were tied directly to choice
making for her. In speaking of choice in reading, she spoke of being able to organize her
teacher’s “really cool books,” of which she does not have access to read freely or on a
daily basis.

Our middle schooler, Race, explained choice in the following way: “Well, for
reading you can go to the library to pick any book you feel like; it has to be fiction—one
fiction, one nonfiction, for books. Then, um, what we learn, it’s what our teachers
choose. We can’t pick that. And we don’t get to pick what classes we go to or anything.
It’s all like, like the year before”. Race explained choice is exercised when students
choose clubs after school, such as drama, track and field, basketball, and art. He
explained that in gym class there are not choices, and in a “bunch of other stuff” there are
no choices. He said, “If you don’t choose right, you go to the office.”

Rylan, Raiyn, Briella, and Race all believed they had some form of choice in
school. In examining their use of language and conceptual understanding of choice, they
interpreted their understanding of choice in a positive way. They enjoyed their access to
what they considered choice. Raiyn had a choice in what to play at recess; Rylan had a
choice in study hall or free time; Briella had a choice in jobs she was going to perform in
and out of the classroom. Race had a choice when going to the library and after school.
However, as their parent and step-parent, and even as a teacher, I viewed their
perspective on choice as limited. I felt as though their understanding of choice was
related to an emphasis on teacher power, and created a lack of autonomy among the
children. For me, choice was being masked; a veil of deflection. Choice was related to the
least academic in schools: recess, free time, sports, library. Choice was not utilized in the
content areas. Even in visiting the library, Race had to choose one fiction book and one
nonfiction book. While he viewed this as a choice—a choice of any fiction book or any
nonfiction book—I viewed this as a limiting factor. I questioned why there would be restrictions on the kind or amount of books that students were permitted to check out of the library. I reflected upon my own personal preferences and my lack of desire to read fiction texts. I began to worry. I worried of their inability to see beyond what was placed before them. I wondered why they hadn’t felt a strong desire to exercise their rights and why they were showing me that they believed the value of learning lay outside of themselves. I longed to tell them that they could still learn, they could still grow, academically and intellectually, and even socially, even if they were given the right to choose; choosing a topic for study, choosing a way to illustrate understanding, choosing their most exciting way of knowing. Finn too shared my sentiments:

Um, sometimes we do this thing called free time, and there are called like money sheets and they are like activities like worksheets and word searches and like coloring and connect-the-dots and stuff, but I literally never do it, so I recycle some. But we have free time, and that, like, our free time, to do like something or, and then any time else we don’t get to choose what we want to do. We just have to listen to the teacher, so that’s pretty disappointing. You do something, you do an activity that you don’t want to do, so I just really don’t like that. And then it’s just not right to make somebody do what they don’t wanna do, but you still have to do school. I still want to do school, I still want to do school, I’d just rather be homeschooled ‘cause I want to like go somewhere if I want to learn about a certain something. Like let’s say I want to learn about dinosaurs. I go to a museum with Mom. I, um, if, well I could go to a different state if I want to learn something, just I, I need to figure that out with my dad, so yeah, so, so, I just don’t think it’s fair to make somebody do something. It’s not fair.

Finn began to see. To say. To become aware through voice that education was not just attainable through schooling. Education was a part of life. Learning was around us. The possibilities are endless. And in education, life needs to be considered. What the kids want needs to be considered. Otherwise, “it’s not fair.”
Questions regarding the issue of whether or not schools provide a platform for happiness in life, and how the children felt they could make schools a better place for themselves if the opportunity arose collided into a central issue of concern: the façade. Excerpts of the dialogue reveal the façade with Race, Rylan, Briella, Rumor, and Finn:

*Question:* Does going to school help make students happy? (asked to all six children)

*Race:* Depends. If you are a good student, most likely you will be happy. You’ll have a lot of friends, the teachers’ll like you. If you’re bad, it’s just the opposite. You’ll have some friends, but all the teachers will hate you and you’ll get in trouble a lot, but you won’t care…

*Rylan:* It depends on if they like school or if they don’t like school, because I have a nice school. But some people don’t cause they like, don’t have a good school, don’t like their school, or things are harder for them so they don’t like school sometimes.

*Briella:* It teaches people how to be happy and listen…to your teacher.

*Rumor:* Yes…because when they learn sometimes it makes them happy

*Raiyn:* Some people may like school. But I do a lot and I love to read too.

(Questioning continues: “So how does school make you happy?”) I like to do math and some, we have specials that we go to and my favorite one is, um, music, gym, library, and that’s all. I don’t like art that much. Um, I like computers, but I don’t like art because, um, um, because a lot, um, a lot of people, um, get in trouble because, um, we have tables—but I never get in trouble—because, um, we have tables. Our art teacher is really funny. I like when he, um, um does funny
stuff but, um, sometimes when the, sometimes, people at my table, they talk when he’s talking and they get in trouble and I don’t like it when people get in trouble…Just makes me sad.

For these four children, school can make you happy. It can make you happy as long as you are listening to the teacher, you are following rules, and you are a good student, or you are learning. Conformity leads, in this sense, to happiness. Causing trouble by talking out of turn can make teachers hate you, as Race said, which can lead to unhappiness.

Finn, not surprisingly, had a different take.

*Question:* Does going to school help make students happy?

*Finn:* I’m going to answer for me, NO WAY!!! Because, as I told you at first, I just don’t like sitting in a chair all day and it doesn’t make me happy and it probably doesn’t make anyone happy, anyone in a school happy, because it like doesn’t ever make anyone happy. That’s sad, so I just really don’t like doing that.

*Question:* What does it mean to be happy? What does being happy mean?

*Finn:* It means you are all like excited. And you are like, and you are like a feeling with a smile on your face and stuff. But I never see anybody at school…sometimes they smile because they are laughing, but that doesn’t mean you are happy.

For the other children, they like school so they are happy. They accept the reality presented by the system. There is little questioning pertaining to their role in education. Choice is masked in forms of ultimatums, or it is binary; choosing good behavior versus bad behavior, having a teacher like you versus having a teacher hate you, school being easy for you versus school being hard for you. Happiness equates conformity. But for
Finn, he even questions what it means to be happy. At eight years old, he says
“sometimes they smile because they are laughing, but that doesn’t mean you are happy.”
For Finn, there is a façade. This façade is present not only in the notion of what it means
to be happy in schools, but what it means to learn something, what it means to have a say
in your own learning, and what it means to have a voice. Finn feels school is not “fair.”
Not because he doesn’t want to learn, but because he feels the current environment of
schools does not provide a platform for how he wants to learn. He sees school as limiting,
not enhancing. Thus, it is a façade for conformity, not creativity.

Ideas of conformity, rules, and regulations were also present in Raiyn’s response
to the question regarding what a “normal” day at school looks like. After explaining how
they get their folders, put their names in slots for lunch, put items away, and read,
followed by calendar and “switcheroo” (their first grade term for Response to
Intervention), she states, “After we’re sharing, we, um, wash our hands and we have
monitors. Those are, um, they make sure we’re quiet in the bathroom and, um, there’s
one for the boys and one for the girls, so, um, sometimes I’m it. I don’t really like to be it
that much.” She continued, “Yeah, because you have to stay in there until, until after all
of the girls or boys are out in class…” In this sense—monitoring children going to the
bathroom—there is a lack of trust. The message that students must be “watched” is
revealed. This phenomenon, along with the clear lack of trust in terms of choices,
behavior, their perceived inability to do the right thing, and being silently dismissed as
active participants in learning choices, all illustrate the lack of autonomy in my children’s
classrooms. Even in the school in which I work, servicing students in grades 3 through 5,
students are viewed as incapable of monitoring their own selves when needing to relieve themselves. Figures 1 and 2 below capture the reality of this ideology.

As evidenced by these images, students are stripped of their privacy through the removal of doors into the separate sections of toilets. In each opening lies three walled sections of gendered-split spaces, where there houses partial swinging doors providing privacy from the children’s calves up. With such a setup, all noises made within the bathroom are heard by the students walking in the hallways moving to and from their lockers. Toilet flushing is consistently heard in the hallways. Conversations near lockers are heard when inside the partially covered stalls. All sinks and needed accessories are exposed, constructed to flow with and share the space among the hallways. Privacy is stripped and discomfort ignored. The layout was constructed for monitoring the students using the facilities and ensuring cleanliness and the exposure of such to the public school sphere. Thus a bathroom constructed “for the students” was actually constructed “for the monitoring of the students.”

This example was utilized because it creates a visual representation symbolic of what messages my children have relayed during their personal interviews. Their narratives reveal an educational environment where the majority of them believe that
there is choice in school, even when there clearly is not. They are appreciative of their abilities to choose in “free time,” and value activities in which they can choose, such as “recess.” It seems some of them believe that school is a happy place for them, but only because they listen, follow rules, and meet expectations. As teachers present them with “choices,” they happily accept, despite their true understanding of what choice actually can mean. They believe, too, that knowledge and education come from the teacher or a book. There are things to learn, and the knowledge that is needed for future success is held in the mind of the teacher. All of my children, except for Finn, believe in this ideology.
Sleep little one sleep, take comfort in the night’s embrace cause the morning sun will open your eyes and you’ll see that you live in a f*cked-up place. Sleep, little one, sleep, take comfort in any kind of embrace, the morning sun’s gonna open your eyes and you live in a f*cked-up place.

Oh, baby, I was like you once; I slept in a crib with yellow sheets. Now the sand in my eyes and the dirt on my feet and the sand in my mouth, and everyone just dreams of themself anyway, don’t they? No, you never asked no one for life but here you are in somebody else’s world. And they’ll say that the change can come through you but it should’ve come long ago. And how can things change when all of our dreams are unfurled?

The stars in your eyes are just shattered glass, and the dolls on the shelf will become the men in the gutter. And everyone dreams of somebody else.

Baby, I’ll never sleep that way again until I die.

—Anna Springer (Blatz)
Artifact 3: “Know Thyself” (Spring, 2014)

Woman
Mother
Teacher
Know thyself
I am 50 percent in the existence of humanity
I am mother
And from the time he was in me, my body was no longer my own
I lived for it, for him, for child
Oxygen in (deep breath) carbon dioxide out (breath) that being for him
I took breath to give to him, my purpose no longer my own, but breathing for the only thing that can know me so well that it births from me into existence, into world, now with me till the time I pass
Holding hands, moments, minutes, hours, staring, watching, growing, being, knowing, feeling what it means to love so much that you would give up your very breath for it
And for the mother
this is life
Life in everything it never was before
But if you don’t know thyself, mother becomes lost, balancing one foot on one side of the yellow line holding all that is natural and real on one side, clinging onto you with chunky little legs wrapping around your waist while balancing the weight of otherness in the palm of your hand, on the side of the second foot holding you up, a balance, the other, there
in the space of what you do as mother
As the days pass that contact begins to break, that gaze,
a place you thought would last forever, waiting for a grin, a sigh,
a moan from this being that grew in you,
and your stare begins to break
One day moves into the next and novelty of motherhood wears off enough
then there’s that the flash of an image,
a word of what should be,
a whisper passing from one mother to another takes that whole existence, the child, the human, the way in which the world is seen and it becomes commoditized,
pieces of it being owned by a system, many systems that have taken stock in the confidence that mother will let go, and then they,
those stockholders, become part owner of 50 percent of what you made.
Somehow they think they know,
and you give it to them mother,
you give them the definition of what it means to be a mother and you hand over your child without question,
8 hours a day, 5 days a week and you don’t say shit
And now they all have stock,
taken from you and so your power’s gone.
And if you try to take it back, well, they won’t call you mother, they’ll call you crazy
And so, you will wake up mother, every day you will wake up, but you will not be wide awake.

You will help open the eyes of your son to the ways of the world, to the stockholders, and you will hand off that child’s self to the very same system that has taken you down.

You will turn on that power button and you will feed him what it means to be American, what it means to have, and to own, and to want and to never be...well to never BE,

is not what you need mother, you need to trust yourself and just BE mother.

And he will dance and play and jump, laughing with ideas and catching life and feeling and you will see THAT

and still Mother you will let him take steps into that very system that hid you from yourself and made you sit there, trading in your charcoal and chalk for a yellow number 2 pencil, and his energy and that lasting energy that makes you laugh and wonder thinking of how he still goes, budding with ideas you never knew he had and he WILL BE TAMED.

And he will sit.

And you will go there and they will say:

“Welcome Mother. Yes, your child is a very good boy. Smart he is. He listens very well and I am very pleased with him and yes mother he follows all the rules and everybody likes him Mother. And yes mother Average Mother. You should be proud mother.”

And you will leave mother.

And you will rub his head and tell him what a good boy he is for doing what they ask him to do. And he will be just average, well you will tell them all that he is smarter, but you are happy mother that he is average because average mother means normal and normal is normal.

And then mother if you’re lucky you might see a shard of light and mother...maybe you will listen and then again maybe mother you won’t.

Maybe it will be, at first just one word.

Just one word that you think about and it resonates, simmering there, basting and you become angry and questioning and filled with hate.

Because mother where has your son gone? Where has he gone that someone can say he is average? There is nothing average about him mother and you should know that.

And he should know that.

And everyone who knows him should know that. Because existence, existence mother, when is existence ever average?

And now mother you must eat your words and just stop talking.

Mother it is now time to listen. Mother.
This is your child. Mother,
This is
YOUR
CHILD.

