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On the Interpretation of Pain in Breastfeeding: An Autoethnographic Account

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Abstract

Breastfeeding is a dyadic self-regulated process, and its benefits have been widely disseminated. Less is known about the difficulties many women experience, which often legitimize health interventions. According to Kugelman, standardized health can be counterproductive as it makes us more dependent on the medical powers and diminish our embodied understanding to heal. Drawing on my own data and existing evidence, I argue that this is particularly relevant for breastfeeding interventions when they are poorly resourced and/or its staff unqualified. I illustrate these points through the inconsistent interpretations of pain I was exposed to, and how this impacted my journey.

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My talk

Studies suggest that breastfeeding promotion and education campaigns focus too heavily on the glossy side of breastfeeding and multiple health benefits, and often omit the frequent difficulties women experience (Brown, 2016). This creates a gap between our expectations and the reality, which increases self-doubt at a time where our bodies and identities are vulnerably and raw and increases our risk of experiencing postnatal depression if we are finally unable to breastfeed (Borra et al., 2015). This gap also contributes to early abandonment and makes us more dependent on health interventions (Bergman et al., 2015; Brown 2016; Williamson et al., 2012; Símonardóttir & Gíslason, 2016).

Unfortunately, this support is not always informed by a deep understanding of the dyadic nature of the breastfeeding process, nor it is provided by qualified and/or empathetic healthcare professionals (Furber & Thomson, 2010; Hauck et al., 2011). In my talk, I illustrated these issues through the inconsistent interpretation of the pain I was experiencing from various healthcare workers. In two days in the hospital, I was exposed to two contradictory interpretations, pain as something to get used to (hence, continue as you do), and pain as a sign of error (hence, stop and correct). These contradictions continued throughout my journey outside the hospital, they made me doubt my performance and become even more reliant on external advice. After two months of constant search for support, several episodes of mastitis and a frenulum intervention, I eventually found the compassionate and qualified support I needed in a specialist nurse working for a non-for profit organisation. The pain never went away, but it helped me validate it as just as one dimension of my experience and empowered me to trust our dyad.

I draw on Kugelmann's (2003) standardized health critique to help me make sense of this data. Kugelmann argues that standardized health interventions can be counterproductive when they make us more dependent on medical powers and diminish our embodied understanding of healing. Unless breastfeeding support is provided by qualified professionals

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who have a profound understanding of how breastfeeding works and are ready to empower the dyad through their own experience, their interventions can be counterproductive. Breastfeeding promotion and education campaigns ought to acknowledge women's broad range of experiences, so that we can validate our own journey and make informed decisions about whether and how we wish to continue. I conclude by arguing that when it comes to breastfeeding, we need less of the "what" (benefits) and more of the "how" (support); less of the ideal (instinctive, magically learned) and more of the real (difficult, uncertain, socially judged).

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Being the Forrest Gump of Organized Religion

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Abstract
Raised non-religious, I unknowingly rode the waves of religious change in America, including becoming, briefly, a Catholic, an atheist, a spiritual but not religious (SBNR) person and, finally an ordained minister, theologian and seminary professor for 32 years until the wave of religious decline broke right over me. I learned that even being a well-known published author, with a long resume, can't save you from cultural change or good people doing bad things.

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In the film, "Forrest Gump," the lead character Forrest, played by Tom Hanks, was unknowingly in the right place at the right time, caught up in cultural trends he did not fully recognize. Oddly enough, I sometimes feel like the Forrest Gump of organized religion. Let me explain. I'm an ordained minister and until recently was a professor of theology in a seminary for 32 years. Although I was raised non-religious, over the past few decades I have unknowingly rode the waves of religious change in the United States until I was spit out at the other end. In my narrative, I'll illustrate this by going back and forth between cultural changes in the U.S. and my own experience.

The 1950s was the heyday of organized religion. With the culture recovering from the Depression and World War II, people wanted to be normal again and flocked to organized religion, as Will Herberg says in _Protestant--Catholic--Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology_ (Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1955)**.** At the same time, as the Cold War intensified, some people wanted to show they were good God-fearing citizens, not "godless communists."

I was born of immigrant parents, one Eastern European Jewish and one an Italian Catholic. Because a mixed marriage was frowned upon by their respective faiths, my parents put religion on a back shelf and that was that. I was purposely given no religious identity. But I was surrounded by Italian Catholics in my Newark, New Jersey neighborhood. At school, the other kids said I was "nothing" and was surely going to hell. My Jewish relatives, although very active in their faith, did not dare to interfere in my parents' child-rearing. And all around me I saw signs on the back of trucks, as well as on billboards, that said "The family that prays together stays together." But I was genuinely attracted to religion. It seemed a resolution to my mixed-faith no-faith background. After all, Jesus was Jewish, right? And so, being a strong willed if quiet child, I selected godparents and got myself baptized as a Roman Catholic at the age of seven. I lived that out for a while, as a mildly observant self-directed sort-of-Catholic child, only having a few catechism lessons and making my First Communion and Confirmation with my cousins.

But then we entered what many sociologists call "The Long Sixties." So many crises, so many new developments: Fears of nuclear war, assassinations, riots, but also rising feminism, the sexual revolution and, importantly, a new wave of spiritual alternatives. After college, and still

relatively unaware of sexism, instead of becoming a teacher, as my parents wanted, I took a job as a flight attendant for United Airlines. It didn't take long for me to realize that men, both pilots and passengers, treated us simply as servants and sexual objects. When on a layover I came across early feminist books such Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* (Vintage Books, 1970), the light dawned. According to everything I read, religion was a big part of the problem. Although I had quit going to church after college, I finally became determinedly non-religious and left my airline job.

But it was hard to find another job. Even though I could write, when I tried to get a job in journalism, potential employers, hearing I was a former stewardess, just laughed at me. "What are you going to do here" they asked, "serve us coffee or tea?" The only job I could find was at a Catholic diocesan weekly paper. The editor assumed I was still a Catholic, and I didn't tell him any different. But he especially seemed attracted to my former status, and even encouraged me to wear my mini-skirted uniform dress to work. But I needed a job, so I didn't object. Soon I was being sent on religiously-related assignments, in particular covering an early Right to Life meeting, where they featured slides of bloodied dismembered fetuses, and an early Charismatic prayer meeting, where they were shocked that I didn't raise my hands in prayer. I also observed the editor's liquid lunches with priests where unholy topics like church politics prevailed. When I did a story on post-Vatican Two nuns, I was shocked to hear them advising people to read the Bhagavad Gita. All of this jarred me out of my benign agnosticism and one day I literally woke up to find I was an atheist. Religion now seemed to me like a dirty trick these people in black were playing on everyone else. Of course, I couldn't work at that paper any longer.

Fortunately, now that I had a track record and some awards under my belt, I quickly found a job as a reporter with a secular daily newspaper. It was a great relief that now not only could I express my feminism, but no one at work cared whether I had faith or not. I could now acknowledge the spiritual vacuum of my atheism and begin exploring spiritual alternatives. So, I experimented widely. In other words, I was a proto SBNR. I became a yogini, joined an ashram, tried meditation, Unity, vegetarianism, and many other things. But none of this could answer my questions, which were essentially theological, such as why there was injustice, sexism, and ecological crises. As much as I saw people satisfied with yoga or meditation or unity, I could not accept that simply sitting on a cushion to meditate was an effective way to change the world and prevent things like the Nazi Holocaust.

Although I loved newspaper work, I got so frustrated with this unsatisfying spiritual search that I took a leave of absence and went hitchhiking in Europe. Whether I'd find peace or answers, I needed to try something different. Unknowingly, I came across an evangelical retreat center in Switzerland. To my untutored eye, it just looked like a hippie commune. And, as I share in my memoir, *Bloomfield Avenue: A Jewish-Catholic Jersey Girl's Spiritual Journey* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), I felt comfortable with that. I ended up having a religious conversion. I didn't quite realize it, but I had just joined the rising tide of evangelicalism. While the conversion did help resolve my feeling of being religiously split down the middle, it wasn't enough. I strongly disagreed with their social positions, such as the subordination of women and their anti-worldly bent. I realized I needed more education so I could explain my unease more articulately.

In 1980s America, evangelicalism continued to grow. Conservative Christians had been apolitical since the fundamentalist-modernist conflict in the 1920s; they were living in a parallel universe of their own creation, which included Bible colleges and independent churches. But now they suddenly woke up and wanted to "save America." Right wing politics saw a perfect opportunity. Politicos appealed to conservative Christians with promises of returning to the good

old days, using shibboleths like anti-abortionism, homophobia, and fear of immigrants. In this way, they lured many conservative Christians "into bed" with them.

I was increasingly horrified by this and realized my fit with conservative Christianity had never been right. I first branched out by getting my Master's degree at a more progressive Christian graduate school, but that fit wasn't quite right either since they didn't approve of women in leadership. However, I stuck with evangelism for a few more years because they had actually taught Jesus' Gospel of God's love, and had themselves often been loving, hospitable and just as interested in my mind as in my soul. I learned from them how to live in community and how to encounter God. I also loved academic life and wanted to teach.

Next, I moved on to Princeton, a mainstream major Protestant seminary, to get my Ph.D. I was pleased with the strong intellectual tradition and the latitude it gave in what and how to believe. This seemed like a good fit. So, not one to do things halfway, I joined the Presbyterian church, took ordination exams, and became a minister with the vocation of teaching. After I earned my doctorate, I got a job as assistant professor of theology at a midwestern seminary of another denomination. I believed I had found my niche.

In the wider culture, however, by the 1990s it was clear that religion – especially mainstream Protestantism – was on the decline in the United States. Many articles appeared about dwindling seminary enrollments, shrinking congregations, and large 1950s-built churches that were now only filled to a quarter of their capacity. And special attention was being paid to the rise of the "Nones" and the "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR). Churches began scrambling to find ways to attract SBNRs and there was no end of church growth books, as well as pastors showing up to preach in jeans, sneakers, Harry Potter glasses, and raggedy sweaters, trying to look hip and attract a younger crowd.

I still had a dedicated faith and believed in my work. But I also thought SBNRs weren't being treated very fairly in church or media. So, I applied for a grant, was named a Henry Luce III Scholar and went around the U.S. and Canada interviewing hundreds of SBNRs. I wrote my fifth book on this topic, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* (Oxford University Press, 2014). The book hit at the right time, and I became known as an expert on the SBNR movement. I have been featured in the New York Times, have appeared on NBC's Today Show, and been interviewed by multiple media outlets. I was satisfied that I was bringing positive attention to my very progressive seminary and to liberal voices in the church.

But by the early 2000s, it became clear that no amount of new curriculums, cool pastors, or exciting evangelistic methods were going to reverse this tide. I don't have statistics on hand for other religious groups, but by now 7,000 churches are closing each year. Seminaries, too, are closing, merging or going virtual. The remaining schools are trying many things, such as focusing on diversity and new degrees, but it is not bringing about the change they hope for. Enrollments continue to fall as young people are less drawn to church ministries. Tragically, many faculty in religion departments all over the country are experiencing "forced termination" which is where even tenured faculty are made so miserable that they simply quit. You can see an example of this in the Netflix series "The Chair." Having interviewed many of them, the common thing they all say is that they feel "betrayed."

I thought my school was holding its own until I was shocked to witness a number of my female colleagues, mostly over-50 and tenured, being forced out. Foolishly, however, I thought my reputation in the field, five books, hundreds of publications, and excellent student reviews

would save me. I was encouraged in this by being given the semi-retirement status of Distinguished Research Professor. But it didn't turn out as I expected.

I won't go into all the -- to me -- agonizing details, but instead of an office, I was offered a study carrel, I received disturbing phone calls pressuring me to leave right away, I broke my foot in climbing up and down two flights moving hundreds of pounds of books and materials, and, with no room at home, felt I had no choice but to donate those books which had inspired me for decades. Then, when I wrote a short blog about how painful it is for scholars to give up their books, the board essentially voted me "off the island." Given that the associate pastor of the church I was attending was a seminary trustee and present at that vote, I was devastated. And then the pandemic hit. No longer wanting – or able -- to attend in-person religious functions, I figured I was once again "spiritual but not religious."

It's important to realize that I am not the only one with a story like this. I have interviewed dozens of other dedicated religious professionals and clergy with similar narratives. While people think religion should hold to a higher standard, the reality is that when groups feel threatened by outside forces, they often turn on each other. This, too, is part of the decline of organized religion in America.

What now? I continue to get invitations to speak at conferences and write articles. I do occasional supply preaching because so many ministers are leaving the profession and my denomination needs help. I still believe in God and Jesus and still mostly value religious tradition. But at the moment I don't attend church regularly and feel somewhat disheartened about the ability of common beliefs to inspire holy action. Even when I just pass a church on the street, I feel uneasy. Will I ever again become a dedicated church goer? Well, probably not if I continue to cry during the hymns. So, I'm not exactly an SBNR again, but I neither am I an enthusiastic evangelist for the church.

Here's the most important thing I have learned: Your resume, your passion, your dedication, and even your excellent work can't save you from rampant cultural changes or good people doing bad things. As Rene Girard's (*The Scapegoat,* Johns Hopkins Univ. Pr, 1989) theory says about the dynamics of scapegoating, it is not unusual for groups to face internal pressures. But if group cohesion is to be maintained, this can't continue. So instead, the group often chooses to scapegoat an individual or a subset, self-righteously proclaim them the culprits and then extrude, shun and vilify them.

So, what is my point in this autoethnography? I see now that I have been somewhat unknowingly riding the waves of religious social change—that is, until the last wave just broke right on top of me. That's why I feel kind of like a Forrest Gump in the world of organized religion.

Is There a Way Out?:
Understanding Psychiatric Institutionalization through Autoethnography

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Abstract
According to sociological theory, social institutions exist to socialize members of society into commonly accepted norms and values. Total institutions aim to preserve social equilibrium and avoid disorder by controlling every aspect of a person's life committed to their custody and care. The psychiatric system, intended to rehabilitate and regulate human behavior, effectively subserviates citizens into complying with the status quo by utilizing methods of control such as forced drugging, electroshock, and isolation.

Operating as a total institution, psychiatric institutionalization then resocializes or neutralizes people's behavior to become 'palatable' to the status quo. Psychiatric drugs and 'treatments' are deliberately used to alter inmates' cognitive and physical functioning to achieve order and conformity with socially accepted norms and values. The resulting anomie from total institutionalization causes a person to turn their distress inward – blaming the self for problems created by the institution. Without this distress, the institution loses significance because people may begin to question society and find content with their lives through more supportive and anti-oppressive means.

Autoethnography describes and analyzes personal experience to gain insight into the influence of a culture in order to challenge canonical research and theory (Ellis et al., 2011). This paper uses autoethnography to describe my experience as a formerly institutionalized psychiatric inmate. In doing so, I interrogate the function of the psychiatric system in the U.S. as a total institution and hopefully contribute to challenging the effectiveness of psychiatric institutionalization. I also intend to show that autoethnography is a useful method for testing the validity of memory. Throughout my personal story, I describe the impact of different social institutions on memory, socialization, and resocialization. I conclude that institutional settings magnify powerful voices, forcing the institutionalized person to question their reality, acquiesce to the institution's version of the narrative, and deny their personal truths.

Considerations
The author intends to submit their complete manuscript to a peer-reviewed journal. This paper serves as a transcript and recollection of the workshop, "Is There a Way Out?: Understanding Psychiatric Institutionalization Through Autoethnography" as presented at the 2023 ISAN.

Introductory Video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=TTLVZoK3hwE&si=EnSIkaIECMiOmarE
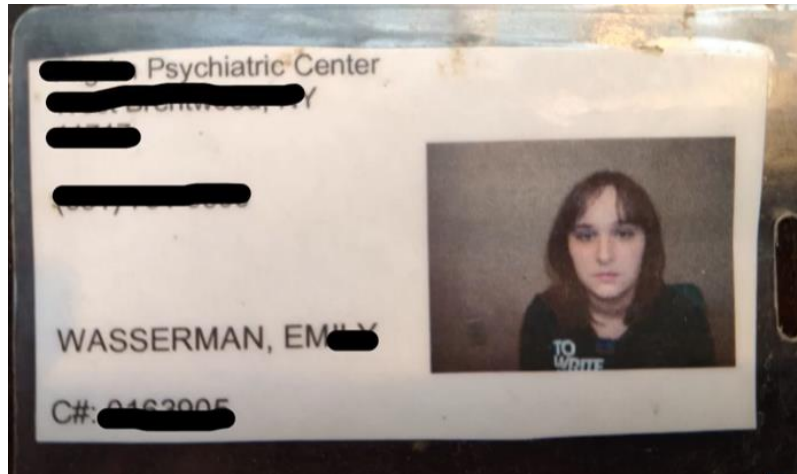
Transcript

My name is Em, and my pronouns are they/them. I am a student at SUNY Empire State College, a New York Certified Peer Specialist, and I like to think of myself as a mad, queer activist.

Thank you for joining me as I share my journey as a formerly institutionalized psychiatric inmate.

My project, entitled, "Is there a Way Out?: Understanding Psychiatric Institutionalization Through Autoethnography" began as a way to structure my story using an academic framework - .an opportunity to afford my memory a reality that was previously sidelined by psychiatric jargon.

Ellis and Bochner explain that autoethnography describes and analyzes personal experience to gain insight into the influence of a culture in order to challenge canonical research and theory (Ellis et al., 2011).

In describing my experiences through autoethnography, I interrogate the psychiatric system and its influence on U.S. culture - hopefully contributing to challenging the effectiveness of psychiatric institutionalization. I also intend to show that autoethnography is a useful method for testing the validity of memory. Throughout my personal story, I describe the impact of different social institutions on memory, socialization, and resocialization.

According to sociological theory, social institutions and systems exist to format (or socialize) members of society into commonly accepted norms and values. Sociologist Erving Goffman refers to "total institutions" as institutions that seek to preserve social equilibrium and avoid disorder by controlling every aspect of a person's life committed to their custody and care (Goffman, 1961).

In my experience, the psychiatric system, intended to rehabilitate and regulate human behavior, effectively functioned as a total institution that subserviates citizens into complying with the status quo; by utilizing methods of control such as forced drugging, electroshock, and isolation.

Operating as a total institution then, the psychiatric system resocializes or neutralizes people's behavior to become 'palatable' to the status quo.

Psychiatric drugs and 'treatments' are deliberately used to alter inmates' cognitive and physical functioning to achieve order and conformity with socially accepted norms and values or forever cast inmates aside as sick, ill, and defective.

The resulting anomie from total institutionalization causes a person to turn their distress inward – blaming the self for problems created by the institution. Without this distress, the institution loses significance because people may begin to question society and find content with their lives through more supportive and anti-oppressive means. In other words, the institution relies on the distress it causes - it cannot exist without the helplessness of the inmate.

Liberated psychiatric inmates effectively eliminate the need for psychiatric institutions. However, while liberation as justice for all inmates is important and necessary, I, as one liberated inmate, am easily discredited and controlled through continued psychiatric labeling, such as the use of anosognosia.

Anosognosia is defined as a lack of insight into one's own "illness." My experience has proven that this label is easily weaponized against the liberated inmate. My internal dialogue often goes something like this: *If you deny perceived psychiatric illnesses and uphold that social institutions construct these "boxes" or labels to oppress those who have been failed by these very institutions - do you really lack insight? Or are you aware of knowledge that power attempts to deny you?*

Since beginning this process, I have thought about my narrative and every day, I find myself "self-gaslighting" - questioning what I remember and how accurate my memory is. This self-gaslighting is a direct result of my institutional experiences with which I continue to struggle. Autoethnography allows me to parse memories, reflect on them, and sometimes unfortunately, ruminate.. It gives *me* the opportunity to observe my narrative and prevent me from second-guessing - only before magnifying that feeling that I must be wrong about my reality. The aim of my project is to work through this constant questioning. If I dwell on trying to answer with certainty, then I never get through the questioning.

Bochner and Ellis (2016) posit that resonance with a story can point to generalizability and validity in autoethnographical works (p. 236-237). I've shared portions of my story in different fora and it astounds me to learn of the many other former inmates' relation to my narrative. Amongst other survivors, these experiences have gained informal acceptance, and generalizability. Those who have not experienced psychiatric incarceration are not likely to relate to my experiences and may downright deny them as truths. These statements do not detract from the collective narrative by psychiatric survivors, but provide insight into another (different) subjective vantagepoint of our stories.

Autoethnography gives us another way of measuring "truth," enriching data that was previously asserted as disingenuous, or "an illness."

We cannot examine my story without acknowledging the impact of "power." Who validates research as "scientific and objective" when studies about 'mental illnesses' have always relied on qualitative observations? Still, we see that narratives promoting psychiatry are the dominant stories - those perceived as empirical research. While the voices of survivors are written off as "crazy".