Mother no one owns this child.
This is your child mother.

Before it is too late mother take that hand of that child you made.
The one you spent every moment thinking about as he grew in you and you remember
how you dreamt he would change the world.

You remember that Mother.
Hang onto that Mother.

And now you reach to that child’s hand and you walk with him and you let him lead you
to where he wants to go.
And you be.
You stop.

Because what they say he needs is defined by what they want from him.
They are stakeholders mother. And stakeholders own, they buy, they take parts of and
they use it for what they want. He is your child mother.
And you will no longer let them own him.
Not a part, not a percentage, not a point, not a piece.
And in that mother you know that the grass matters.
That his toes on the grass matters.

And that he can feel the sun shining down warmly on his skin and you know that feeling
as he runs down the path, with his arms gliding like a big old airplane.

THERE THAT is IT mother, it is him feeling life mother.
And when he is touching the wheat that grows from the stalks he is learning mother. And
when he wants to know and he asks questions and he searches, and he listens, crying to
the words that we have all heard out of joy, but seem to have forgotten, it is him that
remembers, that man is judged by the content of his character not the nobility to follow
normalcy.

So mother, know thyself.
Know thyself

Teacher
And then there’s teacher.

And she walks that line of what you think she should be too.
Everybody’s got a stake in teacher. Teacher will be able to please them. They know that.
Teacher has to do what they say those stakeholders or she no longer holds that title of
teacher.

That threat is always there, looming, lurking, laughing.
Teacher knows this.

And she shuts her door and she prays for moments that will impact them so strongly that
they will be able to sustain what those stakeholders are going to have in store for them by
the time they get out of this prison.

‘Cause if teacher is mother that knows thyself and in there teacher’s caught.
She’s caught between giving her child the bread he needs and battling that moral beast of 
asystem.
And through those halls she walks and her head might be high and she might be nodding 
smiling as she places one foot in front of the other on those gleaming linoleum tiles, but 
she is defeated, stuck in that crossfire of a system, where what she knows as a mother is 
now defined how she sees children as a teacher, and she can’t break down and give those 
babies what they need, what she knows they need as a mother, because she is 
a piece, a part, a percentage of those stakeholders’ system 
and just like the middle class mother that she is, as long as money drives this land, it will 
drive what they want of teacher.
And that teacher dreams
She thinks about it, what if might be like to ask them, what they want, to not have to force 
this knowledge down their throats with yellow pencils. She just wants to teach them how 
to breathe.
How to search.
How to feel.
How to be.
How to know.
How to see, how to look, how to find, how to hear yourself when everyone else’s voice is 
so loud that there is not one moment to hear what you have inside yourself
Know thyself she wants to say
But she can’t
For she is teacher
And teacher, by definition in this American land is not owned by herself.
She is owned, just like they, the children, will be owned by the stakeholders

And then we have woman
Know yourself woman
If you knew yourself, your 50 percent of this existence, maybe it wouldn’t have taken so 
long for you to stand up to man and say take your stock and shove it
Because I am woman, and I am here and you are not here without me here
So now we will
be.
You and I will know that to BE you must have me
Woman
And so we will remove your power from me and you will hear what I have to say
Because my submissive past has put me here in this system owned by man and this is no 
longer something you will own

As mother, as teacher, as woman I will
be
I exist
I will speak
And your fear,
your stockholding,
invading,
because no longer will we let the children of ours be owned by what you define as knowledge.

No longer will we let those children of ours be owned by what you define as truth
No longer will we let those babies of ours be owned by you and what you want them to become for the sake of you

We are women
We will be heard
We are mothers
We will be heard
We are teachers
We will be heard

Know thyself stakeholders
For we now know you
Who Is Choking and Dying? by KAKe

O.K. - I've got a bone to pick with Sassy magazine. Yes, I admit it's a personal grievance, I have had times of low confidence where I felt the only way to insure my happiness was to starve and vomit and try to become one of the females inside a fashion magazine. That's where the trouble begins with Sassy, their format of visuals is the same as all other magazines with a female audience - thin, VERY attractive models AND the "Lose weight so boys will like you" advertisement in the back.

My roommate disagrees with my disgust towards Sassy, she argues that they write good articles about incest survivors, rape, witchcraft, how to make clothes, etc... Alright - all well and good, except the articles are the substance of bubble gum icecream with the cherry being "cute band alert." Yes - too stupid to even MENTION, "cute band alert" degrades any woman who takes her music seriously, except me because I judge a band by their looks and fashion by their lyrics and music.

Perhaps I am in a dream world with my desire to have articles and pictures of the average girl growing up in cheap discount clothes amidst her piles of souvenirs, collectibles, memories, dreams and books that she always carries close to her imagined too large/too small chest.

But that's why Riot Grrrl exists - so all that our grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunts, friends and selves have fought and suffered through will not be compacted into easily digested bullshit bits of information. I just hope that as individuals females will start and continue to follow their inner soul to create a world where - well - whatever wonderful we want can happen.

Riot Grrrl NYC 5 (Excerpt). (Darms, 2013, p. 194)
Artifact 4: “Awakening” (Spring, 2013)

We are interested in education here, not in schooling. We are interested in openings, in unexplored possibilities, not in the predictable or the quantifiable, not in what is thought of as social control. For us, education signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, moving. It signifies the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out for meanings, a learning to learn.

Maxine Green (Variations on a Blue Guitar, 2001, p. 7)

How does one awaken? How does one change? How does one’s soul grow? For many of us, it is among the pain, the struggle in life, the events where one has no control and where one is forced into facing the deepest fears, where these enlightenments evolve. It is under the mask, the wall, the hidden reality and truths that so many of us spend a lifetime protecting, where the movements of each day weave nothing but lies; facades of happiness, strength, and peace.

I was lost. I had no sense of self. My life had been for my children. Somewhere between the decisions of which playgroup to join, the themes of the birthday parties, and whether or not my 1- and 2-year-old would attend a private high school, my sense of self was gone. All the things that he had fallen in love with—the independence, the wild inhibitions, the resilience—it was gone. Between the organic baby food, overpriced owl-patterned clothes, and Stride Rite shoes, my desire to remain “Woman,” with all of its connotations and being that had once defined me, was removed and simply replaced with “Mommy.” While I was so busy trying to be the perfect mother, buying the perfect things, and choosing the perfect mommy-and-me classes, my husband was busy building a second life. Days after my son’s third birthday, just months after my daughter had turned one, the world I had worked so hard at creating, at “perfecting,” came to an end.
I had spent years drifting in my life. Traveling. Traveling to different places, to
different families, being the outsider, moving around, and so the one thing I wanted was a
family. Not the kind of family that broke up, but the kind of family that lived there in that
house they had built together, where the nuclear family of four sat on rocking chairs each
brisk Thanksgiving evening after dinner, talking about life and love and the years of
grandchildren too, all carved into that front porch plank of wood. The place where
everyone knew that I had touched every wall of that house, from top to bottom, with the
laughter of life and family, all marked up, from ceiling to floor. I wanted that so badly,
that normal family. Picture perfect, all round and clear; the home we all wanted right
there in the middle of suburbia.

So when it all happened, when I found the registered Internet sites and the pay-as-
you-go phone, when I talked to the young lady, and I learned the truth, I thought I
wouldn’t make it through. There were some days when I wished I didn’t open that email
and find the beginning of the end. I wished, at times, that I hadn’t pulled the end of that
spool of thread that so easily began to unwind until there was nothing left to pull but
nothing.

She didn’t know he was married. She didn’t know of his kids. She just thought he
was there, tied up in the promotion of his documentaries and touring the campus of
Harvard and MIT, where both had so clearly pursued his expertise in this calculated and
fictitious world. She didn’t know he had parents who signed permission forms to take the
debate team under his supervision to visit this campus in another state, that he was a
teacher, just there to attend a weekend with his students. She didn’t know this when he
left the students unsupervised, alone, to meet her in a bar, this Craigslist respondent, and
she didn’t know this when he took her back to his hotel. She didn’t know his emails were filled with lies, lies of a false life, and she sure as hell didn’t know about his addictions. This, all of this, she shared with me in our conversations in Finn’s nursery, as I watched my two babies laugh in their home, the home of their own that would soon be taken from them, along with my relived visions of rocking chairs on a crisp November night.

Years of lies would follow. Nights where I questioned the sanity of myself. Nights where I felt I could no longer take the pain of this miserable life, where I thought it was all over and there was no truth to anything. No truth in love and in peace and in anything I wanted to live for. And as I spent the next few years banging on doors of a drunk father who left his babies to roam alone, as I fought for justice through the court system with evidence of lies, emails filled with threats, and listened to a boastful man who once again claimed he was sober week in and week out only for me to discover a new event, a new experience where my babies were left alone, I would struggle to my core with how to cope with this man who had once been my rock, and now the main contributor, a tour guide on my path to death.

So there he sat time and time again. There he was, this man who I had convinced to be a teacher, who I stood by through addictions, who I trusted when I knew there were lies. Here was this man, who had a way with words, who frequently created an intoxication of play and manipulation in the lyric of life, so diverting that even a teacher with two master’s degrees had trouble understanding. THE man who could convince anyone of anything, here I was with his leftover pieces of destruction that I was supposed to use, alone, in an attempt to nurture the only thing left in my life: my babies.
There he was, beginning the process of recovery in AA meetings, motivated to “recover,” not in truth, but in the realm of leadership, of inspiration, for all of the alcoholics who now followed his cult of positivism and reality. Absolutism. There they were following him, his words, him thriving off of their attention as he did mine, only to suck the hope they have left and feed on it like the cells of cancer. And when they were left with nothing, hanging on his every word, he would disappear and move onto the next soul to conquer, their souls, my soul, used as pebbles for him to climb to the top of the ivory tower.

This man, he was the reductionist, the positivist, the player of the white patriarchal world, where the good ol’ boys play baseball between banters of E.D. Hirsch and George Bush. Where *Huckleberry Finn* and *Savage Inequalities* were referenced in their power play conversations used to conquer, but they never really gave a damn about it because they, it was THEY who maintained the status quo. Here it was—everything I lost myself in, I lost myself to, the controller, the political president of my world in which I gave up all, here sitting in front of me for the rest of my life. Facing me. There, with a shit-eating grin, flipping a quarter, leaned back in his leather chair, books stuffed in shelves behind him, while he sat there in his khaki pants, chewing on a coffee straw.

But that was my choice. Back then that was my choice. I was not an innocent victim, lying in the woods, abducted by a felon. I was a character. I chose to be a character; a fictitious character, mystified by the black romanticism of his cape and the trance of his words, lured by the plot he created, and I followed that vampire right into the trees, only for my blood to be sucked by the fangs of a liar, dangling his false reality.
in the beauty of the other side. The absolute forever, ringing as true as the night. The ultimate soul.

Now, I have another choice. It did not arrive over the course of one night it was moments in the making, leading me to this rider of this road. And I can either remain on my bicycle, peddling off into my destination, the one I choose, or I can get off my bike once more, be led into the forest and this time never return. For I am speaking of my choice in where to go from here. Where to move when something has taken you so clearly off your path for so very long, where is there to go? Must we continue on the same path? This is a question that is difficult to answer when you are in the forest. When there is no direction of north or south or east or west. When there are no clues if another human has been in this part of the woods before or if you are simply alone in this forest with the vampire.

For me, it is impossible to journey in this forest. On the terms of the forest, with all of its inhabitants, remains darkness. For me, there is nowhere to go but out. So for me, I must create anew. A new ecosystem where there are no paved roads, only hills and valleys, rivers to drink from, and fruits. Then as I imagine, as I start to go journeying in places I thought no one had before, out from behind the willow tree appears someone. Someone who is ready to walk beside me, and then we together see more. More than what we thought there would be. Women and mothers, teachers and children, all walking, coming out from this dark forest of a system, and moving, not fast as if there is an end, just roaming, basking, soaking in the light, enjoying the breath, feeling life, no longer constricted by the inhabitants ruling our environment, for we created one of our own.
"Hypocritical Kiss"
Lyrics by Jack White

My temper got the best of me
And when I said that I mean
I know every single thing
That I said was true

And I know that you’re mad at me
But if you’re thinking like that
I think you’ll see that you’re
Mad at you too

And I know the feeling’s strong
Strong enough to forget about
All that I’ve been through

And it sounds obscene but
Loud words never bothered
Me like they do to you

You’re the boy
That talks but says nothing
A big game to the ones
That you think will believe you

But you don’t know how to read
The look on my face when it says
“Yeah, I’ve read that book too”

And who the hell’s impressed by you?
I want names of the people
That we know that are falling for this

You would sell your own mother out
And then betray your dead brother with another
Hypocritical kiss
WHAT YOU ARE DOING IS SEXIST TOWARDS MEN.

Our culture is based on the idea that there are only two ways to be (in any given situation) IN CONTROL or OUT CONTROL, THE FUCKED or THE FUCKER, person WHO KNOWS WHO THEY ARE or someone in process of AN IDENTITY CRISIS. Our society trains us to be so anti-confrontational cuz we think this means we person (usually the CONFRONTANT) is "right" and the other (CONFRONTED) just be "wrong". We are afraid of arguing cuz we see everything in terms of WINNING/LOSING instead of in terms of understanding each other. This is where the idea of reverse sexism came from: men get threatened by feminists cuz they think we are accusing them of being "wrong" instead of trying to help them understand how WE feel about things and see our points of view on things. We want them to empathize with us so that they can change those behaviors of theirs that are hurting us. We need to move beyond our archaic concentration on blame and move on, towards change.