I resonate with Arthur Frank's 1998 article, "Stories of Illness as Care of the Self: a Foucauldian Dialogue" in which he draws on the empowerment in our reclamation from medical narratives. Frank explores the personal ethical dilemmas that arise from illness narratives, pointing to the concept of "power" in this context. He highlights that telling our stories of "illness" can fulfill a sense of empowerment from the sick, ill, and defective role we are assigned by the medical profession and in turn, society. I concur with the sentiment that narrative-sharing is incredibly healing.

Psychiatry often refers to the DSM-V as the diagnostic bible - experts have to acknowledge your experience as real, as defined by the bible - and your version of this story will not be represented in their bible.

Trauma, for example, is often perceived as tangible, physical harm - others have to see it in order for it to be verified. This is where my story is medicalized. Borderline Personality Disorder - my first label - no longer tells the story of the harm inflicted upon me. It describes an expert's opinion that my reaction to bodily violation is incorrect or "disordered."

Being told that a reaction to trauma is "disordered" is (to use scientific terms) crazy-making. I learned that I am not allowed to share troubling events without punishment. I learned not to share my reaction to pain because it is more socially acceptable to quietly feel immense inner turmoil than to express it.

What had I done with that pain? Well, I decided that I had to die - something I thought of as "a way out.".

I awoke in emergency rooms with stitches up and down my arms. I awoke to charcoal being forced down my throat after swallowing a bottle of ativan.. I awoke..
What we observe thus far is a person who was taught to die because of the pain inflicted upon them in a confusing cycle of shame. *Talk, don't talk, feel, don't feel, reach out for help, but not like that.*

Attention-seeking behavior, they termed it. I define this as having no other way to be heard. If I died, then I told myself I wouldn't have to worry about this cycle. If I lived, well, then maybe this time, someone will listen.

The drugs and treatments were retraumatizing, with side-effects doctors termed as new and exciting illnesses. From "borderline personality disorder, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, ADHD, to schizoaffective disorder."

Inside of a state institution, I was told my condition was medication-resistant. The best-case presented scenarios included "symptom management" and lifelong "treatment." The worst-case scenarios included death by suicide.

I was then forced to undergo Electroconvulsive Therapy, or ECT. A "last resort," they said. I vividly remember one night during this process: I couldn't recall my life. I didn't connect with who I was or why I was there - in the hallway of a state institution that I had walked for quite some time. I immediately felt overcome. I cried and slid to the ground and was surrounded by authorities - one nurse pre-preparing a syringe of sedatives - the cocktail unknown to me.

I recall feeling so frustrated that no one would believe me. A doctor had said, "IF you do not remember, it is temporary due to the anesthesia." It wasn't.

I clutched my knees, put my head down, and cried. Then, they injected me, as they would keep doing. I was tied down, put in a solitary room at times, and on a one-to-one supervision in which a staff member could not be more than one arm's length away from me at any time, including in the bathroom.

I had to play the game to get out. I learned that I had to agree that I am ill in order to be free. I went to therapy, I signed safety contracts, and I ate my meals. Eventually, I would not have to go through ECT again. My goal was to survive.

Once I was free from the institution, I was by no means free. I was in community residences, day programs, and my existence was defined by my ability to accept that I am sick.

I thought, at points, that I was perceived as "well enough" to exit this system. I did what I was told, and I said I am not feeling depressed or delusional. *I'm controlling my urges.* Using their terminology to relate to their expert opinions. The journey out would prove long and arduous, with bouts of transient living, breakdowns, and a lack of connection to basic needs.

But once I began teaching myself, learning from my elders - other psychiatric survivors - I realized I may have had intense reactions, but once validated, I gained clarity in how the system attempted to shift my perspectives to fit their narrative. I began speaking about my experiences as a peer specialist and educator. It allowed me the freedom to distance myself from the psychiatric narrative, while admittedly being complicit in the system, as now, I work in it.

So, In a sense, there is no way out because my only recourse is to support others so they may not experience *more* harm.

Now, I believe my anxiety about retelling my story "incorrectly" has some validity. Stories are fluid because our memories are malleable and influenced by time, environment, and power. I also must account for brain injury and resulting memory loss incurred from ECT. Unfortunately, I will never understand whether my current reality aligns with a previous reality. Perhaps this is not unique to electrocution under general anesthesia; however, it is a valid reason to question my recollection.

My experiences, alongside the institutional narrative, remind me that an account of our own history is warped by powerful forces rooted in white heteronormative patriarchal systems. Psychiatry represents this system in my story. And I acknowledge that there is nothing special about me overcoming this system - because I haven't. I often dissociate from the present because I question whether I exist in reality. I also acknowledge that there is no difference between me and those who did not get out of that system aside from "traits" that others perceive as more problematic than my small, frail, white-skinned, feminine frame, as doctor's notes have described.

I conclude that institutional settings magnify powerful voices, forcing the institutionalized person to question their reality, acquiesce to the institution's version of the narrative, and deny their personal truths.

With that, I look forward to continued self-analysis and liberation from the constraints of psychiatry in hopes that it will contribute to anti-oppressive means of wellness and healing.

Thank you all for holding space and spending time with me in my current reality.

Audience Feedback:
The audience related to aspects of the presentation and joined in a conversation that interrogated systems of power in place to medically oppress marginalized identities. Participants called into question their own interactions with the psychiatric system with an understanding that factors such as gender and race play a role. Participants inquired about the author's story, who then shared more about institutional experiences, including trauma, socialization, labeling, electroshock, seclusion, and experiences since being freed from psychiatric incarceration. Members suggested invoking more Foucauldian perspectives and Goffman's notion of the presentation of self in the final manuscript.

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Writing with Love in a Time of Hate:
The Present Is Not Always about the Present

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Abstract

This short prose piece examines the autoethnographic ethic of love in a time of hate from February through the spring of 2022 when the American-English media began coverage of the violence on the Ukrainian steppe. Idealistic though naïve acquaintances in the U.S. repeated discourse mediated through mass media without regard to the sorrowful history of the people in/from the region. While writing a longer piece about my six years teaching in Ukraine and Russia, I found myself struggling to maintain an ethic of love in daily life and coming to terms with intergenerational trauma in a family with Ukrainian/Russian roots.

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Autoethnographic researchers emphasize an ethic of love distinguishing it from a traditional ethnography that fails to contextualize the researcher (Denzin 2010, Mackinlay 2022). The revisions on my autoethnography of teaching and living in Ukraine and Russia have stalled: It is difficult to write with love in a time of hate. My first two years on Slavic soils started in 1993 at a high school on the Black Sea in Kravchuk's Ukraine. My last academic year ended in 2017 on the edge of Russia's Vologda River. I love these people unadulterated by media's war lust propaganda that stokes hate.

My spouses' conversations with our daughter strengthen her spoken Russian. Prior to Covid, I had made a deposit for a teen summer camp to maintain the language. The accounting office contacted me twice in two years about the deposit for campfires and s'mores. Then, on March 11th, 2022, an email from the organizer:

> We will be addressing the war this summer in a way that supports campers in understanding what is happening now, empowers them to engage in humanitarian support efforts, and provides them the skills they will need to become the leaders of tomorrow who can work to prevent similar crises in the future.

Wars with s'mores? I deconstructed every clause and told the organizer that her silence about the military actions in eight countries of darker-skinned peoples is not only Nationalistic but also, comparatively, racist. Her director telephoned me immediately and a short conversation revealed that a US government grant had led to the propaganda.

Why did I become so angry? The camp organizer likely believes in the enlightenment era humanism that evolved with colonization. The call for humanitarianism is a symptom of a deeper disease. Mary E. Marcy who interpreted Marxism for U.S. workers wrote, "The Profit System is the cause of all wars." (1984, 73) Conscientious investing is the best solution my family can come up with, but we have few funds to really drive a change. "We try none-the-less," I explained to the camp organizer. Other attempts to discuss the war have been even less respectful. More flippant. A fellow student in school with my daughter approached her in the hall and asked, "Don't you speak Russian?" After affirmation, "What do you think of the war in Ukraine?"

My daughter knows her Great Grandpa Boris refused to give his land and livestock to Stalin's Collectivization effort in Ukraine. Boris' fight resulted in a forced relocation to the Far East where he built a small home. The remaining family starved in the famine or were murdered when the Nazis occupied Kharkiv. The past rests in the cells of the living; my daughter responds, "That question is so inappropriate." Perhaps I would have benefitted from my daughter's words earlier because I found myself irritated by a colleague who asked a similar question: "What do you think about the war?" The muscles of my chest strain and tears come to my eyes.

"Three hots and a cot are all a person wants and needs," my neighbor said winding down our conversation. He had expressed concern about our extended family in Eastern Europe only to learn of theft, famine, and Nazi death squads. His inquiry was more thoughtful than most who become tools for the propaganda state. Evocative autoethnographers Bochner and Ellis write, "Knowledge from the past is not necessarily about the past" (2016, 253). Agreed, and the present is not always about the present. The hurt caused by the symbolic violence of media's bloodlust reminds me that no person can ever feel what I experienced. In the 1990s, the post-Perestroika period filled us with optimism and I joyfully worked in Ukraine to acquire a million dollars of aid from the closing U.S. military bases of Germany: refrigerators for medications of Chernobyl children, blankets and sleeping bags for families in need, and shelving for the books that came from a letter writing campaign by my Odessan students.

Will any of my work remain? Most of my close friends left Ukraine decades ago. The place has always been a mess with poor leadership. The Czech Republic had the playwright, Vaclav Havel. Poland had a gregarious dock worker, Lech Walesa. But Ukraine got corruption, ethnic strife, and ghosts from the past.

In the summer of 1993, a moment at a table with my Ukrainian language teachers turned sobering at a Peace Corps gathering. The older of the pair, Ms. Natalia said, "You know Maggie, Ukraine sided with the Nazis in the war." She glanced at Ms. Marina. "Yes, it's true," said the younger Jewish woman lifting her glasses to her eyes. For the first time, I heard of Babi Yar, a valley filled with victims of Ukrainian Auxiliary Police and Einsatzgruppen's death squads. Babi Yar, the largest massacre site of the Holocaust. Their slaughter continued to Kharkiv and the Drobizki valley received the last of Boris' kin.

My husband carried the shame of Grandpa Boris' relocation when I met him. When Boris fought for the plants and animals he loved, the forced removal from Ukraine may have been a loss but on the larger arc of life, it was a win. The naming of his great granddaughter was not for

the saga of sorrow but for our love—Victoria. I worry, however, about intergenerational trauma (Dean 2018). The prison camps of the Far East were filled with agony, and the people of the steppe suffer anew. The media's warmongering tears open the wounds of consciousness, but the unconscious imprint on the cells of my family is less known. Past and present in an English language textbook appear on a timeline with one point neatly following another, but history is circular erupting in violence again and again. Victoria wrote on a 7th grade history exam: "War is entertainment for the rich."