It seems in most conversations about sexism, men wanna immediately take the focus off of how sexism affects women and put it onto how feminism affects men. And once again, men are placed in the middle of the action, as the central characters, his needs come first, you know? So, essentially, the idea of "reverse sexism" is just another form of sexism. We're making a judgment, he thinks we do everything to affect, offend, push his buttons, never for our own sake. We are obviously screaming, he thinks, to hurt his ears, not because we are, genuinely, in serious pain.

If a guy starts saying you are reverse sexist, he is obviously threatened by what you are doing, he's threatened cuz he thinks there's only two ways of being powerful or powerless. He assumes you asserting your right to experiment, fuck around, have fun and scream when you gotta, is an attempt to take power away from him. He assumes you wanna "switch places" with him, knows you get treated like shit, he knows he gets advantages from your supposed feelings of inferiority (it makes him feel like a big man) he's earning REVENGE, girlfriend. His fear of "reverse sexism" is basically an admission, on his part, that he knows you get treated like shit and he does not want to switch places with you.

Bikini Kill 2 (Excerpt). (Darms, 2013, p. 138)
Don't tell me to be happy motherfucker.

I saw a tee shirt today at the store. It came in large and extra large sizes. There were ten of them, hanging there, dark black with white letters. I imagined some girl's boyfriend coming home in one. SHIT UP BITCH written across each one.

Don't tell me to be happy motherfucker.

I listen to you all the time. Your worries and your troubles are the stuff that is like breathing. The stuff so often repeating that it sounds like a ticking clock or a real live heart. Yet I'm the one who is told I talk too much.

Axl Rose is on MTV. The image is like this: Guns-n-Roses are performing an acoustic set for a grade school assembly. Axl is singing these words, "I used to love her, but I had to kill her. I had to put her six feet under." The kids are laughing. Little girls are sitting on the floor at his feet, laughing.

I am making such a big deal outta nothing. I'm sorry. Sorry. Sorry. I'm so sorry.

You never state how you feel and say maybe if I was more like you I would just deal with things "inside" more often, and "by myself". But see, being silent to you means safety, to me it means being gagged.

"Smile princess."

Why do you always ask me why I'm not smiling, you don't really wanna know.

I WANNA KNOW WHY ITS IN YOUR BEST INTEREST THAT I ACT LIKE EVERYTHING IS OKAY.

I WANNA KNOW WHY ITS IN YOUR BEST INTEREST THAT I ACT LIKE EVERYTHING IS OKAY.

I WANNA KNOW WHY ITS IN YOUR BEST INTEREST THAT I ACT LIKE EVERYTHING IS OKAY.

I WANNA KNOW WHY ITS IN YOUR BEST INTEREST THAT I ACT LIKE EVERYTHING IS OKAY.

I guess its not enough that i accept the evil sexist dumb commodity bullshit that eats up my true life and threatens to engulf me in fear and drain me of all hope...you want me to TAKE IT WITH A SMILE too.

No.

BUT I KNOW A GIRL WHO LIED ABOUT BEING RAPED....

This is also called 'Passing the exception to the Rule off as The Rule.' Mainstream movies (propaganda) are really good at this one. Take the movie, FATAL ATTRACTION, for example. Okay, so like, 99.9% of all abusers/harrassers in heterosexual relationships are male and then this movie comes out where this woman is running around totally scaring this man and wrecking his whole white and married and middle class thing. And like EVERYONE is like, "Oh my god, that's me!" And like EVERYONE is like, "Omg! I thought that was me!"

The Dangerous Woman. We are so evil, oh yea. Well who are the real rapists, child molesters, serial killers and general bullies in our society anyways? Who are the real people in power???
Artifact 5: “Yoga as Discourse” (Spring, 2013), Entwined With

Artifact 6: “Death” (Fall, 2013)

“Yoga as Critical Discourse”

Simply put, yoga keeps me sane, peaceful, and as balanced as possible in this world of contradictions and chaos.

Mary Bevel

The following journal entries were written and/or included after reflection upon the following field research:

- Meditation with Bhante Sujatha, Buddhist monk
- Yoga and meditation at Bliss Yoga
- A Hunter’s Moon Kundalini Yoga and Gong Event
- Morning meditations

I have this messed up relationship with death. Like it’s hanging over me, teasing me, reminding me that it can take me or someone that I love at any moment. It is a toy sitting there in my function of life, right there lingering, with me in the middle. It’s like I’m right there standing dead center on a plank, teetering on top of a rock, and I’m juggling to keep either end from touching the ground. One end is the realism, the normalcy, the tedious day in and day out of life, of schedules, jobs, appointments, and deadlines, and then there is mysticism on the other, the hope of peace and love and what I want in this life. Death sits there on my shoulder, with every choice of words. It serves as my reminder of the limits of time, of how much time I have wasted on pain and anger, and how much time I have left. It hangs, waiting for me, standing behind my back, all the while judging what I do to see if I am worthy of spending more moments on this earth. It
seeps in me, the push to remind my children how much I love them each day, to brush my daughter’s hair, and hold my son’s hand. It asks me, “Have you done enough?” and I wonder if I have. If I have done enough for them? For would it be enough if I were taken from this earth? Would I have done enough for them that they would remember what it is like to live? Will they know what it’s like to live?

When meditating with a Buddhist monk, he talks before our acceptance of meditating for loving kindness. He says something like this:

When your environment is in chaos, when the wind blows, you cannot see. You are blind. You have to calm yourself. You have to calm your breath. You have to create peace through acceptance. If you sit in front of the water, in a forest, and you want to see the beautiful reflection of the moon, you cannot see the reflection clearly. You cannot see the beautiful moon when the water is not still. You cannot see yourself when the water is not still. The reflection of your own self is blurry, distorted in the water, when there is chaos. But when your environment is still or your mind is still, calm, you can see all of the beauty that the moon has to offer in its reflection. You can see yourself clearly too. No blurred edges. Clarity and peace and the ability to see.

With my reminder of death and my hope of clarity, striving for inner peace, I am forced to think about it all. Every choice, every turn, every smile. It makes me think about the things I have never thought about before. About perspective. About rules. About assumptions. About messages. Actions. Conformity. It makes me think about the day, the hour, the minutes. And it has made me come to see things in a way that I have never seen before.

I spent each breath trying to forget rather than accept, and I knew that this mediation was useless. That my emotions were too wrapped up, consumed in the anger of him, that it would be of no use to focus on the breath. I told myself over and over to forget, to stop, to let it go, and the very reminder of this in each moment seemed to weigh me down more than it was helping me forget. I was angered that this time, my time, my
energy and focus, was being spent on trying to get rid of his wrath, that each attempt at release was a deeper breath into fear of not being able to let go. As my breaking point seemed to seep deeper into reality, I felt more and more disconnected from my Shavasana. But then, just as a storm ends and the sun breaks through, it came to me, this story; a visualization that would come to be the release.

I sensed the anger, the power, not hearing the words but knowing that they were being exchanged on that dark forest floor among these two men in my world. The power swirled around them like the wind they felt on their faces, walking back and forth clockwise, then counter, in a half attempt to reach the other one. They paced, like the dance of a martial art, waving and pushing the anger across the spaces between the tensed souls. The vibration of their voices was felt in my toes, my claws, hooking into the bark. And then I was there, above them, looking below, sensing their presence, knowing they were there, but not letting their dance, their play, be touched by me. I nestled my wings into my body, my head sinking into it, me, the owl up in the tree, between the night sky, the natural beauty of earth, and the angry men below me. In that space I could be, knowing that I did not have to feel them, but it, the beauty in the world around. There in that moment, it was over. The anger was no more. I was separate, aware, but unaffected by the game, the words, the play of the men below. And as the release was felt, signaled by the calm in every pulse of my body, it became day. The sun was warm as I pushed off into the blue sky. But I was no longer the owl. I was the blackbird. The shine of my wings reflected in the sun, the tip of my wings gently rising and falling among the breeze as I soared to the sky. I was beautiful and warm and free. The blackbird.
As my master summons the awakening of my soul, I am at peace, not thinking, but just present, there in the moment, breathing in Sat, breathing out Nam, and I am happy. So I know and say, “Namaste.”

I step outside and begin to laugh as the sun is being set, a most picturesque red, yellow, and orange like a watercolor brush had been swept on the canvas of the sky. I begin to drive towards it, only to see three blackbirds cross slowly, flying, soaring in the air, and as our eyes meet, I know, I know there is something more. Not only am I at peace and release, but I am safe in the hope of tomorrow, of what I can become with this gift of self, inner peace, and acceptance here in this moment.

On the way home to greet my children, I stop at a local store, pausing for moments before going in, to feel the warmth of the sun. I very consciously place one foot in front of the other, feeling every part of my feet touch the earth, feeling comfortable and free in my skin. As I turn the corner to pay for the few items I needed, I see an owl, a golden owl, hanging off a pendant in my current path. I reach down and see it, the very owl I had become in my dream, my visualization, my moment of release, and I know, I know it is a sign. A sign in the beauty of letting go.
Beware. When you least expect it, you may be victim to the Zen Stare. But be grateful, for it will make you a more honest, true, and articulate human being.


Since my first exposure to the Zen Stare and my gradual maturing, I have cultivated my own power of Zen Stare that is essential to my existence, survival, and unique expression of goodwill to others. I use the Zen Stare on girls who are not pro-girl. Who are stuck in 3rd grade gossip/back-stabbing behaviour and want to share it with me and drag me into it. Basically all people who engage in bogus conversations as a way of life that goes beyond the pleasures of flirting and socializing. And especially passive-aggressive types.

Other Zen Stare situations — goody, kissy, super-hyper people running up to me all "hey" and what's up "just for the hell of it. They had better chill. You can't be that happy to see me. The ALL POWERFUL

Other potential targets — people who cannot interact unless they are somehow entertaining me and getting a reaction. I take this as an insult after a while, like I am just there to be provoked. I wanted people to constantly make me laugh, I'd go to comedy clubs and be a groupie. This is so oppressive and demands so much of my energy and I just want to say "fuck off"... but the Zen Stare works even better than that cathartic phrase.

When you use the Zen Stare, you refuse to be manipulated. You keep eye contact with the person, smile, and listen, as if you are taking them seriously. YOU ARE NOT ACTING in this behaviour. You are giving them the benefit of the doubt, trusting them, telling them you are not bullshitting. You become a spiritual mirror — they see themselves and calm down. They get real.

Using the Zen Stare is delightful. It truly incapacitates and it is GOOD FOR PEOPLE. It feels good. They know when it's happening. It's disarming. It may sound a bit cruel, but in the end it is good for others. It is more gentle and constructive towards people that in the past you may have written off as just worthless. And it allows you to exist in the world and not be a total harridan or thorn-in-the-side cynic.

I think I actually assaulted my entire English class once with the Zen Stare. It was just when my Zen Stare powers were getting really fine-tuned. One particular meeting was so boring and outa whack when it's usually a great class. It was a waste of everyone's time that day and I was definitely exuding a "get real" Zen Stare vibe. Next thing I know, class is being dismissed 1/2 hour early.

Sometimes the Zen Stare requires compete and brutal honesty. Other times, you respond to the person's bogginess as if it were spoken with integrity so they feel really stupid having to prolong their act. It is hard to pinpoint. But when you feel it you know it, and when you use it, you improve the world.

"Cupsize 3" (Excerpt). (Darms, 2013, p. 312)
“Death”

Johnsburg, Illinois was everything I never wanted to be. Everything about it. As a teenager, I wanted nothing more than to leave my suburban town of Arlington Heights and go to the city. Chicago. The closed mindedness, lack of fashion, intolerance. I couldn’t stand it. And my feminist roots never took well to the beat of backwards white baseball cap responses. So while my town was not as rural as Johnsburg, not a John Deere, camouflage wearing, gossip talkin’, church goin’ town, it still was not as liberating as I saw the city. So as soon as I was able, I packed my bags and headed there, where the flavor of life brewed in the vat of creativity, openness, freedom.

Years later, when the late nights of the city would catch up with me and the transition between college and real life would become a new journey within itself, I would find myself driving to Johnsburg, to what for a period of my life would be called home. With no money and no place to live, I would have to join my new step-father and mother in his hometown of Johnsburg, which was to me, at the end of the earth. More like a useless town, set there in the sticks, where I, an outsider, would navigate as a trespasser for years to come, a trespasser in the sense of a tourist and as a family invader, where leftovers were thrown if there were enough, and not without being put in my place before accepting them.
It was there in Johnsburg that I walked into the church where my step-father was
baptized, and his father, and his daughter and son, and also the church where my mother
was scorned at if attended, there where I was for the funeral of a great Johnsburgian, one who said he saw the Indians traveling in his backyard, one who lived to 98 ‘cause bacon and eggs every morning make the ticker tock and ta hell with that tofu shit. Real men and real meat, woman get your ass in the kitchen and make me a drink.

The first time I went there, for the funeral of this family legend, I sat in the church with my second husband, the father of my children, as we were snickering and sneering to one another under our breath in response to the ostracism we encountered with having to sit comfortably in the back corner of the church. It was there that we looked at the hangings of Jesus, listening to the word of the lord, that caused us, or that encouraged us to encounter blasphemy. We rolled our eyes at the rigid remarks, the echoing voice of what is considered right and wrong, and the celebratory words raising the expectation of happiness to civil obedience and glorification of conformity.

On that day when the grass crunched, so cold the wind snapped at your ears, I sat forward facing, watching for the first time in my life a man, a man in a box, being placed in the ground. For me, the actions were just too real. A moment when you wished you weren’t there, hadn’t seen, where you wanted to take it back, turn back time, make it stop, and let it be just how it was. Seeing that, though, couldn’t be reversed and it would never leave me. It was etched in there. Forever as long as I was here on earth.

After the burial, we walked to the community club, all black, quiet, cheap dress shoes rhythming the pavement. As we digested food from the women’s club, the family talked of how it all came down. The cancer. Throat. Breathing. And as I listened, something inside me felt like I couldn’t breathe. Cancer. Throat. Breathing. I put my hand on my neck, feeling it. Feeling it. I felt it. A lump. In my throat. “Mom, what is this? I
feel it,” she said. “What is this? What is it?” It was echoing through the room. I was the spectacle again. The outsider. Something wrong. Different.

It was cancer. Thyroid cancer. I was so young. Angry. But I was lucky. So I saw it as lucky and I forgave the anger, traded it in for a recognition that things could have been different. Scars and treatments were symbols of me being thankful. The cancer, I was thankful for it. Thankful that I knew I could die, but hadn’t. Could die, but didn’t. And out of it all came a proposal. Two children. My education.

It was there at that Johnsburg church that death would play with me again. Some 10 years later, when the death of my step-father at the age of 65 would take from my mother the security she so frequently had thought she needed from a man in this world. There, holding it together at the site of his grave, trying to keep it in, the anger, the peace, the everything, trying so very hard to oppress the terror I felt for being here again, among these people that so clearly had sent the message of not belonging to me. Through family fights, judgments, and battles, the control among us all had ripped this family apart. Me. My family. I was once again an only child, with my step-sister and brother and town of Johnsburg sending me again to messages of lines. Where not to cross, where to step, and what I was allowed to see. So here I was as they handed my mother the flag, so neatly folded, placing it into her arms as the symbol of appreciation for a life of service for this American Dream. Every moment of that day was an extended second of torture. Every release of breath was a push of control; I was trying so hard to control the quivering screams in my soul. I kept remembering my mother, just one year ago, laying in that hospital after she had attempted suicide. Drinking wine and taking pills to soothe her struggle for acceptance from this small town, this bloodbath of conformity, and do or die,
born-into-only clan of tightly knit ethics, values, and truth. Here my mother was, vibrations of her shaking hands clutching the only thing of his ever given from him to her, and I’ll tell you it was hard. Hard to hang onto that breath to control it. To keep it at bay that extended moment in time where reality seemed again not so real.

As I held my mother’s hand, her seated and me standing behind her, sheltering her from the gossipers and do-gooders waiting for the moment to slap her in the back, I watched with savoring moment each child lining up to step towards Papa’s grave with a rose. Each child, stepping over the trench between the land we stand on and the land below where the remainder of him, Papa, would set forever. And there was my son. My son the dreamer. The delicate soul offering love, peace, the soul embodying everything of all I ever wanted, him, my son, he stood there. It was he who knelt the day before near Papa’s casket, tearing eyes, head held low, telling Papa he wanted to go fishing. It was him, my son, who told Nana that she has him, that at six years old he knew, she could make it because she had him. It was my son who stood there reaching out to the hand of his sister, younger, more scared, and hesitant to reach Papa’s grave. It was my son who stood there, placing her hand in his, and with one step it was my son who was gone.

I was no longer a human. An animal at best, screaming, moaning, a sound more horrid than can ever be described as the dirt flew and my son, my everything, who stood so gently there with his golden heart, had fallen deep somewhere gone, there into the abyss, the hell, of Papa’s grave.

Every single thing, every sound that had been in me, that I was keeping tame was released. All of it. A yell, cry, that only a mother could make upon the taking of her son
could be what came out. And as the dust relaxed I continued to scream. My son. My son. Finn. My son.

In a moment where there are no explanations, no trials, one cannot predict what will occur. I didn’t watch my son fall and stop, think, and say, “Hum. I wonder what happened when he fell in that grave. I wonder if there is water down there. Hum. Is the casket falling on him? Hum. Let me walk over and see and then if he is dead, well then, hum, maybe I’ll cry.” No. Reality is nothing like that. There is no debating, weighing options in the moment of life and death. So when I saw my son there, then gone, every bit of fear I had ever had, every particle of that god-forsaken town, that control, that judgemental fuc+ing town, all of it and all the people in it, they were meaningless. It was my son that mattered. Where was my son.

The moments of men reaching down, lifting, pulling, as I heard nothing, was something that every day of my life I never forget. Not knowing if he was dead or alive. Here or gone. Living. My son, my world, not knowing for just those minutes, were more than I ever knew I could feel. So when they finally pulled him up, out of Papa’s grave, I fell to my son, my love. And this child with a heart so pure, my education, him, all of it, he placed his hands on my face and said, “Mommy, mommy. It’s okay. Please don’t cry.” I can never let go of his hand.

So it was there. There I knew. My education, he changed me. Once again he changed me. As I walked away, with the whispers with their hands from one ear to another, words of “overreacting” and “control,” I knew it was his hand that mattered. As much as I wanted to, as much as I wanted to say, I had no right to criticize their hands,
not any more than they did mine. But I knew one thing. I had to be true to my hands. His hands. What the rest of the world thinks, it doesn’t really matter.

~~~

I have traded time for these reflections, this writing. I hate it. I’ve traded hours upon hours with my family for reflections upon a previous life, past days, constructing essays that dug into places that I no longer wanted to visit. I wanted recognition, praise, confirmation that my thoughts were true, or real, maybe even worth hearing. I needed that connection, one that was another voice telling me that my work was worth it. That people in the world would want to hear what I have to say. And the ego of such drove me to sacrifice. Sacrifice holding the hand of a woman who had given birth to the man I love. As she sat there dying, I felt the pressure, the excitement of hearing the voice of a man I looked up to, a professor, a writer, and I could only focus on what he might say. On the last day of my husband’s mother’s death, I met with a professor to discuss my work, to feed my ego.

We had planned to meet for coffee. I had hoped this would be my in. A recognition of my worth. And while my husband was holding the hand of a woman he loved, I ventured down the curving path of a forested road on my way to what I hoped would be validation. Validation of my knowledge. My intelligence. My truth.

When the hit happened, there was no time to think. It was but seconds. Quick and painless for me, a slight jerk of the wheel, and I would pull off to the side of the road to recover. I was fine, pain-free, unhurt, but it was the look I couldn’t forget. The eyes of this baby deer, looking straight into mine as her body and my car collided, and then
looking into the side mirror, the pain, twitching, kicking of hooves before taking its last breath. It was a reminder of death being near.

As I met with my professor in the local coffee shop, music pounding, distracting me from any logical conversation, I questioned whether he had read my work at all. We talked of following my dreams in academia, advice I received that I would remember and pursue, but my work, my work had received little feedback.

I headed to be with my husband, leaving disappointed in what I discovered. Shortly after, I too held the hand of her in her dying moments, and I watched her struggle for breath with seconds in between each and the compressing and contracting of her chest. I see my husband, saddened and with worn eyes. And then she leaves. We step out for a moment and she leaves. The end of a life. Gone in moments. Seconds. And I wonder how much the world will remember and how much will remain.

I wonder and think of the purpose of these events, my search for enlightenment and the teetering between life and death. I wonder about perspective. The events in my life are from my perspective, meaningful with perspective and they shape who I am, how I see, how I think.

Maybe my dream was a dream. I may have discovered my cancer coincidentally in the same place as a man I knew at this church. Maybe it was a freak accident that my son fell in a grave at that same church. And that I hit a deer and killed it myself on that same unfortunate day that my mother-in-law passed. Maybe those things just happened, with no connection, or rhyme or reason. Or maybe there was. Maybe these stories are a way for me to see, to learn, to reach, and to help the students I teach. Maybe they happened to help me see. To help me see the reality of what it really is, this life. That
there is a separation of what life should be and what life really is. That people are spending their lives on things that don’t matter, battles that don’t matter, and on things that don’t matter. That I am, regretfully so, in the business, and addicted to the very system that has brought me so far away from the person I really am and the person they wanted me to become. That I have spent so much of my life moving further and further away from love, acceptance, happiness, and the kind of creative knowledge that can transform my soul and the soul of others, that I feel it is almost a crime against humanity. That for me, I still struggle. I struggle with the disconnect of humanity and education. I struggle with the repetition of what doesn’t work with the rejection of creativity for the sole reality of misguided knowledge. I struggle with children becoming soldiers, collectors of knowledge, rather than being nurtured and supported by their families and communities. I struggle with the power of others defining what it means to be successful, and even the word in itself.

~~~

We have one life to live. I’m not sure how we have gotten sidetracked about this, but it should be at the core of what we do and believe. We have one life to live. And it is limited. It doesn’t go on forever, and we trade each breath in exchange for each heartbeat; for life. How we spend each moment should be important, meaningful, purposeful, and true because we are trading time in our lives for those moments.

In school, as in facets of life, we can see that this purpose, this truth, has been forgotten. As mothers, we walk our students into the arms of a system that tells us it prepares our children to be models in our society, that it molds them into what the world needs, that it prepares them for the future. And each day we send our children there and
our untouchable system molds them. They mold them, slicing away every last bit of creativity, imagination, and innovation that they have. Slowly and surely the system pounds the facts, their truths, deep into the minds of our youth, branding them with the American way.

My son is in second grade. He goes to school, this brilliant child of mine, with a smile and a laugh, and he walks up the rubber black stairs of the school bus, waves goodbye through the sliding glass windows, and returns hours later, walking down the black rubber stairs with exhaustion. He steps off the bus these days with a headache. “Learning, learning, learning,” he says, weak with glassy eyes, hunched over, and dragging his gym shoes across the sidewalk.

It’s not that I don’t like his teacher. It’s not that I don’t think she is doing her job. It’s not that at all. In fact I think Mrs. Williams is doing a fine job, a responsible job of educating the children before her. I mean, his sentence construction is getting better and his spelling is too. His math facts are moving up the ladder of the program, and she does check his work, stamping it with approval. She is doing what she is told to do. She follows the system. My son does too. But neither one seems happy in this system.

~~~

As teachers, we are supposed to deliver. We are handed a program or package or curriculum that is “research-based,” and we are treated as the puppeteer, orchestrating, pouring, and lecturing the knowledge, the knowledge from above, into the minds of our youth. As if they are empty vessels, we are to fill them up, teach them, mold them, get them to do what they need to do to become fluent, become accurate, and become what we want them to become. The stakes are high, high for them and high for us. For if we don’t
get most of them where they need to be as defined by high-stakes assessments, we have failed, we are poor, we are useless, disposable. And if they don’t do what we tell them, they have failed, they are poor, they are useless, disposable. But never once, never once has there been a comprehensive discussion, an understanding, an awareness of who they are and where they have come from, or who we are and where we have come from. Whether a child has lost a parent, is abused, struggles with the transition of divorce, has no breakfast, or comes from a home where achievement is defined by athletics or obedience to a god, it does not matter; for the participants in our system are all treated the same with the same common curriculum set in front of them.

And there’s the teacher. Whether he or she sees the injustice or not is of no matter, no substance. For their job is to pretend. To step in front of the students each day and pretend that the world operates like it does in school. To pretend that they will be okay in life as long as they do, do without question, without concern, to tell them and show them that conformity is the way and disobedience of thought is the devil.

We ignore who a child is and who the teacher is, so mistakenly so, and wonder why the youth of our nation act without thinking, harm with no remorse, and fail to help thy neighbors. For many of us in the system, we understand the message, that who you are does not matter in the realm of academic success and that the self is separate from the work, an ignorant mistake that has done nothing but harm the life of many. We have been taught from the beginning of our entry in the system to ignore our senses, like our gut feeling of what is right. Too many of us have sat hour after hour, day after day, wondering, questioning why we are there. We have sat uncomfortably among the beige concrete walls, with teachers who have not thought about the purpose of their time spent
with us, other than to ensure their paycheck is issued the following week, to meet the needs of the state, or to prepare us for some test. If we think about it, I wonder how many teachers have really cared about our genuine happiness in life? I wonder how many teachers felt it was part of their job to help us discover our dreams? Or how many teachers in our lives have treated us with the same kind of compassion that they would treat their own children? Because we have spent hours upon hours in a classroom with our teachers and many of them are not even sure who we are. I question how that can happen?

Even at the doctoral level, I have poured my heart onto the page. I have spent hours upon hours planning, reflecting, researching, evolving, becoming comfortable with my own voice and taking the very risky approach of speaking my truth. And even here, in this realm, we have teachers who have not taken the time to care. Some teachers have not even read my work. I have spent hours upon hours writing for them, for what they ask, and the product of what I give them, the simple product of 10 pages itself is enough for them. I did the task, and the process, and yet the very process itself, the writing is ignored. No feedback or comments or suggestions. For the doctoral student, this is disheartening. That even at this level, who you are does not seem to matter. It’s the task of teaching that matters to them, the professors, not so much who a student is or what they have become.

There’s an egotism in education. The ego of the teacher, the ego of the man, the ego of the system. It stands up and preaches to the masses. It stands up, this ego, and pretends to leave itself at the door, and it takes over all that it is in that room. It fails to
see or hear the voices of the others around it and fails to offer anything to develop the self of others, only factorial thinking, check-in-the-box thinking, systematic thinking.