The expanding economic system values weapons more than wetlands; blood soaks the soils of the steppe. Where on the visible landscape is the past and the future? A potential summer camp of wars with s'mores, and unmindful questions about violence, present hurdles for the autoethnographic ethic. Diversity dies in a war-based economy: Europeans, Africans, Muslims, and lives less valued—cows, cats, birds, insects, grasses, and crops like those Grandpa Boris grew. I cannot stop their wars, but I can try to love and write with love.

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Echoes of the Past, Traces of Possibility:
Grief, Memory, Openings

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Abstract

In this autoethnographic essay, I trace my journey toward the possibility of healing by walking my story through overpowering grief, painful memory, and healing dreams of possibility. As I stumble into my deepest emotional pain—pain that I've carried through all six decades of my life—I find myself writing the origins of my trauma, the depths of my grief, the fragments of my memories, and the openings offered by new dreams that have emerged since undertaking new means of therapy.

Keywords

Autoethnography, grief, hope, memory, openings

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Echoes Across Time

      I have this strange recurring dream. In the dream, I discover our house has a hidden extra room I didn't know about. In the dream, I'm trying to remember where this room came from, and how I got here, and why I don't remember it, despite having lived in this house for many years. I wonder: What is this place? Where did it come from? How did I get here? Why have I never noticed it? And: what's it *for*?

      For some reason, as I enter, I feel drawn to the center of this room. The trouble is, it's hard to tell exactly where the center is, because it's dark, and the room is cavernous, with high ceilings receding into darkness and walls receding into the distance.

      I feel a sort of presence there, though I see nobody.

      I call out: "Hello!"

      Nobody answers.

      There is only the soft echo of my voice: "He-llo! He-llo! He-llo!"

      I call out again: "Hello!"

      The briefest of pauses follows, as I listen for the echo: "He-llo! He-llo! He-llo!"

      Listening to the echo, I fall into reflection, mostly on the nature of echoes, which seem to me to be traces of a presence that's both there and not there, or something that's fading out but having a hard time with it, resisting the very fading that is its essence. The sound of my voice is gone, over. But, at the same time it's there, in a new form, coming back to me, even as it falls away. The echo represents, it seems to me, the presence of an absence *and* the absence of a presence.

      I wake up puzzled, in the midst of my musing, engulfed in the mystery. I shake my head, and I go on about my day.

But the room haunts me. I keep hearing murmurs of these echoes. And one day, it occurs to me: *Echoes. I need to write into and through these echoes*. I need to write about the possibilities generated by calling out into the emptiness, and the (inevitable) echoes that come from the calling.

And then I think: Maybe the echo, receding into the distance, fading slowly into silence, represents the echo of *possibility* that lives in the spaces between speaking and listening.

Maybe the dream is an *invitation. An invitation to possibility*. So today, I sat down and started this project. This project is about traces of something that is presenting itself to me, to us, while receding, fading, falling away. This project is about the echoes of presence, heard and felt and remembered over time. It's about the echoes of absence, heard and felt and remembered over time. This project is an autoethnography of memory and forgetting, of connection and disconnection, of presence and absence. It is a story of leaning into memory, of memory stumbling into story, of story tumbling headlong into dialogue.

I write about traces reverberating across time, as memories erupt, as stories are made, as dialogue is engaged, as people come and go, as I make my way into and through and toward the liminal spaces between voice and echo, between presence and absence, between memory and forgetting, between story and secret, between dialogue and silence, between hope and despair, between connection and alienation. It is a story of calling out into the void and hoping for at least an echo to come back.

Yes, it is true. I do hear a faint echo, drifting across time. I feel its resonance in my bones. I almost grab hold of it, and recognize its voice, its words, but it quickly starts to fade. I want to reach out, across time and place, to the source. I know that voice. It is calling me. Can I trace its path from here in the present moment, to the place where it all began?

The echo is like a fragment of memory: A trace of something that may or may not have happened.

The echo is like a trace of trauma, stored deep in my body.

The echo is like a piece of story: A fragment of something made possible by writing (or speaking) it into space, across time.

The echo is like a line of dialogue: A trace of the divine spark that connects us, human to human.

The echo is like a faint whisper of human co-presence, for why would I call out, if I did not crave connection?

The echo is like the fading sound of my father's voice, a sound I still hear in my head, in my heart, three years after his death, a sound I will always hear.

The echo is like the little wisps of hope that hover at the edges of despair.

The echo is that thin line that separates consciousness from itself, that I must step across to awaken.

The echo is…

This work is about a search—a search for possibility in the thinnest of places, in the faintest traces of echoes, in the little murmurs that ripple through my consciousness from time to time. Its story is a collage of fragmented memories, of traumatic interruptions, of faint voices from the past, of places I have stood and where my ancestors stood, of echoes across time and toward…

Hope?

Meaning?

Story?

Openings?

Burn Your Maps

To take this story where it wants to go, I must talk about grief for a moment. I have suffered a lot of loss in my life. Many people I have loved have died. I still don't know how to grieve. We don't come equipped with a map, to guide us in how to face the excruciating pain of the loss of a loved one. When I was a kid, 12 to be exact, my family, just like so many American families sat down to an ordinary-extraordinary Thanksgiving dinner. The date, etched forever into my memory, was November 26, 1970. And in the next room, at the moment my dad started to say our prayer of thanks, my uncle died. Within a year and half of that day, three other family members—my aunt and my grandfather on my dad's side, and my great grandfather on my mom's side—died. Four in two years. And we were left standing, shakily, on a much smaller foundation. The fallout of all that death was devastating. My grandmother sank into a depression that lasted another 12 years, until she died, engulfed in despair. My father was depressed—grief-stricken, really—for another 35 years, until he, too succumbed to despair.

In September of 1998, my other grandfather, my mom's dad, James N. Leckie, died. He had lived a remarkable life, lasting for 94 years, almost the entire 20th century. He was one of my favorite humans ever. He was my rock—the boldest, most courageous man I have ever encountered. His life left a mark on me; his sudden death left a hole in my heart that took many years to heal.

Fast forward another 14 years, and on August 24, 2012, my friend and mentor, the "new ethnographer" Bud Goodall, died of pancreatic cancer. Two days later, our dear dog Jake died. Two months later, our mutual friend and ethnographer/Ethnog Nick Trujillo died suddenly of a heart attack. And just a couple of months later, in February 2013, my father-in-law died on the day after a high school teammate of my son died suddenly in the middle of a basketball game. That summer a recently graduated student committed suicide, and a friend's son died of an overdose. Seven in 11 months.

Fast forward to July of 2019, and my dad died after a brief illness. And the ground fell away under my feet. A month later, a close friend's wife died of cancer, followed shortly by our dear dog, Jessie, another friend to cancer, and another to emphysema. Five in three months. I felt like I got run over by a truck. And last summer, after a beautiful hike in the mountains of Virginia, our sweet dog Jackson, one of my many four-legged best friends, died suddenly in the car.

I tell you all this to say…I should be an expert in grief. But I still see no map. I still don't know exactly how to process all that loss. What I mostly do is write, and cry, and try, as best I can, to bring the pieces of my loved ones into my life, keep them with me, and hold on to the memories. But there are no maps, there is no instruction manual, there is no certain way back home.

So, I still don't fully get what to do with death, and loss, and grief. Apparently, I am not the only one. The 2016 film, *Burn Your Maps* shows the struggle of a family trying to cope with the sudden death of their infant girl, Lilly. And they are thrown into questioning the meaning of family, home, grief, and loss. Through the fantasy/memory/dream world of the 8-year-old son, Wes, they are thrown straight into an adventure that teaches them how to begin to navigate the profoundest of losses. In the end, facing directly the question of what to do when we just don't know what to do, how to go on, Wes says, "Leave it all behind, come with nothing, leave your

maps behind, rip them up, burn them…and come, even if it's far away, even if you don't understand, even if it's far away, even if it's only in a dream…" and head out on an adventure.

Burn your maps. If you even have maps.

And, as Albert Camus writes in his essay, *Return to Tipasa*, "I strive to forget, I walk in our cities of iron and fire, I smile bravely at the night, I hail the storms, I shall be faithful. I have forgotten, in truth: active and deaf, henceforth. But perhaps someday, when we are ready to die of exhaustion and ignorance, I shall be able to disown our garish tombs and go and stretch out in the valley, under the same light, and learn for the last time what I know." Maybe that's what we need to do…with our grief…lie in the light, and learn what we already know.

For myself, I think I just need to venture forth, to keep going, to cry out, like a voice in the wilderness, like writing in the dark, as I am doing right now, hoping to send these words out beyond me, to you.

And, like the echo, maybe some of my words will return, a little lighter, a bit softer.

Maybe, like the voice that starts the echo, we all just need to go out, venture about, and then come home, a little less burdened.

It is my hope that, in offering this kind of work to the world, we can share a transformative space that allows us all to see ways to heal and to become whole—not to deny our trauma, not to suppress our grief—but to feel our way through it, together, as we write and read and listen and speak.

Expressive Storytelling:
An Autoethnography on the Effect of Using Storytelling to Process Complicated Grief

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Abstract

After my father's death, I undertook an autoethnographic study designed to examine if written, first-person narrative storytelling that leaned on expressive writing techniques could help me actively process and effectively move through my complicated mourning. My data consisted of 41 vignettes that disclosed the cultural interactions that occurred before, during, and after his death while narrating the wildness of prolonged grief. The categories I had identified in my analysis emerged twofold: the art of storytelling and the four cornerstones of grief stories. Both categories had a positive impact on my recovery. My presentation explored the analysis and findings of my autoethnography, providing a framework for therapeutic, expressive storytelling that can be used to process and heal grief.