~~~

Horan (2007) writes:

Vedantists declare that the intellect, and its discriminatory power, is purified through the quality of dispassion (vairagya). The word dispassion derives from *dis* (the opposite of) and the Latin *passionem* (suffering, desire). Dispassion means the ability to overcome desire, or suffering. In yoga, desire and suffering are synonymous because desire clings to objects (i.e., information) that cause pleasure or pain, two phenomena that define each other. Clinging to objects immerses the subject in the pleasure-pain cycle, thereby limiting freedom. Desire’s source is an awareness of separation between subject and object. Dispassion is detachment from limitation, that is, the transcendence of the constraints of concepts, affective patterns, social conditioning, and so forth. Dispassion embodies the intention to transcend. This type of choice-making enhances creativity by loosening the bonds of limiting through constructs elicited in the perception of the object or projected by the subject onto the object. (p. 186)

~~~

I recall reading a section of bell hook’s *Teaching to Transgress*, where she describes her students’ feelings of animosity, even anger, in their discovery of how their view of the world changed as a result of explorations in her class. It was an almost “take it back” mentality, a knee-jerk-reaction experience, similar to the rebirth or death of what I have experienced in my doctoral expedition. So now in this new space I must find a new way of dealing with my new truths.

I want to be honest about my endeavors. I can’t keep pretending that I can change the world. I have to be honest with myself. And a part of me has to let go. But there is hope in this. There is still hope in this story. For if I can change me, if I can continue to partake in transformation—shifting, changing, creating new spaces and peace, fostering creativity—then as a teacher, as an educator, I am changing something. For we know

172
that WHO one person is can inspire others, in this case, teachers and students. We read about these people, hear, and feel their words. Now I want to be one. So if I can inspire just by being, not by molding, but by being, then maybe I can help water the seeds of a place of which I do not yet know but have hope for. Maybe then I can be the kind of mother that truly gives her child a gift.

I need this project, more than I’ve ever needed anything in my life. I need to breathe peace. Breathe ease. But not because I have given up, and not with some sort of resentment or judgmental placement in the world. I need to breathe with ease and peace because I need to stay true to who I think I am, or at least learn more about that before the ocean of conformity wears away the stone legs that hold me up and I fall, disintegrating into their waters.

I have experienced the joy of releasing in a Kundalini class where the tears released toxicity, where I first felt a tic tac of self-acceptance. I have relaxed in Shavasana, opening to the colors and images of the gong. I have reached the place of nothingness in yoga where the breath is filled with golden oxygen, healing my cells. But these experiences have been on the mat, and there are times where the remembrance of them is forgotten. And so I need to return there, daily, hourly. I need to find a way to bring yoga into it all to save me, the naive teacher of hope, who is carefully wobbling a surfboard in the sea. There has to be a way to be a part of this culture, this culture of education, where I can walk without being stoned, and where I no longer become the angry victim, but am empowered by letting go of all that has made me feel defeat. A place where the closeness of death is remembered, but so is the closeness of light. A place where this gift is carried with me wherever I may go. This I need. To become in a
state of being, openness, creativity, and peace, rather than a state of Americanized judgment, whiteness, and the space of control.

My project has guided me to spiritual, mental, and personal enlightenment in order to help in my mission to continue a curriculum of caring, happiness, and advocacy without adversity in perception of self and others in my community. To release in order to regain strength and motivation. My goal of learning how to function within a culture which consistently pushes agendas working counterintuitively against the soul, is in process, and it is farther along the spectrum of inner peace than it was before this project began.
Yoga as Discourse. (Art by Karyn McElroy, inspired by field project, 2013)
Artifact 7: “This Sucks, I Should Have Written a Quantitative Dissertation” (June, 2016)

My writing seems fluffy. Meaningless. I wish I would have hidden behind big words. And numbers. It would have been easier write about. To deconstruct. I look back at my writing and it’s different than I thought it was. Maybe I am different than I thought I was. I remember writing these words down with so much emotion. So many layers of passion and pain. I relive the emotions of this rollercoaster writing as I nestle down to read each one. And then I throw it. The feeling is not the same as when I wrote it. It was something new to me. I was discovering something new. I felt I was transforming. Morphing. Changing. Getting better. I don’t know if this is true. I don’t know if I am better. Smarter. More secure in my knowledge. I feel less. I feel that I should have hidden behind a quantitative project. It could have been done with ease. I want my dissertation to end. I don’t want to relive this anymore. I want to write myself into a new future. But I cannot do this by writing of the past anymore. It is time to let go. I have said what I needed to say so that I can move on. It is now, this present moment. That’s all that matters.

I once thought I could write myself into being something new. I cannot. My past is part of my future. My past is part of my now. I want to apologize for who I am. I want to apologize for dragging you into my life. I thought I could write to make you, the reader, see. See why or how or what I see. But I can’t make you see what I see. No words can ever capture that. I’ve argued myself and this study into proving validation. Once again, proving validation. Breaking down truths and canons and knowing with deconstruction and poststructuralism and for what? If I were really concerned with being a poststructuralist, then I wouldn’t even have written this. I wouldn’t need to prove my
worth, prove my knowing, because in that I would be claiming to be all-knowing. I am not. I know now why people fit things into neat stories and happy endings and why they pretend. It’s because it is easier. Resisting sucks. It makes me feel outside. Alone. Lots of people don’t want to write stuff like this. And I’m sure they don’t want to read it. Controversy is a bitch. This work is a bitch. I guess I’m coming to terms the notion, “I ain’t no stepford wife.” I’m even more fractured than I thought. I’m broken. I’ve got to do something different to get out of where I am. Maybe I should stop shaving my legs. Live up to the stereotypes. Be quiet. Lame, lame. So very lame.
Here are some of my favorites:

1. YOU TAKE THINGS TOO SERIOUSLY.
   YOU ARE PARANOID.

1 in 3 of us are gonna get raped in our lifetimes...the threat of rape permeates every centimeter of our bodies and influences where we are able of people who live in poverty. Women comprise the majority humanity, but the benefits for work that men do. We also have to deal with sexual harassment, an experience so commonplace, most of us don't even notice it anymore or have desensitized to it. We know it'll probably never stop and is almost to be expected. And so many of us are single mom too, and our dumb boyfriends and ex-husbands don't pay any child support and say that $100 a month is just too much. Facts. Facts. Facts?????

1. You want facts? You want it in writing? facts aren't as real as watching your best friend cry or seeing a woman who lives in her car, carrying a coat around in the middle of the summer.

Women die. Women die of diseases that never got studied cuz no one gives a shit if we have to get our tires chopped off or are laying in our own blood screaming. AND AND AND the NIH (The National Institute of Health that is supposed to be studying diseases but is really spending poor peoples tax money to torture and mutilate animals in repetitive and non-conclusive tests) uses mostly male bodies and cells to study AIDS and cancer on cuz these men like to act like male and female bodies are the same when it's convenient for them BUT US GIRLS KNOW that its a completely different story when they see us on the street. “Nice tits. Nice legs, Nice ass.” And us girls are constantly being told in a million ways that we are shit and that the way we are is somehow wrong, and our bodies are dirty and we should hide the fact that we have periods and shit and fart and bleed, bleed, bleed...we should hide the fact that we have desire at all, don’t let anyone know that we are not content (“smile baby”) to be mindless machines programmed to serve Boy wants and needs and desires.

AND and AND WE are not the ones who’re deciding who the “great” artists or writers or philosophers or musicians are either. That’s fucking right.

We are totally excluded from the REALM OF THE MASTERS (except those few female tokens who accept fascism in return for their entrance into the white boy toyland) and we have not ever existed as artists, etc...as far as “history” is concerned.

We are totally discouraged from learning how to play instruments of fix things because in school it is “suggested” that we take Home Ec (instead of Shop) and Chorus (instead of Band) and then we get treated like we are dumb cuz we can’t play Stairway to Heaven on the first try or fix our own cars.

But see, a lot of us don’t even have our own cars, meaning we have to walk places...and this is horrifying cuz everyone in the world thinks they can judge us like we are in a walking talking Beauty Contest always. They always wanna comment on you, what HE thinks, what HE sees...it makes you sound like a moron so I guess that’s the point. Stare Stars Star at me, at the show, on the street, on the bus, when you pull your dumb red camaro next to my car at the light, at the AA meeting, in the classroom, the board meeting, The Peeping Tom stares in the window of your own house.

But I guess that is not enough cuz our girl souls are very strong so they have to keep trying to crush them.

We are force fed anti-feminism propaganda via our exclusion and misrepresentation within: Films & videos, texts, novels, discussions, oral histories, music, TV, newspapers, college boards, classrooms, advertising, etc...we walk into video stores (many of us with our friends who can afford a TV and VCR) only to see female bodies scantily clad, slashed, gashed, mutilated and/or at the very least, clinging to some dumb looking guy, on the covers of nearly every single video.

Bikini Kill 2 (Excerpt). (Darms, 2013, p. 133)
CHAPTER FIVE: COMING TO TERMS

An Interpretative Performance

Walking Myself Into a New Woman: On Experiences, Epiphanies, and Becoming-Other

In reflecting back on this work, I’ve come to realize that my inner urges to write myself into my story—from the beginning of my doctoral journey and continuing until this time—were a passionate attempt to “walk myself into a new woman” (Strayed, 2012). I ventured into a rhizomatic topography as a nomad, working story as a multidimensional space of complexity and eclecticism in order to capture my lived experiences. By working the ground of those experiences and the middle spaces as a bricoleur, I’ve attempted to capture some sense of life becoming curriculum, thus holding hopes of moving myself into new spaces and places. Concurrently, I have attempted to capture lived experiences of “other” women through the juxtaposing of zines, allowing myself and the reader to venture into new lines of flight (Deleuze, 1995; Semetsky, 2004). I had hopes of bringing myself into a new light and freeing the trapped spaces I was walking as a nomad that seemed to be surrounded by barriers and brick. In an attempt to “do curriculum on an alternative playing field,” I examined the “shocks” and “jolts” which sent me into rhizomatic wandering (Reynolds & Webber, 2004). I had hidden desires of us, you (the reader) and I (the writer), becoming-other, where together we could open dialogues that may not have been spoken from our lips but somehow connected together in struggle. I had hopes that the small mosaics of epiphanies could tell a new story to the world.
Writing for epiphanies.

Epiphanies in autobiographies, or the idea that circumstances and events have the capability to change life through writing, have been part of Western minds since the days of Augustine (Denzin, 2014). I’ve written stories over the course of my doctoral program because I felt silenced, and I needed to speak out and speak up about my lived experiences. I felt somehow those lived experiences needed to be explored in academia. But how to create such a project, I wasn’t exactly clear about and I had not seen much in the way of “actual” lived experience writing as a doctoral student. I wanted a deeper sense of understanding on this issue. I had to unpeel and work the layers by writing throughout the years of my doctoral studies. Once I was granted permission to begin this work from my supportive and open-minded dissertation committee, focusing on the artifacts of my doctoral journey for deconstruction, I began to feel a life shift. For as St. Pierre wrote, “Once you have used the nomad, rhizome, haecceity, middle, line of flight to think the world, you live differently” (cited in Semetsky, 2008, p. 185).

The feminist writers of zines were brave enough to speak their story in a way that is accessible. I spoke of this accessibility in Chapter Three. I’ve placed their stories, the stories of “others,” beside my artifacts, because although the stories may not be parallel to mine—or perhaps the authors would not see any similarities between their work and mine—I, myself, felt I wasn’t walking alone anymore. I felt I was finally working the middle ground with “other.” In the end, I felt my stories had no value without the presence of theirs. Semetsky (2010) writes:

Experience is that milieu which provides capacity to affect and be affected; it is a-subjected and impersonal. Experience is rendered meaningful not by grounding empirical particulars in absent universals, but by active experimentation on ourselves. Experience is not an individual property; rather, subjects are
constituted in relations within experience itself. Experience is qualitative, multidimensional, and inclusive; it includes ‘a draft, a wind, a day, a time of day, a stream, a place, a battle, an illness’ (Deleuze, 1995, p. 141): it is contextual and collective, therefore a singular experiential event is (as yet) subject-less. This means that experience is not private, confined to the individual Cogito of a Cartesian subject. Experience is always already public: as Deleuze (2000) says, we are made up of relations, and experience makes sense to us only if we understand the relations in practice between conflicting schemes of the said experience. In fact, novel concepts are to be invented or created in order to make sense out of singular experiences and, ultimately, to affirm their meanings in practice. (p. 477-478)

When I read the work of “other” women—the feminist zinester pages that spoke to events, issues of power, and experiences in a relatable and nonacademic way, published in the Riot Grrrl archives—I felt their pages were “revolutionary.” Cutting edge. I felt they said things I wanted to say in my life, but thought I was the only one feeling it, and therefore I remained silent. From their work, I found more courage in mine. Sara Marcus, author of Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution (2010), wrote:

Talking to these girls, I had begun to understand that I didn’t have to be miserable. Maybe being a teenager was always going to be a blood-bath to some extent, but it did not have to be this particular blood-bath. Its severity and the specific tone of its miseries were political, which meant they were mutable. I felt powerless not because I was weak but because I lived in a society that drained girls of power. Boys harassed me not because I invited it but because they were taught it was acceptable and saw that no one intervened. These things weren’t my fault, and we could fight them all together. For the first time in years, I knew that I was going to be okay. (p. 8)

That quote stuck with me. I could have easily juxtaposed what I was learning about my artifacts as a mother, teacher, and woman with so many of those words. In that order. In that way. It would have gone something like this:

Looking back on this work, I had begun to understand that I didn’t have to be miserable. Maybe being a woman working among systems of patriarchy was always going to be a blood-bath to some extent, but it did not have to be this particular blood-bath. Its severity and the specific tone of its miseries were political, which meant they were mutable. I felt powerless not because I was weak but because I lived in a society that drained mothers, teachers, and women of
power. Curriculum publishers, politicians, and advocates of national standards and high-stakes testing harassed me not because I invited it but because they were taught it was acceptable and saw that no one intervened. These things weren’t my fault, and we could fight them all together. For the first time in years, I knew that I was going to be okay. (Marcus, 2010, p. 8, with edits by McElroy, 2016)

Their story and my story became our story, shared in struggle. They were written years apart, even decades, but somehow connected. They were written by younger women and I was so much older. But there were so many stories by so many women. As I read them I felt like I was returning home.

While I resisted a very specific aim in this study, I did hope to discover if this journey has changed me—if I have morphed, transformed, become smarter, understood life more, or was able to find myself breathe easier in the present moment. What did it mean now that I was going to be holding this title of Dr.? What did it mean? What did I learn? I had hopes to live a better life from it, to carpe diem. I wanted learning—not simply knowledge in discrete, categorical forms of information from a report or quantitative study, but to be “transformed.” I wanted the most out of my education. I wanted to learn, not just know something. As Semetsky writes, “To learn means to move together with a particular milieu (2010, p. 479).

I do not know how these rebellious woman-zinesters’ felt when capturing their experiences, but as I read their feminist artifacts, I felt shared in strife. I felt I could move together with their milieus. Without them, I would be stagnant. Unable to move. Their stories made me less afraid to submit mine. Simply less inhibited. I felt less isolated in my reflections. In reality, I’m not sure I could have constructed this work as a dissertation, sharing my inner world on the page freely with the world of others, without their stories of struggle. It is these women who were brave before me, who gave me the
strength I needed to walk this topography in rhizomatic, fragmented, and controversial fashion.

**On the “findings”: Finding and locating the reader’s experience.**

I intentionally did not want to work every comparison, commenting on the “common” threads between my work and their work, because this is a role I am entertaining for the reader. I do not want to write the curriculum of this work. I do not want to dissect into small bits what it means and what it doesn’t. For this would just be some version of a false truth. This is for the readers to entertain. In the constructing of this dialogue is an intersecting, curricular “event.” I concur, I fear, and I also want to argue, like Hwu (2004), the following words:

one of my main concerns is the death bound of deterministic and systematic curriculum planning that prescribed to perish teachers' and students' social realities and their meaningful life experiences. I argue that prevailing structuralist-minded schooling has excluded the dynamics among students/teachers; that it offers false hope of certainty in achieving educational excellence; that it overlooks the social matrix embodied within itself; and that it diminishes the tensions of race, gender, class, and ethnicity by creating a homogeneous educational enterprise. (p. 181)

**Versions upon versions: Difference and deferral.**

My interpretation as the author is not the interpretation as the reader. Denzin (2014) writes:

When a writer purports to be giving the “real” objective details of a “real” person’s life, he or she is in fact only creating that subject in the text that is written. To send readers back to a “real” person is to send them back to yet another version of the fiction that is in the text. There is no “real” person behind the text, except as he or she exists in another system of discourses. But the central postulate of the biographical method (and of this book) is that there is a “real” person “out there” who has lived a life, and this life can be written about. This “real” person was born, has perhaps died, has left her or his mark on other people, and has probably deeply felt the human emotions of shame, love, hate, guilt, anger, despair, and caring for others. This feeling, thinking, living, breathing person is the “real” subject of the biographical method. (p. 12)
Emotions create the most connecting life stories for those of us who like to write about the real—the real fractured, untamed, and cracked parts of life that cannot be hidden by knowledge and facts and reality and textbooks. The life story, or biography and autobiography, become for Denzin (2014) a performance: an interpretative performance. Denzin (2014) writes, “The life story becomes an invention, a representation, a historical object often ripped or torn out of its contexts and recontextualized in the spaces and understandings of the story” (p. 28). Interpretations of the story are never parallel and mirrored, nor static. For meanings are partial, impure, and created through language and speech which have meanings that are plural and contradictory, subject to a constant process of difference and deferral (Denzin, 2014; Derrida, 1976). Denzin (2014) writes, “There are gaps in reality, experiences, and performances. There is never pure presence. We have reached the end of pure description. Description becomes inscription, and inscription becomes performance. The task is to understand what textually constructed presence means because there is only the text” (p. 37).

In order to embrace such beliefs, I intentionally left gaps in the performances of my texts and the zines from the Riot Grrrls archive. There is a fracture, an abrupt change, a walking from one world into another, moving as if one door is open and then closed, to be faced with another open door and a new space. This is quite intentional. For this is life. Lived experiences can change in the blink of an eye. Emotions fluctuate, a rollercoaster of times and events filled with laughter and love and then the move to death and despair. And while life may be viewed by some as linear, like the continuum of constructed curriculum, step after step, year after year, until the end is reached, it does not have to be.
Life, like curriculum, can be understood as rhizomatic. It does not have to lead or be defined by the “end.” Hwu (2004) writes:

The poststructuralist curriculum, Daignault (1983) conceived, is not simply the transmission of knowledge, or the transmission of values, nor the mastery of method—"know-how" or "know-how-to-be"—but rather is a "manner" to "stage" knowledge through a "passage-way." This passage-way is to think otherwise, as in Nietzsche's "will to" (as resentment), Heidegger's notion of "thinking" (thought-provoking) and Foucault's history of thought (as unthought), especially in the Deleuzean "sense" (French sens)—surface and event (as the fourth dimension of language or fourth person singular). Daignault suggested such a notion of thinking or sense in which to think oneself as self-educative, meaning "to experiment and to problematize"; to make sense, which by itself is problematic and problematizing. Influenced by Kant and Deleuze, Daignault asserted that the separation of universality and particularity, subject and object, one's work and play, one's intellectual activities and everyday life, teaching and learning is all but unattainable. Binary oppositions are denied. Daignault thought of the "excluded middle" (in Deleuze's term, "sense-event") being given ready-made unproblematically in curriculum studies. The excluded middle is the interest of determinations of signification. He argued that sense (event) is presented both as what happens to bodies and what insists in propositions. As Ulmer (1985) pointed out, classroom is a place for teacher and students' inventions, not simply reproduction; he insisted that "pedagogy is theater that is not representation but 'life itself'" (p. 174). Lives become texts. Texts require interpretations and reinterpretations. (pp. 187-188)

For Diagnault, the “excluded middle,” or life event, is what happens in life beyond the walls of the classroom. The excluded middle thus must be the primary part of curriculum and recognized as so because it is already acting as curriculum. It is “life itself.” He furthers, “Lives become texts. Texts require interpretations and reinterpretations.” Lives then require interpretations and reinterpretations. Hwu stresses reinterpretation by invention, working spaces and places in an undefined way, transient and always in movement. Not static. He references Ulmer (1985), who suggests that “pedagogy is a theater that is not representation but ‘life itself.’” The performance of story is also “life itself,” constructed from the effects of subjectification. Since pedagogy is life itself, the story that is told is constructed or invented by the subject who is, in Derrida’s terms, an
effect of subjectification, but not set in stone. Not written into an unchangeable, immoveable story. Subjects can change their stories. If stories are told in new ways, or if different or deeper lines of flight are ventured, performances change, thus lives become texts which require new interpretations and reinterpretations. Meanings can scope wider processes of difference and deferral, breaking down common sense assumptions of what is or is not “real” or “truth” or “reality.” The effects of subjectification can change (Davies et al., 2002). Still, if the same stories repeat themselves, or if we walk in our same struggle over and over again, the stories we live will remain less motive. They will move less, not venturing away from set roads, and as people we will walk endless paths of strife. Fewer nomads will be able to enjoy walking with the tools of a bricoleur, journeying to find the spaces and places where there is a welcoming in becoming-other.

Journeying the Open-Ended Terrain as an Autoethnographer: The Gaze

Stories and becoming-other.

But first a poem from salt., by Nayyirah Waheed.
you travel
to lush looted countries.
parts of earth laying on their sides.
barely breathing.
hot with rust, infection, and tourist anemia.
you and your camera arrive.
start tearing at bodies
with
your lust.
it’s harmless.
appreciating culture.
sharing.
honoring clothing.
the way certain skin exists.
In the beginning of this work, I made it clear that I would have no fulfilled answers, only new places to venture. I thought of my writing, my journey as a nomad, as a terrain where I could roam, only to dismantle the bricks surrounding me. I had hopes of finding new spaces and places to travel and venturing beyond the horizon. I wrote, “In this space I hope to work as a bricoleur, pulling mosaics of story onto the page from the conglomerate of memories, language, and ‘truths,’ and using it as a reexamination of
positions…I hope whole-heartedly to layer them on the page before you. I yearn to hug the incongruity of thought and action, all while holding hands with deconstruction and hypocrisy. This is the method to my madness.” I hoped for tension, change, morphing, fracture, and peace. Semetsky and Lovat (2008) wrote, “Nomads must continuously adapt and readapt themselves to the open-ended world, in which even the line of horizon may be affected by the changing conditions of the wind, shifting sands, or storms so that no single rule or knowledge of the static facts would ever assist nomads in their navigations” (cited in Semetsky, 2008, p. 175). While walking this terrain, I hoped “my gaze” would be captured. I hoped people would “see.”

One of the abrupt epiphanies I’ve stumbled upon in working through some theories of Deleuze relates to the statement, “A singular experiential event is (as-yet) subject-less…experience makes sense to us only if we understand the relations in practice between conflicting schemes of the said experience,” as referenced by Semetsky (2010). I cannot pretend I alone am the subject, working in isolation, walking alone in this landscape as a nomad. In working the rhizomatic journey, experiences I’ve created are not only constituted in language, but I am, as we all are, an effect of subjectification (Davies et al., 2002; Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1994; Weedon, 1997). Semetsky (2010) writes that we learn from our experiences, and it is “in the midst of experiential, problematic, and shocking events” that can encourage us to become-other (p. 27). Semetsky writes we become other by “overcoming the dualistic split between self and other, to integrate ‘the other’ completely” (2012, p. 56). This involves becoming ethically literate. According to Semetsky (2012):

Being ethically literate, in the framework of Deleuze’s philosophy, would amount to an inquiry into who we might become. We will ask this question on the basis of
recognizing (as Spinoza did before Deleuze) that we have no real idea about who we might become because we do not yet know what a body can do and how it (body) might act in the midst of novel experiences. Philosophy, therefore, rather than focusing on the classical theoretical question of being, is devoted to the practice of becoming and, specifically, becoming-other. (pp. 50-51)

This notion has been part of my conflicting struggle with being in the world. I have wanted to walk wide awake, feeling at moments that I am striving to BE in the moment of life, but my definition of myself has already been told in the stories I’ve constructed. And I’ve placed my bets on how others will act in the world and the stories they will tell. I do not know “what a body can do” in novel experiences, nor who that might lead me to become. By merely focusing on being present and present alone, simply attempting to be wide awake, I am already making assumptions about how the story will play out. I tell stories of control and of peace. I tell stories of myself acting as an innocent bystander in a situation. As if I have no effect on the result of an experience. Experiences are constituted in language, a discursive struggle within everyone. We are all part of a discursive battle, as Weedon has told us and as I have cited in Chapter Two. In returning to that chapter, I see her words. “Knowledge of more than one discourse and the recognition that meaning is plural allows for a measure of choice on the part of the individual, and even where choice is not available, resistance is still possible” (Weedon, 1997, p. 68). So for me, this small epiphany in realizing that yes, possibility is blooming everywhere through the discursive struggle of individuals, suggests a continual breaking down of universal stories or metanarratives that are not only created, but that I have told myself. I am not just the nomad walking aimlessly, awaiting to see the sunset, or smell a flower. I am a nomad walking to find an interaction. To find a relation. Not just to meditate and breathe in and breathe out, but to hear and feel the breath of others.
In this final analysis of my doctoral journey, I have not given up on writing myself into a new woman. Again, the question that ignited it all:

*The purpose of this poststructural autoethnographic study is to analyze and critique my documented lived experiences as a beginning, female doctoral student within cultural, historical, and social contexts. Through this process of critical self-reflection and psychoanalytic deconstruction, I hope to get in touch with my self in an attempt to be present, open, and available for others by moving towards a space of deeper awareness of my location, thus becoming possible for my own existence. Within this poststructural stance, I embrace curriculum as nomadic, hoping to bridge some middle ground between curriculum and lived experiences (Hwu, 2004; Reynolds & Webber, 2004). Through an eclectic deconstruction of my autoethnographies, I am proposing to begin this journey.*

**A Final Performance**

I was an unhappy child. I believe both of my parents may have called me ungrateful. It was hard for me as a child to think of their lives and position myself in their shoes. My mother would always tell me that she was doing the best that she could. When I questioned her abuse with alcohol, she would talk to me of her mother dying at 14 years old and of how my father had raped her. My father would say that I was ungrateful because I had still wanted to see my mother and because I would always choose her over him. He had tried to tell me that I should understand what it was like for a man to walk in on his wife with his best friend, while their two-year-old was wandering alone downstairs in dirty diapers. He had reminded me daily that she had given me up and he couldn’t understand why I still loved her. I couldn’t understand why he still did too. My mother would tell me, sitting in a big black mink coat with a vodka tonic and diamond earrings,
that she had no choice but to give me up. That she had no way to fight. Lots of people in my youth told me lots of things with lots of reasons for why lots of things went wrong, but I could never fully understand them. I couldn’t grasp their experience. Their language wasn’t capturing their reality in a way that I could understand. In a way that I could relate.

Artaud-Mania: The Diary of a Fan (Darms, 2013, p. 341)

I remember my fourth grade teacher yelling to me louder and louder to stop crying when I could not stop, and when I couldn’t explain, or couldn’t find the language or words to explain why the tears wouldn’t seize. I couldn’t explain the experience, the events, the curriculum. School memories of my principal holding me down when I was screaming, trying to break free fiercely and yelling for my mother not to leave as she walked out the door, could not be shared in experience as a child through words. Lots of
people telling me lots of things were supposed to make me hear them. It was supposed to make me “see.” I was supposed to understand. But their language, their discourse, their experiences had not been shared in a way that was accessible to me. They were hidden like a rule that I had no way of comprehending. A lens of struggle prevented me access to their stories of reason. And as a child, I only wanted to say one thing. I wanted to say to someone what I wanted. That I wanted to be like them. But I couldn’t. That I wanted the pain to go away. But it wouldn’t. I wanted to say that my voice mattered. With everybody telling me things, how I should be, who I should be, how I should think, whom I should love, who had it worse, who gave me up, who was right, who was wrong, and what everyone had to do, I never thought that there would be a place for me. A place where my voice mattered. A space, as a child, where I was asked what it felt like to be in my shoes. I was never asked what I needed or who I wanted to become. And the only thing I ever wanted was a voice. I remember praying to God night after night, for simply the strength of a voice that would be heard. I wanted someone to save me, to hear me, and for the pain to end.

As I write this, I think of people who may read this and laugh. Laugh at the fact that I grew up in America and couldn’t have had it that bad. Laugh because my parents had jobs and homes. Laugh because we are white. And they had health insurance. Laugh because in some psychoanalytic deconstruction, it will be viewed as me feeling sorry for myself. And this I understand. And yes, I concur. I need to stop telling myself the same story. I’m working through it.
COMPLAIN, COMPLAIN, COMPLAIN....
AT LEAST YOU DON'T HAVE IT AS BAD AS
a) women used to
b) people of color
c) women in other countries

I had this job for like 4 years at this LIBeral typy college and when
i voiced some anger about getting treated like a lackey all the time
and not shown any kind of respect or appreciation, ever....i was told,
"Well in the REAL world you'd be treated much worse, so you should be
thankful to even get treated this good."
And i was like "God thanks for totally not even listening to me."
Buz all i was saying was "look you all are hurting my feelings and
making me feel bad when i'm at work" and no one could address that,
they just defended themselves and ignored what i was really saying.

It's like i am trying to make my life better by sticking up for myself
and it gets turned into this thing like, you are being completely self
serving, and, at least you don't have a spinal cord injury, at least
you're not a Black Lesbian in a wheelchair, at least you even have a job.

It's like people think of oppression as a test you can either pass or
fail. Okay, you get one point for being poor, one more for being female,
but oh no, you score a negative one for being white and able bodied

Bikini Kill 2 (Excerpt). (Darms, 2013, p. 140)
And I want to. But it’s that pain that rings in my head. The pain of not being heard. The pain of not having control over one’s life. The silence. Not the pain of my
parents not staying together; it was the pain of no one being present in the moments of pain. Feeling like no one was walking it with me. That no one was there but myself. I look through my lens. I see so many of us, people, all walking in life. There seem to be so many of us going through struggle, yet all of us alone. Many of us divided. Walking circles of pain in search of relief that can only be found by moving outside of our own cyclical path. Reliving it over and over, killing ourselves by reliving the pain.

I see this with teachers too. Colleagues of mine walking around in circles, trying to figure out how to fit it all in. Worried about the curriculum. Not finishing the year on Unit 6. Feeling powerless in their own paths. I see the same thing there as I do in life walking in our stories. It’s like there seems to be no way out.

A professor on my dissertation committee, whose words I value deeply, suggested I return to my journals of my youth. After much searching, digging in the old and dark mildewy basement at my mother’s home and rummaging through some tattered brown boxes, I finally came across this:
It is one of my first journals. It is the one with the rainbow and vinyl cushy cover I spoke of in Chapter One. It was a space and place, my first location in telling myself my own stories. I found many other journals too. One journal that I must have had around the time of nine or ten years old brought back many old memories. I opened the first page and saw something I had written. It says, “I am very unhappy.” The pages that followed dug deep into my life. It ended with “Would you like to grow up in an environment like what I just wrote? Not for me!” Even back then, I was trying to write myself a new story.

I also found an excerpt of a journal I kept in college. It was written in 1997, around the time *Riot Grrrl* zines were circulating the punk underground scene. It is a poem.
I had so much to say and no one to say it to. So much to say that would have changed my life. So much to say that could have taken the pain away. But I could not. So I roamed. Walking into this nomad story. Everyone around me was so wrapped up in the pain of the past that they couldn’t see the present. They were not with me in the moments of life, so I could not be heard. They were not walking with me in this journey of life. While their feet may have been placed next to mine, moving in synchronized steps, navigating through the places we roamed, I was alone. I was walking alone with ghosts
who had died from the traumas along the way of their own lives, making it impossible for them to be present for mine.

This is my greatest fear. Being so stuck in the past that I cannot be in the present. Dying, slowly, with each step. Not being here, but being back there, so lost that I can’t see the child in front of me, the child with me. My greatest fear is not hearing their voices. Letting them grow up, feeling alone, living as a result of my mistakes. Repeating history. Feeling so alone that they start to die too with each step into their journey. I’m so scared that I will be so tied in my own deaths, the slow loss of my own soul from the traumas that are life, that I will not be there for them. I do not want another child to feel that kind of pain. To feel that kind of distance. To feel that kind of isolation in being alone. Walking alone. To be scared of falling asleep and crumbling when you awaken. I want to be present to hear their voices. I want to hear their stories. Build from it. Work it with them. Learn. Grow. To let them know that what they say has value.