Keywords

expressive storytelling, prolonged or complicated grief, reconciliation, healing, loss

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I was startled awake to the sound of tremors running through my father's body. Scanning the room, I found two nurses pinning him down as he shook uncontrollably, convulsing against the metal bed frame. Using the arms of the bed to catapult in his direction, I sprang from my cot and landed beside him. Grabbing his forearms, I held him in place as the doctor held my stricken stare and said,

> *We need to take him to the ICU. If we don't put him on life support now, he will die. We need family consent to do this. Do I have your permission?*

Comprehending that I was the only family member in the room, I consented as the words, *he will die*, pulsed through my veins. My mind, gyrating, trapped the rest of the doctor's counsel in a revolving door, unable to reach me. I stepped out into the corridor while the staff shifted my father's rattling body onto a mobile bed. Adrenaline filled my fingertips as I attempted to find the contact *home* on my phone. Dazed and confused, my mother's voice quivered while she caught up to the words, *life support*. In a panic, she wailed out in her native tongue—*Ente kunju ithu ellam thanne enghaneya cheyyunne? How is my child doing this all by herself?* Then, as fast as her tension spiked, her scattered thoughts slowed down. Agreeing to the terms laid out in front of her to save her husband's life, she settled long enough to form the words, *I'm on my way*.

Clutching my father's hand, we entered the elevator alongside the doctor and three other medical professionals. I resisted the urge to spiral into an anxious fit, but the large metal doors closed tight, adding to my suffocation. Silence engulfed the small space around us; all that could be heard were the sobs of tears helplessly spilling from my eyes. I tried to compose myself, but I could feel the sadness rising in the people standing next to me.

As we entered the long stretch of the hallway leading to the ICU, I begged them to wait, pleading, *My family is not here yet*.

The doctor reiterated, *The longer we wait, the worse it will be for him*.

My heart split: the larger portion pulled in my father's direction.

Just as they started rolling him away from me, my mother appeared. Suddenly, in front of me was nothing short of a scene from an Indian movie, a plot twist that seemed far too stretched to resemble anything even close to reality. But here it was. My mother, with her arm overextended, ran toward my father screaming—*Mocha*—her lifelong term of endearment for him. As if on cue, synchronously, his convulsions stopped. Sitting up straight, following the sound of her voice, he zoned in on her. Tightening his fists, he fought to sit still and looked longingly at her. Then, joy, embodied in a smile, joined us. A smile, curving so far upward that his lips lit his eyes aglow. A smile so vibrant that I had never seen a man look at a woman like *that* before. A smile that told a story, *I was waiting for you. I needed to see you. I needed to hear your voice one last time before I go*. And so, their perfect ending was also written. He never said a word to her, but no words were needed after praise like that. As always, my father's heart spoke volumes; it was the purest form of love I had ever seen.

–The Revelations of Eapen, 2023

Introduction

In January 2017, my father died, and I began the long journey of complicated mourning. In 2018, I entered the Doctor of Education program to examine the gap of grief work and grief education in Canadian school systems—a leading cause of the overwhelming problem of grief illiteracy in modern North American societies. *Grief illiteracy* which I defined in my research as "not knowing the deep distress caused by death" (Mathew, 2022), not only contributed to the length of my grieving but also became a glaring problem I decided to tackle. With my doctoral supervisor's encouragement, I identified authoethnography as the best methodology to examine the cultural interactions of the phenomenon of grief while also examining if written first-person storytelling would be an effective tool to process my complicated mourning.

Grief is a psychobiological response to the loss of any kind (Shear, 2012); a "deep and poignant distress" (Merriam-Webster, 2023); an emotion usually described in reference to the death of a loved one, but can also arise in non-death losses. Grief work is the action we consciously take to work through the loss we have experienced, an active process (Attig, 1991)

that helps the brain reconcile and adapt to the change that has occurred. As an educator, storytelling seemed a viable option to address a lack of grief work in schools.

The Effect of Trauma on the Brain

My grief was traumatic. According to van der Kolk (2014), "trauma, by definition, is unbearable and intolerable" (p. 1), and traumatic grief occurs when "acute symptoms of grief do not diminish but instead spiral into persistent and chronically debilitating grief reactions" (Boelen & Smid, 2017). Initially, when assessing myself on Boelen and Smid's (2017) Traumatic Grief Inventory Self-Report version (TGI-SR), I fell under the 'always' category for all 18 symptoms persistently for the first two years of my bereavement. My mind was so severely affected by my father's death that I could not recall the full details of his loss nor remember the order of events that led to his death. Because of this, I could not communicate the story sensibly to others, and this inhibition became an impediment to my healing. My thoughts and spoken language were frozen, repeating the same points of his death over and over again, without resolution. Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) explain that "the failure or inability to translate traumatic experiences into language has been implicated as one possible cause of PTSD…linking our emotional memories to language is often beneficial" (p. 145). Thus, bridging this gap was vital for me.

The ongoing frustration of losing verbal reasoning persuaded me to research the effect of trauma on the brain to find out what was happening to me on a biological level. I learned that my physical symptoms, as well as my reactions and responses to grief, aligned with someone who had gone through a severely traumatic event (Levine, 2015). The crushing blow of losing my father had shut down the left side of my brain, causing me to lose sequential order, linguistic ability, and logical reasoning (van der Kolk, 2014)—all of which explained my abnormal behavior. Consequently, this prevented me from making clear connections to how things happened in chronological time. By furthering my understanding of how the traumatized brain functions, I learned why the story shattered and fragmented:

> Breakdown of the thalamus explains why trauma is primarily remembered not as a story, a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end, but as isolated sensory imprints: images, sounds, and physical sensations that are accompanied by intense emotions, usually terror and helplessness. (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 70)

The marked events in the hospital became scattered and disorganized, creating a disconnection between my mind and the tragic plot that unfolded. A year after my father's death, bits and pieces of what happened suddenly resurfaced and scarred me, as forgotten memories rushed to the front of my mind, delivering both shock and confusion (Levine, 2015). According to van der Kolk (2014), "people cannot put traumatic events behind until they are able to acknowledge what has happened and start to recognize the invisible demons they're struggling with" (p. 221). And these invisible demons—*stored memories*—tormented me.

Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) support that "translating abstract thoughts and emotions associated with a traumatic event into written words with a linguistic structure may allow for the traumatic event to be better understood and integrated into one's understanding of 'self' and the world" (p. 146). And since I had used writing to heal through painful situations in the past, organically, I sought comfort from this tool to heal through the severity of my grief as well.

Expressive Storytelling

A tool that is gaining recognition in grief literature today is brief, expressive writing exercises, "a technique where people typically write about an upsetting experience for 15 to 20 minutes a day for three or four days" (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016, p. ix). Communicating our emotions is a natural reaction to stressful life events, and expressive writing researchers determine how the writing should be constructed and in which circumstances written narrative strategies are most successful, maximizing the potential of this technique (Leopore & Smyth, 2002; Pennebaker & Evans, 2014; Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016). However, a comprehensive case study has been rare as most studies focus on small group settings, targeting selective experiences through several short writing exercises. Here, my autoethnography differed as I wrote extensively on my loss, disclosing a wide range of social situations and distresses I endured.

Autoethnography—"an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 65)—became a vehicle for me to examine my severe reactions and responses to loss. Because of the paralyzing nature of my grief, I knew I would be able to provide rich narratives describing my inner experiences as one of the goals of autoethnography is to bring "heightened attention to human suffering" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 45). By reflecting on my story of loss, it became clear that the most effective way to confront cultural grief illiteracy was through revealing my own challenges with bereavement and discovering myself *first* in the context of grief.

When investigating a phenomenon that deals with the human condition, my task as the researcher was not only to inform the audience about the topic, but to engage, perform, mirror, interpret, and provoke epiphanies that accompany the experience of grief (Holman Jones et al., 2013; Denzin, 2014). Embracing my vulnerability as the subject and reclaiming the power of insider knowledge allowed me to intimately explore the effect of writing on bereavement, and act as a mirror for others, giving voice to the larger, often muted, grieving community. Using evocative autoethnography, written to evoke emotion in the reader by allowing "the story to do the work" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 60), I wrote out an in-depth account of my loss through 41 stories that shed light on the cultural impact that social interactions played on the development of my grief. By design, I took the expressive writing technique (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016) and expanded upon its guidelines using the art of storytelling to decipher whether extensive, structured narrative writing would effectively process the pain of losing my father. It was through this method of storytelling, initiated almost two years after his death, that I finally began integrating his loss and felt a more substantial shift towards reconciliation.

Storytelling that uses rich, figurative language to describe abstract thoughts and emotions may help assimilate an event more effectively than speaking through literal terms that do not match the severity of the loss (Pennebaker, 2000). Neimeyer (1999) states that "a well-chosen narrative method may prove to be a powerful means of articulating and addressing loss in such cases precisely because written self-expression is a novel experience" (p. 71). And, as previous studies have shown, the bereaved found sharing stories of the deceased to be more helpful than professional counseling (Castle & Phillips, 2003).

For close to a year, I consciously engaged in grief work by immersing myself in creating grief narratives for my study as "autoethnographic stories attempt to bring vivid and resonant frames of understanding to one's anguish and pain" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 69). Here, I gathered information from multiple sources, organized the events in chronological order, and wrote out the fine details of my father's death in over two hundred pages. I envisioned my data

would create identifiable categories, observations, or rationales that would lead to insightful conclusions that would support the grieving community as a whole. And at the end of my rigorous, painful, and awakening study—I was *right*. I determined that structured, first-person narrative writing was a successful tool used to recover from, reconcile with, and integrate the loss of my father.

In the dense swirl of my grief, I wrote 41 short stories, accompanied by 41 coinciding photos, as the data of my study—now published as a novel, *The Revelations of Eapen*. The stories closely examined the cultural interactions that occurred before, during, and after my father's death, shedding light on the dangers of grief illiteracy. Using the narratives-under-analysis approach (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Bochner & Riggs, 2014), I removed myself as the main character and looked at the writing through a scientific lens. I discovered that telling the story was not enough, the writing had to evoke emotion and be constructed using the central themes that emerged from my data, targeting bereavement: The Art of Storytelling and The Four Cornerstones of Grief Stories (Mathew, 2022). Both of these categories had a positive impact on my recovery, and the following discussion sheds light on the novel ideas that evolved from my study.

The Art of Storytelling

The themes under the first category spoke specifically to the writing, some of which have been previously discussed by therapeutic writing researchers—the structure, language, drafting, and revision of a story.

Structure. The stories had to be organized under headings that fell in chronological order, restoring order to a broken version of the grief story replaying in my mind, as "*constructing* a coherent story" (Pennebaker, 2011, p. 11) was important.

Language. I had to pay attention to pronouns (Pennebaker, 2011), ensuring they were accurately used (ex: "our father" instead of "my father") and be transparent with my own actions, both positive and negative in my retelling. I had to balance my emotions 60/40 (sixty, negative; forty, positive) to allow my grief to spill honestly. Last, I had to weave authentic tongues directly into the stories by writing phrases in my parents' native language, Malayalam—ensuring the lines were said *the way* they said them.

Drafting. I wrote four separate drafts of the stories, moving from a 'standard' to 'benefit-finding' telling (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016). The fourth draft included personal memories I shared with my father throughout my lifespan. And with each draft, fresh insights emerged.

Revising. I had to edit the writing until the sentences *felt* right, which helped spark more memories and gave me the benefit of hindsight. In this way, I remade history by telling a more accurate story of love, loss and grief rather than a traumatized version.

The Four Cornerstones of Grief Stories

The patterns from the second category specifically delved into the writer's grief, bringing forward new insights from this study that targeted bereavement—relationship building, designing a blueprint of grief, strengthening spiritual health, and leaving a lasting footprint.

Relationship Building. As Pennebaker & Evans (2014) suggested, I had to switch perspectives with the other main characters; however, in grief stories, these perspectives had to be delicately balanced against the grief reactions and responses of my family members, ensuring empathy flowed through each story which, in turn, mended souring relationships.

Designing a Blueprint of Grief. To solidify the healing and reconciling of grief, I needed to embed grief theories and processing models directly into the plot. As I moved through

the analysis, I quickly noted that the following theories and models were evident: The 5 Stages (Kübler-Ross, 1969), Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement (Stroebe & Schut, 2010), Tasks of Mourning (Worden, 2018), and Continuing Bonds (Klass & Steffen, 2018).

Strengthening Spiritual Health. Within the 41 vignettes, I examined both my individual and family values and beliefs system to reinforce that the important elements were met in our story of loss to strengthen my spiritual health. The stories also gave me space to explore the extraordinary experiences (LaGrand, 2001) or magical elements of death and dying (Mathew, 2022) that can coincide with loss, such as: feeling my father's presence, hearing his voice, or experiencing dream visitations post-death.

Leaving a Lasting Footprint. The main character (me) had to have an *aha moment* that not only was I carrying my father's legacy forward through the service of writing these stories, but also that I was preserving his memory for my future story.

Conclusion

My evocative autoethnography, *The Revelations of Eapen*, had a positive impact on my transforming identity. By writing these 41 short stories, my Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and severe anxiety and depression decreased; relationships were healed within our morphing family dynamic; a sense of story revival emerged, filling in the gaps lost to trauma; reconciliation and healing took place through a disclosure of grief illiteracy; and Post-Traumatic Growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001) was evident as I experienced a restored sense of meaning and purpose. Using this targeted approach to storytelling—with proper research, planning, and safety measures in place—impactful grief work can be carried out in the comfort of one's home, or within a school setting, simply by putting pen to paper. The practical element of my study was constructing a seven-day unit—*Storytelling Through Your Sadness*—for educators willing to support bereaved students in the classroom. And as we tweak the guidelines to fit their specific circumstances of loss, I am confident that a strong possibility exists for them to use expressive storytelling to reconcile and heal from the death of a loved one.

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Covert Autoethnography

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Abstract
Doctoral students and researchers commonly practice reflexivity in the research processes. Covert autoethnography was autoethnography which was denied by claims of reflexivity and statements of being unbiased, neutral, and objective. In the research, 15 educational leadership dissertations using qualitative research from 15 universities in the United States of America were examined using thematic analysis. There were three key findings: theory of purification, act of symbolic verification, and theory legitimation. A discussion ensues, with the recommendation researchers need to develop biases within all facets of research.

Keywords
bias, qualitative research, reflexivity, autoethnography

Presentation
https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=f67hiHSwUs8

People cannot deliberately control their perceptual impressions: a sharply seen hilltop looks near even if one has learned of the effect of clarity on the perception of distance.

--Tversky & Kahneman, 1974

No, no! said the Queen. Sentence first—verdict afterwards.

--Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, 1865

In studying frameworks used in qualitative research in educational administration dissertations, an interesting phenomenon was exposed: covert autoethnography. *Covert autoethnography* is the disguise of autoethnography to avoid the shame and accusations of fakery wrought by autoethnography. The researcher impacts the results in all studies, but most qualitative researchers seek to display a validity and reliability borne from impartiality (Chenail, 2011). Prior experiences show condemnation of the method of autoethnography, a mark which is connected to hoaxes and antiresearch (Atkinson, 2006; Dauphinee, 2010). For example, the submission by me of a mixed methods study which included autoethnography was rejected by a journal because the study "lacked a method." The manifestations of covert autoethnography became apparent in concept dilution: Reflexivity and bracketing were/are meaningless acts of fronting. Fronting was the act one does not have a researcher—the self—in the act and reporting of research. Everyone—and I mean everyone—claimed reflexivity and bracketing were guaranteed methods to prevent biases. The denial of self-as-instrumentality reigned supreme in every research project.

Key points emerged within covert autoethnography: orientation and directionality, glamor shots, need for debiasing methods, disconfirmation/dysfluency, and negative cases (Coker, 2022a). By recognizing and admitting one's covert autoethnography, one can improve research outcomes. First, all research, from qualitative to quantitative to mixed methods, has the autoethnographer's voice in any research report. Secondly, there were methods to identify and separate one's position from one's results. Finally, more work will be needed on debiasing techniques, influenced by forensic sciences.

Background

The literature review was difficult: No one claims their results were invalid, biased, or incomplete to require a complete restudy. Quantitative and qualitative research struggle with the problem of making everything ordered, linear, and positivist:

> While large studies are not immune to showing statistical significance but real-world irrelevance, blind adherence to previous research also crippled findings. Social psychology has experienced a replication crisis over the past decade; for example, though 600 studies "confirmed" ego depletion, a re-examination suggested the concept might not exist, was ill defined, and could not be replicated (Coker, 2022a, pp. 403).

Replication in education (Maskel and Pluckner, 2014; the authors point out authors following one's own work did replicate!), psychology (S. Maxwell et al., 2015), and other fields (e.g., Freese & Peterson, 2022; Leppink & Pérez-Fuster, 2017) revealed major problems: Researchers found novel, positive results *every time*, but no/few could ever reproduce them.

Doctoral students were especially at risk, as the dissertation was often the first time one researched and entered the field. The chances of publication, quality, and future use were low (Coyne et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2018). Dissertations in educational administration almost always work, claimed generalizability/transferability, and found novel/important findings (Coker, 2022b). If one conducted research, the chances of finding what one desired was almost a given.

Nickerson (1998) pointed out confirmation bias can be deliberate or implicit, and building a case and making desired inferences were natural and ubiquitous. There were claims reflexivity could mitigate and remove biases (Jootun et al., 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2012; Watt, 2007), but others pointed out not only could reflexivity not be a magical solution to remove biases, how one could access biases and overcome them remained unproven (Coker, 2023; Doyle, 2012; Salzman, 2002). The gap in the literature was reflexivity and being unbiased were popular but lacked a research basis to operationalize the practices and value.

Theoretical Background

A conceptual basis influenced the research design and iteration. Itiel Dror provided a theoretical and inspirational background for the following study. Dror found experts were especially suspect to confirmation bias, using contextualization and others' decisions which unwittingly influenced one's findings (Dror et al., 2006; Kassin et al., 2013). Another issue was theoretical arrogance, where researchers were theoretically driven or using a theoretical spectacle versus theory based (Coker, 2022a; Goia, 2021; Kim, 2015). Instead of using theory and prior research to develop a dialectic, researchers used their theories and one's *weltanschauung* as representations to find and not challenge data.

Methodology

A thematic analysis analyzed 15 educational administration dissertations with a focus on the reflexivity and results sections. Thematic analysis was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), with a coding schema of reading/annotating, in vivo, descriptive, memoing, aha moments, questioning, categorization/relationship development, themes, and metathemes (Coker, 2021). All data received a geocode to track location, and intermittent thematic formation was used to track the development of themes while formally questioning, debating, and challenging findings (Coker, 2022b). The reflexivity and results sections were coded and compared to the literature. My position as someone who completed a traditional dissertation, multiple autoethnographies, and frequent peer reviewer, impacted the results.

There were 15 dissertations from 15 different universities in the United States, all in educational administration. The original goal was 15-20 dissertations, as previous research and practices suggested key themes which would be representative would need at least 6-8 in the sample (Guest et al., 2006). All dissertations were from 2010-2020, and the criteria were the following: all dissertations were strictly qualitative in nature, traditional, in English, completely online, and full text available. To achieve variation, there were 7 phenomenological, 6 grounded theory, 1 narrative inquiry, and 1 autoethnography in the study. Of the 15 dissertations, 13 were Ed.D. and 2 were Ph.D. All data from the dissertations were downloaded in Microsoft Word, and data analysis took place in Microsoft Excel.

Results

Covert autoethnography was defined as autoethnography—self as instrumentality and results in either/or/combinatory of analytical and evocative—but hidden and denied. Within the paradigm of covert autoethnography, researchers presented themselves as neutral, objective, and grounded in the research. Three primary results explained the fronting of covert autoethnography; fronting was the denial of self as an instrument and influence in the research. The three primary methods of covert autoethnography were the following:

➢ Theory of purification → *the invisibility cloak*
➢ Act of symbolic verification → *the conceptual dilution*
➢ Theory legitimization → *theory as antiacademic argument*

The theory of purification explicated the researcher disappeared and did not influence the results. One donned an invisibility cloak, banishing oneself from the study and using the data to speak for itself. Coker (2022a) differentiated orientation from directionality, where one is concerned with a particular problem or viewpoint (orientation) and the other (directionality) sought to confirm/prove one's worldview. Researchers bracketed, developed an epoche, "intentionally prevented biases," "compartmentalize," and "journaled" to remove the researcher. The most common conclusion by researchers: "ensured." Ensured an unbiased study, completely valid, reliable, and neutral. The invisibility cloak meant the researcher, in all instances of the magical reflexivity which lacked any discussion of the microprocesses beyond a label, always removed any biases or problems with interpretations. Some studies acknowledged reflexivity was not a part of one's study (e.g., interpretative phenomenology, autoethnography, etc.), but if one discussed reflexivity, biases and prejudices were eliminated. Many authors mentioned the need for reflexivity as a given in the methods section and never addressed the issue again.

There was symbolic verification, or researchers citing a process in name only and then claiming unfettered success. Lacking were problems, rewrites, or an admission the researcher

saw and felt themselves within the research. Unlike Dror's studies, one claimed "journaling," "peer debriefing," "auditing," "understanding," and "transparency" were symbolic acts to tell readers "Look, I followed the guidelines and ideas in my graduate classes. There is no autoethnography here. Only true, validated, grounded research. Move along." Lacking was the discussion of the microprocesses of reflexivity, and a doubtful provenance endures because there were no dysfluencies, disconfirmations, theoretical rejections, or divergences. Every concept was diluted to reflect preordained results. There was not a description of how any method worked except a leap of faith that merely writing one's thoughts or talking with a colleague eliminated biases and prejudices. Overfitting, where super-linearity and lack of any divergence, outliers, or stubs, existed.