~~~

And then I realize something so difficult to comprehend, something so painfully raw that I hate to record it. But I must. In the desire to find women like me, to find children like me, and hear people like me, like my son, I have not seen all that I could have seen and heard. I’ve not only told the stories of others, and speaking for others, I’ve omitted stories, playing into the cycle of silence.

I began my dissertation in the fall of 2012. I want to write that the stories I have told about my son stood out over my daughter because he was my first-born. He was the first child I gave birth to, the first to walk, the first to speak, the first to attend school. I want to say these are the reasons why I have written so much about him. Why I have
captured his moments, this old soul of mine. But perhaps in listening so deeply to him and his words, I haven’t heard the words of my daughter.

I know I have tried so hard to instill in my son the things that I think a man should become, that perhaps I have not heard Briella. It is with deep regret that I write I have not listened as deeply to Briella.

Briella was never a toddler. She was a baby and then a child, but never a toddler. She went from lying down, to sitting, to walking. I remember bringing her to a mommy-and-me gymnastics class when she was 18 months old. During a part of the class, the mothers placed their children’s hands on the uneven bars. They held their hands there because they knew that if they let go, their child would fall down to the mat and cry. The goal was to teach your child to hang on. Swing and hang on. Briella saw the first two parents and children step up to the mats, watching carefully as the parents placed their children’s feet on the big red square mat which acted like a platform assisting in the raising up of their child. When it was Briella’s turn, she crawled up the mat quickly, stood up, and jumped, swinging back and forth on the bar like a little chimpanzee. And that was and is how I have seen Briella. Independent and strong. She is a tumbler, a dancer, a singer, and a performer. She paints, draws, and entertains the family. She is lighthearted and free. Happy and fun. She makes friends everywhere she goes and is without inhibitions. She is everything I’ve ever wanted to be. Everything. She is not angry or tormented by events she sees in the world. She is peaceful. If I could be anyone in the world, I would be Briella.

I don’t write of my daughter in the way I write of Finn. This I know. For Finn parallels me in so many ways. Briella’s story is untold because as a child, I had walked
such a different path. And perhaps she is the unknown. She surprises me every day, and I can never predict where she might go in a conversation or where the day might take us if she is directing the journey. It is difficult for me to speak FOR Briella. So here, I will write what she has asked me to:

*Question:* Briella, what should I write about you?

*Briella:* When I grow up I want to be Wonder Woman. And I want to save the world and then nothing bad would go, or happen in the world. And no smoking and I wish no one ever died and they would shrink into a tiny baby and grow back into an adult again and then it just happened over and over again. And even that would happen to God. And after being Wonder Woman, I wanna be an author and then after an author I wanna, I wanna, mmm…let’s see…I’m going to be kind, and I am going to be not selfish and I am going to be a nice, sweet girl that helps people, and a cute cheerleader. And then I am going to be when I’m old, a robotic engineer. Because I love science and math. And now that I’m eight, I have crooked teeth and I don’t want to get my braces on and I don’t want to get them off. When I’m older, I’m going to make kids happy. I’m gonna help them by if their parents don’t have enough money. I’ll give them money so they can go to school. And I really, really, really, love my mommy to the sun and back. That’s better than to the moon and back because it’s farther.

*Question:* Anything else you want people to know about you?

*Briella:* Yes. That I also know that I care about my inside and more than my outside. And I know that I never want to die. And I for surely know that how long I’ll stay far away from my friends doesn’t matter, it still means I love my friends.
I love trees. I love yoga. And I love gymnastics and cheer. And I love ballet. I
dance like a ballerina. And on the tippy top of my toes. And I always dance like
my mom when she was a ballerina.

Briella (July 2016)

**There Must Be Reason**

I’ve seen my father try so hard to articulate an experience, repeating it over and
over in many different ways, as if I don’t get it and will completely grasp his experience
if it is said in just the right way. I’ve heard of my mother’s affair each night in his
company after the arrival of 4:30 pm and a minimum of three beers, in the space of every
night’s visit to happy hour. “Imagine…,” he would say, “Imagine what I must have felt. Most people would have lost it, ya know? But I didn’t beat the fuck outta him. I should have. That was the biggest mistake of my life.” He would say this with his arms up, in broad 45 degree angles as if his arms were held up by a puppeteer. He always waved his arm at me, jabbing, with his pointer, ring, and pinkie fingers folded and his middle finger horizontally directed at my forehead. It was my father who would, over a decade later, try to fix the past and correct it by creating a new story. A story where my ex-stepfather’s face would be pounded by my father’s fist over and over again in my mother’s front lawn. And while it may have momentarily relieved his pain, and he had hopes of writing himself into a new story, he was never fully able to do so. He did and always will relive the story of my mother in bed with his best friend, after 4:30 and three beers at happy hour.

In the end, many of us will walk the same paths. We see the same story, tell ourselves the same story, walk the same story. Sometimes we think story is truth. Story is real. That there is no version of story. Or of life. That there is that same, narrow way, not filled with interpretation or performance, but a singular path. Like there is a very narrow understanding of the truth, and it should and does apply to all. We walk those same circular paths of struggle. As children, many of us are taught that by adulthood we should know better than to wander or journey or create. We should know better than to write our own inventive and fictitious stories. We must grow out of them. As children we are taught that we should grow up and away. Slow down. Settle down and begin the journey to the end. Plan for retirement. Pay off the house. Get good health insurance. Go for
colonoscopies and mammograms. These are some of the stories that have been told to us, and we tell them.

“Reason, stated Deleuze, sometimes dissuades and sometimes forbids us to cross a certain limit or boundary. Because to do so is useless, would be evil, and is impossible—there is nothing to see or think behind the truth” (Hwu, 2004, p. 185).

I’ve spent so long trying to find out reasons. Reasons as to why I am the way I am. Reasons as to why I feel so different than the people I know and see. I’ve researched parts of myself trying to find reasons regarding why I hold such discontentment with who I am. Why I feel so critical of myself and others. Why I didn’t write about the many great stories. Why I didn’t mention the people who did support me. Why the system of education that I have spent my entire life in is something I love and something I hate. Why I write of darkness more than light. I’ve also searched for reasons in my middle ground leading me to understand why I believe in postructuralism and consider myself a poststructuralist. This has been a primary drive in my work. My lens is filled with the desire for reasons. I am forever trying to make sense of my stories by virtue of reasons. By virtue of some truth. This is a battle. For I’m still speaking in the father’s tongue.

Some people might say, in reading this work, that I paint a picture of education as a dark place with no room for voice. This may be so. As a teacher, there have been many stories of light and many places where I feel I “made a difference” in the lives of my students. I know that they have made a difference in me. To speak to the problematization of writing of only the struggles, I rest on Baldwin’s quote in which he writes, “I love America more than any other country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually” (1955, p. 9). Just as Baldwin loves
America, I love education and I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually. This is in an effort to make her better. This is in an effort to make me better.