The theory of legitimization was the theory was the results. Soft/strong or narrow/broad theory did not matter—no one ever disproved or disagreed with an included theory. Results aligned from the beginning, and theory served an antiacademic argument by using *argumentum ad verecundiam* to develop circular reasoning. Positionality statements were full of meaningless stereotypes which revealed nothing about the hidden *hypothesis*, or what researchers thought one would find. (Are there any researchers who commit to a dissertation over 3-10 years and have no feelings about what they think will happen in their research? Apparently, everyone has no thoughts about the conclusions of their dissertations.) Every researcher in a dissertation expects a finding, yet failing to proffer what one thinks will happen sends one's autoethnography underground.

Key points emerged within covert autoethnography: orientation and directionality, glamor shots, need for debiasing methods, disconfirmation/dysfluency, and negative cases (Coker, 2022a). Researchers viewed autoethnography as a fake method, not worthy of the label of research proper. By hiding one's directionality and highlighting glamor shots (exemplars which proved a point while omitting negatives), researchers could confirm their findings were data driven. Debiasing was a methodless decision with guaranteed results; all studies lacked disconfirmation/dysfluency and negative cases. The irony was autoethnography admitted the researcher was part of the study and findings, but covert autoethnographers privileged a positivist post-positivism. The irony of the self-contradiction should not be lost.

There were divergences. Some authors either omitted reflexivity or downplayed the importance. There was an exemplar, where a researcher admitted negatives and outliers, though the section remained incomplete and underdeveloped. There were claims of "ensured," "deliberately avoided," and "intentionally resisted," but one could neither see nor verify the veracity; maybe retreating within oneself was sufficient. Possibly the statements "biases are irrelevant" and "not engaging in my own experiential analysis" were the most reflexive of all.

Absences detailed a major issue: problematization. No researcher in their reflexivity mentioned a dialectic which produced debate, disagreement, and separation amongst the researcher, the participants, and the academic community. If someone did something, there was instanter, unmitigated success. How or what moved beyond "putting aside personal bias and suspending judgment," "feelings . . . did not transfer them into the research," and "makes it possible to maintain openness" was never explicated except like most methods in qualitative research, everything worked. Qualitativists might claim to be chaotic and post-positivists, but the certainty and neatness of claims would look like parametric tests with p-values statistically significant at the .0001 level if on the quantitative side.

Discussion
There was a hidden reality in every study. First, bias elimination was a myth (McGannon & Smith, 2018). One can recognize, acknowledge, and minimize biases, but biases were endemic to all research which involved humans. No one stated how one eliminated biases beyond if one did something, there was no work or effort and 100% success. Secondly, most every researcher found what one was looking for/desired (confirmation bias); finding the opposite or contradictory results was a stark anomaly (Hamati-Ataya, 2013; Cook & Therrien, 2017). The two points, being neutral and finding oneself in one's research, were at odds. The conclusion: One's autoethnography went underground, covering up oneself within one's research.

Kim (2015) spoke about epics, which produce authoritative, complete stories with no room for questioning or alternatives. Doctoral students, probably subconsciously and implicitly, operate like the publication bias (Banks et al., 2012) common in all research: Finding complete, novel, and unquestionable research. There was a stasis with a gaze and fixation on oneself; within the provincialism was a predestination wrought with a procreation of self within the data. Instead of a transformation, one translated one's self into one's data and results. Ricouer (1981) and Gadamer (2013) called for questioning, doubting, and identifying one's prejudices within the history, self, and future. Recognizing a *mystory* within the historicity and facticity of one's research can create the critical realism suggested by J. Maxwell (2012).

Many recommendations could improve research. First, the autoethnographer in all of us needs to be recognized, valued, and identified. Secondly, instead of eliminating biases or viewing prejudices negatively (think Spence, 2001), researchers need to harness their biases, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Developing biases to establish reliability and validity.

Problem	Bias	Shift
Critical means urgency; ascribing instead of finding	*Kritikos* bias	Judge, discern, and question all data, decisions, and results
Linearity in research and thinking	Dissonance bias	Develop a chaotic approach to doubt one's research and challenge priming
Lacking negatives, outliers, or stubs	Disconfirmation bias	Challenge one's findings with reasonable and unreasonable alternatives
Singular categorization, classification, and conceptualization	Continuum bias	Move from overfitting to allowing more categories and degrees of separation
Theory driven and theory arrogance	Mosaic bias	Theories and paradigms should be pragmatically applied and individualized beyond a single path; there are multiple paradigms

		and theories which control a researcher
Collapsing and reducing research to one voice	Multivocality bias	Develop and honor a horizontalism throughout the research
Contextualizing everything within one's own view	Decontextualization bias	Examine base rate and contextualize-decontextualize to differentiate thinking based upon a priori/post priori thinking

Kim (2015) pointed out epics were more like propaganda than research. Coker (2023) went so far to make the following startling claim: "If researchers ignored directionality and relational sampling (by failing to recognize one's emotional and personal vulnerabilities), one might as well skip Chapters 2-4 and proceed to Chapter 5." Researchers who subvert themselves in covert autoethnography with the problems in Table 1 work to deny themselves and focus on preferred findings within a frame projected within one's own sense of reality. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) called this phenomenon biases of imagination, often rooted in biases of availability, retrievability, and the search set. The problem of surface excess meant researchers developed a *Snow White* paradox: One's results, married to one's theory and extant thinking, was found easily and was deemed the most fair of them all (Bourdieu, 1988, spoke of *homo academicus)*. A multisystemic bias of compression and reduction of the world into a neat, clear phenomenon reduced humans and events to a flat portrayal; a distanciation from master narratives and prescriptive macro/meta themes and theories can circumvent a parody of self which becomes agenda driven and more theological-of-self than theoretical or conceptual.

Conclusion

There is a challenge to examine this study's validity and reliability: Find a study using critical in the name of a theory which did not find the preferred narrative (one could search for Marxism, decolonialism, or Western-inspired theory, etc., as well, and what one leads with, one finds). Find a dissertation which did not coincide with one's positionality. Find a study where reflexivity created challenges. Myths and oversimplification to the point of ideologues dominated much of the non-autoethnography research. Reflexivity without method relied on the following dubious position:

> Reflexivity as self-positioning and self-reporting, in depending on realistic self-awareness and honest disclosure, is a rather pre-Freudian idea, assuming, as it does, that all of our critical personal parameters are available to the consciousness, and that people present themselves with no ulterior motives. These assumptions appear to be unwarranted (Salzman, 2002, pp. 810)

Reflexivity, like many microprocesses in qualitative research, was ill-defined and served a political spectacle devoid of meaning (Coker, 2023). Coker (2020), Quiglet-McBride et al. (2022), Chenail (2011), and Carr et al. (2017) provided a path forward: Defined steps which cause one to unmoor and lose oneself from one's prior position, but in the end admits positonality and biases as part of the process. An adversarial approach amongst and between self, theory, the extant literature, the university culture, and participants can shift covert

autoethnography to the overt. Many of the steps were not natural, commonsense, and relied on cognitive science. Covert autoethnography hurts all research by corrupting results under the guise of being nonbiased. The business-as-usual approach privileges the rejection of autoethnography while simultaneously masking validity and reliability.

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What do Literary Editors Look for When Vetting Evocative Autoethnographies and How has this Process Evolved?

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Abstract
The AutoEthnographer Literary and Arts Magazine is a digital nonprofit dedicated to presenting the creative side of autoethnography. By developing a refereed, open-source publication featuring evocative, personal stories of cultural experience presented in an array of modalities, we aim to support emerging authors and artists, to promote cultural diversity and appreciation, and to celebrate creative expression as a vehicle for shared understanding. As we are not an academic journal, however, one of the more challenging aspects of editing the magazine has been establishing the review process. As such, this presentation will respond to the questions, "What do editors look for when reviewing evocative autoethnographies for a non-academic publication, and how has this process evolved throughout the magazine's first year?" Members of the magazine's editorial board will address the development of our vetting system, the significance of a writer's or artist's memo, some of the rhetorical tensions we face when reviewing, and conclude by offering strategies to autoethnographers interested in publication.

Keywords
method, publication, advice, evocative, vetting

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The AutoEthnographer Literary and Arts Magazine is a digital nonprofit dedicated to presenting the creative side of autoethnography. By developing a refereed open source publication featuring evocative personal stories of cultural experience presented in an array of modalities, we aim to support emerging authors and artists to promote cultural diversity and appreciation and to celebrate creative expression as a vehicle for shared understanding and positive change. As we are not an academic journal, however, one of the more challenging aspects of editing the magazine has been establishing the review process. As such, this presentation will respond to the questions, "What do editors look for when reviewing evocative autoethnography for a non-academic publication and how has this process evolved throughout the magazine's first year?" Members of the magazine's editorial board will address the development of our vetting system; the significance of an author or artist's memo; some of the rhetorical tensions we face when reviewing; and conclude by offering strategies to autoethnographers interested in publication

How has the vetting process evolved?

Due to the various genres of work we receive, we require an author or artist's memo that contextualizes or explains the submission in relation to autoethnography. The memo answers the questions, "How is this work autoethnographic and which cultures or cultural issues are being addressed?" Here's an example:

> 'The Closet in the Classroom' (Harrison, 2021) responds to the question: What was it like being a queer *gaijin sensei* or foreign teacher at the turn of the millennium in Western Japan? Using story to report cultural experience, 'Closet' autoethnographically presents the anxieties, choices and progress I made understanding how to construct, reveal, and perform a queer sexual identity in light of my developing teacher identity.

The editorial process begins with editors reading submissions, either accepting, accepting with revision, or rejecting work, and providing brief written feedback. Initially, there was no rubric or criteria. Our own definitions of autoethnography guided our evaluations. Three readers were assigned to each submission, and the author/artist memos helped contextualize the more abstract work, such as poetry, video, and performance. Editors agreed to support the development of works that showed promise reflecting our editorial philosophy of nurturing new authors and artists.