Poststructuralism shows us that there are not always answers. Not always answers that are universal or that can be understood completely in parallel from one person to another. I know this of poststructuralism. I know this of the world I breathe. Yet I have still been searching for answers. Searching for reasons.

When I wrote the journal entries I’ve brought into this work, I was feeling a rebellion. I felt that academia didn’t celebrate the messiness and emotions of individuals. I felt it favored the quantitative paradigm, as I had seen in academic educational journals and witnessed in the changing tide of social efficiency ideologies across conferences and marketing publications, during the time I entered the educational world in 2000 into the current year of 2016. I felt that I needed to scream out in resistance of this change. I felt I needed to stand up and say that there were other stories in play that mattered, when thinking of people working in a system that seemed to be striving more and more towards the technological and certain. Stories of the “underground,” the “bottom,” in the schools and the habitats and environments of individuals that this educational market was supposed to represent (children, teachers, women). In these raw journal entries, I worked my lived experience. I had to work those experiences because I felt broken. I was broken. I am still broken, in a sense. There are at least parts of me that are still fractured. This is something I have discovered in my artifacts. This is something that is part of who I am as a woman, a mother, and a teacher. I am no superwoman. I am no superpower. But I do want to be better. And I do want hear others. I want to become-other.
Messages have flashed all around me. From national common standards and the favoring and increase of formalized testing, to paradigms of the social efficiency ideology masked as “common sense” and “truth,” the “broken” educational ideology helped push the cause in making me feel even more broken. That I and my system that I loved and wanted build up needed to be reformed and dismantled. That I needed to be reformed and dismantled. It didn’t matter how many nights I stayed up late, or how many lunches I skipped, or whether I worked all weekend long, not enjoying my own children gasping for air with a smile on a warm silver slide; I couldn’t get all of my students up to the standards of our nation that were outlined in defining my success as a teacher. I had spent so many days walking into a classroom with the perfect lesson and the “right” answers, only to notice little eyes peering out the window at a butterfly. Only to hear the words of a child that had such a deep and innovative perspective that we had no choice but to engage in a discussion on those very words.

My life as a mother, a teacher, and a woman has been filled with a constant reminder that I am not good enough. That no matter what I do, there will always be some superwoman or superman or superperson doing it better. Reminders that I need to hide my love for the children I’ve birthed and the children I serve in education. That I must be filled with reason. That I must be logical. That I must mask my emotions. This is the story I have told myself. This is the experience I have constructed through language.

It’s been a long road. There have been many great stories. The hardest stories and the greatest stories I tell are the ones of my children. But the more I tell them, the more I realize they are simply the stories I tell myself. They are not the stories they have told me.
The only thing I have ever wanted in my life is for my children to never endure the struggle and powerlessness I felt as a child. I wanted them to grow up in one home, build relationships with their friends and neighbors, sleep cozily in the only bed they have ever known each night, and wake up with the security of knowing that this is where they would always be. I didn’t want them to be nomads. I didn’t want them to fulfill my destiny. I had hopes that they would never be alone, never be torn, and always be whole. Children walking between, in the middle spaces of the road, protected by parents who would shield them from whatever in the world would dangerously enter into the road.

The divorce was the hardest thing in my life, not because I couldn’t get over him. Not because I was still in love. Not because I wanted him back. It was because I couldn’t understand how he could do this to them. To the children. From a man who came from a house that was whole, he couldn’t understand the amount of pain they were about to endure. And for me it was like I was living my childhood all over again. I envisioned my children crying for me at night, feeling lost and alone, and breaking down at school, living like I did, out of a suitcase. Never settled. Never at home. Always alone.

My greatest fears were realized when the separation began, and only intensified with time. Picking my children up from a drunk household with a man incapable of caring for them, led to “wellness checks” by the authorities, and a play on language by the patriarch leading the police to believe that I was once again the dark female of enlightenment epistemology. Even by acting in the role of the dutiful daughter (Kaplan, 1997), speaking the father’s tongue (Tompkins, 1997), and following all the rules in entrusting the authorities with the safety of my children, I was being defeated again by language. I was being defeated by a rational man calmly and clearly using his intellect to
defer the reality of the situation into a focus onto me as the irrational woman out of control. “For officers just look at her hysterically crying,” he had said with a stone cold emotionless stare and a grin, upon the turn of their heads.

Things like that can break a woman down. Especially when you go through something like finding out your children have been left home alone at the ages of four and six. And when the indication of “child abuse and neglect” finally comes around after an investigation nine months later, and the judge tells you the event was too long ago to even matter, it can lead a woman to places of despair. She can begin to tell herself stories again. Stories of defeat. Stories of worthlessness. Stories of loss. Things like that can break a mother.

When you are a woman and you find out that anyone can go before a judge and try to get your children taken away from you by the play on some language created in a man’s head for vengeance, it makes you as a woman feel even less secure, even less able to have faith in the system. And even when you get your children back a few days later, and the order is reversed and you “win,” you are really not “winning” because you are so baffled that this can even happen, that your entire faith in the notion that “good people come out ahead” dissolves in your hands, slipping through the cracks of your fingers like sand. When guilty people walk free, that’s when it gets the hardest. So the stories you tell yourself are all about fear.

And when you finally win custody after tens of thousands of dollars, making sure that your children know you will never give them up, that you will never let them go, and that you will fight every day of your life until you die for their happiness, only to be tampered by news of new mandatory visitation, your faith may be lost again. You may
tell yourself stories of heartbreak. Then when he moves out of state and you are now forced to pack your children up for 24 days each summer, sending them alone on a plane and living out of a suitcase, it has the ability to break you. Then you might tell yourself stories of injustice. For they are now living your nightmare.

But then one day you might hear them. You might hear them in a new way. You see them over the benefits of technology and you see their little faces and they are smiling. They are hundreds of miles away, and they look at you through the screen and they tell you how much they miss you, and despite sleeping on a pullout couch and being sent to camp, they happen to be okay. They are fighting it. They are enduring it. For they know that they are coming home. They know that you are there. They are strong. They are there, so close that you can almost touch them, and they say to you, “Mommy, you are in my heart, I feel you with me.” And then there, you might realize, like I did, that my story is not their story. My path, my journey, my cyclical walk that I have been replaying over and over again, is not their path. It is just the story I have been telling myself. They have their own paths. Different paths. And biggest fear, my fear of them feeling pain, feeling the agony of disconnection, is not something that is killing them as it had killed me. They have their own story. And I hadn’t been listening. I hadn’t yet become-other.

As a woman, a mother, and a teacher, I’ve undergone this study to examine my fractured self. To see if I have grown and to try and understand what this doctoral journey has come to mean. I’ve had hopes of getting in touch with a deeper layer of myself, with hopes of being open and available for others, because I feel this makes me a better mother, teacher, and woman. This makes me a better educator. What I’ve realized is that I have been so wrapped up in my own story by itself that it has skewed my availability to
be open and available for others. I’ve created my own story to define “them” and to “divide” us. Even when researching poststructuralism. My story has been to define my students, to define my colleagues, to define my mother, to define my father, to define “others” around me. In this way, I’ve abused my own power. I’ve told their stories for them. I felt that because I was attempting to become a better person, a better woman, a better mother, a better teacher, that I could make a difference in the world. But the reality is, for me anyway, that it is about “others.” I cannot have the power of defining others. I cannot speak for them. I cannot tell their stories. And even if I spill my soul on the page, recalling very detail of my pain and struggle, no one will ever fully understand my experience. Language can never fully capture an experience. In listening to others, I can never fully understand them either. The only thing I can do is be there for them, listening, sharing a space, participating in the milieu of their experience to their story. Whatever happens from that, whatever organic thing happens, whatever hopes, events, or curriculum they wish to explore, I can only walk with them. I cannot define. My own inner work is something that may be shared, but it can never be applied, not the same matter, anyway.

When I think about my education, the hunger strike I endured, the screaming to my mother not to leave me as the principal pinned me down, the discovery of oral histories in college and my love for autobiographical story, my fear for my children and for my son walking into an institution that may destroy his love for nature and life, those are all stories I have told myself. Those stories have defined where I am; they have orchestrated my location.
So where does this leave this research? I do not know. But there are some things I feel. As I write this and can taste the saltwater reach my lips, I have only come to some conclusions. I am sorry and I am humbled. And I am raw. I don’t know as much as I thought I did. I don’t feel angry anymore.

See, I’ve worked so hard, so relentlessly, so fast with this roaring fire within me as an attempt to capture this present moment. I’ve wanted to live so fully and to live every moment as the best version of myself that I can, that I have been walking this land, this terrain, in an attempt to discover and capture what it is to be the best mother, teacher, and woman. I’ve been walking as the nomad on this terrain, looking back into my mind. I never turned around. I did not see that my family was behind me. I didn’t see my students with me. I didn’t see others walking with me. But they were there. They were making meaning with me. We made it together.

**Future Research**

One afternoon a few months ago, I sat with leaders of our school improvement planning team as we discussed our research into growth mindset. We had begun an adventure into the examination of Carol Dweck’s text, *Mindset: The psychology of Success* (2006). Our principal had asked each grade level representative to give a brief examination of their team discussions on the research. As each teacher reported, it became evident to everyone in the room that it would be challenging to embrace growth mindset in our culture, when our teachers were illustrating that they themselves were stuck in hanging onto their own fixed mindsets about the concept. As the reading specialist and literacy coach in our school, I had also seen many characteristics of our building operating under a fixed mindset mentality. When all the team representatives
had spoken, my principal turned to me and asked me to give a summary of what everyone had said about our culture, and my opinion on it. I replied with this:

I think we feel pressure. I often look out the window at the nature preserve behind our school. I think about our students and wonder if they would rather be out there than inside here. I think about how connected reading and writing are, in terms of progressing skills and of creating lifelong learners who have a passion for literacy. I think about what they would say. I think about what they think. Often times I want to bring the kids outside and see what they can discover. I want to see if they would be interested in finding ways to connect literacy to nature. Perhaps they could write stories about their observations or create fictions in listening to the sounds they hear. Or maybe they could study the plant life that is in abundance through the trails. Or maybe they could come up with curriculum themselves. I’m not 100 percent sure, but I’m kinda too scared to try. I look at the clock and realize that there are only 40 minutes for reading intervention. I think about what that might do to my data. If it would show negatively on my progress monitoring charts. I remember that all of the teachers have windows too, and I’m afraid of what will be said about me as a teacher if I’m not following the program. I don’t think exploration out there would be considered “intensive intervention following response to intervention protocol.” And teachers are already upset that I don’t eat in the lunchroom and I read a book. So the excitement and daydreaming subside and I grab my intervention manual adopted by the district.

The room was quiet. I was unsure of the response. But for once in very long time, I wasn’t embarrassed to speak my story. And I wanted to hear the stories of “others.” I saw nods and validation. It didn’t matter, though. My story meant nothing without their stories.

Later that night, my principal emailed me. He asked me to research some schools and websites with some terms which were unfamiliar to me. It was something called “personalized learning.” After much research and excitement that night, he asked me to meet with him the next day. We met, discussed, planned, and shortly thereafter I was offered a position as a personalized learning teacher. I begin this position in less than a month from today. I’m not sure where it will take me or how it will go, but I do know one thing: It is a place and a space, a location I’ve moved into where boundaries don’t stop
me. I am not scared to move and break down any bricks that have been laid by my father, or my system, or my education. For I am a part of them. I walk with them and they walk with me. I will no longer walk in this terrain alone. My children are with me and my students. We are working to become-other. I have broken down the walls, brick by brick, and I have realized I have written myself into a new story. I have written a new history. I am no longer angry. I am no longer fearful. I am here, and others are with me.

This new curriculum that I will venture into over this next phase of my career is about the students. It is no longer about me. I am a servant to them, helping them work through their own stories. Helping them “reckon and rumble” (Brown, 2015) to come to a place where they can be open and available for others. The curriculum I hope to engage in is a place and space of working their middle ground, beginning with them, beginning with their events or their curriculum. Working their topographies of self. Embedding knowledge into their learning on their terms and in their way, thus fusing into a space where binaries crumble and they are no longer are expected to leave themselves at the door of the institutions in which they participate. It is about walking the journey together, entering different paths and not knowing where they are going. Being there to listen to them. To support them. Not to push my own story. And perhaps that would be a space where they too learn how to navigate through struggle and strife, where they know they are not alone, and where they look into the eyes of others, face to face or from screen to screen, and know that they are not alone. That I am present for them, and I am working with them in their middle ground and in mine. Perhaps then more of us can end the cyclical path of walking in our own stories of pain, unable to be present, available, and
open for others. Perhaps then we can walk together on wide roads that lead to places we have never imagined. Walking together. Present. Listening. And free.

I’ll refer now to Hwu (2004), whom I quoted in Chapter One: “There is a whole ‘geography’ in people—with lines of flight, series of events” (p. 184). I can’t wait to hear about these geographies. I can’t wait to walk them. For it is there, only there, that I really feel here. It is there that I can make meaning, walking the middle ground, living and doing curriculum.
REFERENCES


Lather, P. (2004). This IS your father's paradigm: Government intrusion and the case of qualitative research in education. *Qualitative Inquiry, 10*(1), 15-34.


*Qualitative Report, 17*(7), 1-17. Retrieved from 
http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/rogers.pdf