But as our editorial board grew, we realized that we needed a standard rubric for vetting with clear criteria. Since January 2022 editors begin by considering how submissions demonstrate the characteristics and purposes of autoethnography as outlined by Holman Jones, et al. (2013)

> Holman Jones et al. (2013) 4 characteristics of autoethnography:
> - purposefully commenting on/critiquing of culture and cultural practice;
> - making contributions to existing research;
> - embracing vulnerability with purpose;
> - and creating a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response.
> Holman Jones et al. (2013) also explain that autoethnography can serve 5 purposes as a method:
> - disrupting norms of research, practice, and representation;
> - working from insider knowledge;

- maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty, and making life better;
- breaking silence reclaiming voice and writing to right;
- and making work accessible

However, our experiences in the world of literary magazine publication have shown us that this criteria reflects an academic journal approach to editing; lit mags don't give feedback, nor do they nurture promising work.

As editor-in-chief, I also began to feel uncomfortable about offering opportunities for writers to revise their compositions, but not to folks submitting songs, photos or videos. So, we decided to keep things simple, especially in light of the increase of submissions we were enjoying: no more feedback and no more acceptance with revisions and mentoring. We were going full lit mag style. We did feel that the memo was key to the success of many of our contributions, however, and as such we decided that we would request memo revision as needed. Memos typically contextualize the work and establish the cultural issues being discussed. More recently, however, after growing our editorial board and reconsidering our mission yet again, we've moved back to a philosophy of nurturing any submissions we receive, no matter the genre.

What do editors look for when vetting evocative submissions?

Nadine Khair, one of our editors who is also a marketing scholar, explains: "The magazine takes autoethnography to a different level of freedom, experience and self-expression and keeps autoethnography, but drops the element of research to allow writers to express themselves in a variety of ways."

"Being a literary and arts magazine, we acknowledge the limitations of some art forms in achieving the full academic autoethnography as a research method. The rhetorical tensions can be addressed by the author's memo, which also allows the author to address those limitations," explains Lina Fe Simoy, editor and media director.

Editor and poet Jay Meadows adds, "It is the flash of personality and identity. The moment of healing or deep introspection that I look for. I want to leave a peace feeling like I know the author all the better simply by reading their work."

"I am looking for narratives that provide thoughtful, powerful, and compelling imagery or commentary in whatever area the artist chooses to submit. Accessibility is important in a piece. I do look for the narrative to connect and speak to wider themes in society," writes editor and ISAN award winner Shanita Mitchell.

Founder and editor-in-chief Marlen Harrison emphasizes, "I look to see that the contributor is concerned with a cultural issue and presents cultural inquiry in some way. I also look for a strong memo contextualizing the work as an autoethnography, and clearly defining and discussing the cultural issue being examined."

"I look for works that use personal experience to explore culture. I want to see personal experience used as a way to reflect and comment on the society and cultures that surround us," explains author and editor Odessa Ogo.

Author and editor Jessica Gullion concludes, "Mills wrote that we should explore history and biography and the relations between the two within society. History meant the larger social context while biography is the personal story. What I am looking for is: How does your story inform the readers about a larger story?"

What strategies do we recommend?

Lena Fe Simoy explains, "Whilst respecting the integrity of autoethnography as an established research method*, The AutoEthnographer* aims to make room for other art forms and acknowledge their autoethnographic value." Lena continues, "My advice to those who are interested in publishing with us is to familiarize themselves with autoethnography and understand its basic difference from autobiography. Focus on lived experience and explore a meaningful phenomenon whilst remaining faithful to your chosen art form."

Managing editor Dilek Islir Hayirli suggests contributors look for "the emotions, feelings and reactions of the researcher towards a specific situation. I would like to see the crisis or dilemma felt if there are any during the research"

Author and editor Sandra Faulkner writes "When I am reading a submission, I want to be transported into the world the author has created, to forget that I'm reading a submission, and to be completely immersed in the piece."

Nadine Khair asserts that "the focus is what is behind the words or expression and is more on the feelings associated with the culturally specific situation." Nadine continues, "It's more like living the experience with their writer or artist to understand their perspectives, challenges, experiences, and so on.

Marlen Harrison explains, "The work should ultimately be a story no matter the medium. And that story should concern a specific cultural issue. Help us understand how that story celebrates, interrogates or illuminates a specific cultural context or phenomenon. This is where you and your lived experience come in."

"And stories take many forms: photos, drawings, dance, music, video, art, and performance are all possible modes of autoethnographic storytelling," adds Marlen.

For more information as well as resources and strategies from *The AutoEthnographer's* magazine editors, please visit https://theautoethnographer.com/what-is-autoethnography.

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From Ethnographer to *Maira*:
Reflections on the Interactive Moral Aesthetics of Researching Street Populations in Mexico

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Abstract

After working as a street educator for ten years, I began an ethnographic research project with young people living on the streets of Mexico City. Quique was the young man who guided me through this lifeworld for my doctoral dissertation. When he was sentenced to prison at the age of 18, I intervened and tried to help him start a new life in Guadalajara. This paper presents a summary of Quique's life story and explores how we influenced one another, focusing on the complexity of morality in researching youth in contexts plagued by chronic violence.

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Introduction

After my first two years at a liberal arts college nestled among Ohio's cornfields, I enrolled in a service-learning exchange program to spend a semester in Guadalajara, Mexico. The program was set up with a weekly schedule divided between classes at an elite private university and volunteer work with a local nonprofit. I was assigned to the 'Open-Air School' of an organization dedicated to aiding street children, called MAMA. After a morning of Spanish, Sociology, and Mexican history classes, I would consume a multicourse meal prepared by my host mother and travel an hour by bus to teach basic literacy to children who sold trinkets, shined shoes, or begged for change in downtown Guadalajara. The experience was a turning point in my life. I decided that my calling was to become a *'maira'*, a local term for street educators, meaning a mix between teacher, companion, and mentor.

Upon finishing my degree in International Studies, I returned to Guadalajara to pursue my dream. As one can only do in her early twenties, I juggled two fulltime jobs (street educator and first grade teacher at a prestigious bilingual school), while studying a master's in education and writing a thesis on pedagogical interventions with children living and working on the streets. After a couple of years, I left my job at MAMA to start another nonprofit, CODENI. Though similar to MAMA in many ways, CODENI aimed to be less paternalistic, with the mission to empower street children and their families. Over the years, I have witnessed kids who I met begging for change become nurses, teachers and civil engineers. However, others continue to survive off the informal economy of the streets, and some even send their own children to CODENI, hoping maybe they will be able to break the cycle of poverty for their family.

Those who seemed to be 'attached to the streets' (Lucchini, 1998) left me restless. Thus, from 2008 to 2012, I dedicated myself to a doctoral program in Social Sciences with a dissertation focused on educational projects with youth living on the streets in Mexico City. As tends to occur when studying a PhD, instead of finding a successful model help children overcome their dependence on the streets, the more I delved into the street world as an academic, the more complicated it became for me.

During my fieldwork, I documented the lives of over a dozen young people living on the streets (Strickland, 2015). Those who grow up on the streets in Mexico City are only expected to live to the age of 24. To my knowledge, four of the young men whose life stories are documented in my thesis are now dead. I have dealt with the grief of each passing differently, but writing has always helped.

I recently learned of the death of the young man who guided me through the street world in Mexico City, Quique. Remembering his life story and what I learned from him inspired me to write this memoir. I begin with a summary of Quique's life up until I met him, reconstructed from his autobiographical narrative and in-depth interviews with street educators and members of his family. The second part of the paper focuses on my own 'engaged learning process' (Carrithers, 1992), based on experiences with Quique, first as an ethnographer and later as a *maira*.

Quique's childhood

With a wallet full of freshly earned dollars, Juan persuaded Yadira to move from Tijuana to live with his family outside Mexico City. Already pregnant with Quique and unwed, Juan's family rejected Yadira from the get-go. The relationship was further complicated by heavy drinking and domestic disputes, but it lasted long enough to bring two children into the world, Quique and his younger sister, Sarita. Due to regular quarrels with Quique's grandmother, the family would often leave home for several days. On one such occasion, they were staying in a hotel in one of Mexico City's rougher neighborhoods when Yadira went out to pick up some tacos and never came back. The children returned to their grandmother's apartment with their father and never saw their mom again.

Juan began drinking more, and prolonged absences from home became the norm, sometimes taking Quique with him. They traveled on freight trains, begged for change, stole things, and slept on the streets. When Juan would hit rock bottom, he would call his mother to bail him out of jail or let them move back in. Left to raise Sarita on her own, she decided to give her to a couple of doctors unable to have children of their own. According to Quique's Aunt Patty, the grandmother offered the couple both children, but they only wanted Sarita, supposedly because she was a light skinned while Quique was dark.

At the age of five, Quique traveled to Veracruz on a freight train with his father. For nearly two years they lived in a vacant lot a few blocks from the beach. Juan spent his days drinking whatever alcohol he could find, while Quique begged in the streets and sometimes took care of a smaller child at a mechanic shop. "The guys from the shop paid me with food, and I took it to share with my dad. [My dad] always took care of me. I was his favorite. He never hit me," Quique remembered.

One day Quique's grandmother received a call from the Veracruz police department. They had arrested her son and reported that he was in the terminal phase of cirrhosis. Quique was sent to live with a great-aunt in the state of Puebla. Juan died six months later, without the opportunity to say goodbye to his son who was then eight years old.

Quique did not adapt to the home in Puebla and was sent to live with his aunt Patty and uncle Hugo in the same apartment complex where his grandmother lived. Hugo and Patty worked at a night club, and their oldest daughter would look after her younger siblings and Quique at night. About a year after Quique moved in, Patty found out that he had asked his younger cousin and a neighbor to take off their panties. She and Hugo decided that he could no longer stay there, and his grandmother refused to take him in.

"Since I couldn't be there taking care of him, I had to look for another option," explained Patty. "A friend who lives in the city said, 'Send him to me, I have all boys, so there won't be any problems.'" Quique resented his aunt for having "given him away," but he soon began to feel at home with the Guzmáns.

"They treated me very well, but they never loved me as much as their own kids," Quique recalled. He lived with them for several years, but eventually the parents became exhausted by his teenage rebellion, and shortly after his 14th birthday they left him at *Casa Alianza*, a nonprofit for homeless children in Mexico City. There Quique quickly joined a group of kids 'from the streets'. "We escaped [*Casa Alianza*] at least five times. We stayed outside the Justice Department, by the horse statue, in *El Zarco*, but they always let us back in," he remembered with a smile.

A year after his arrival at *Casa Alianza*, the social worker asked the Guzmán family to take him back, promising to provide regular follow up visits and support services for Quique. Despite not having a birth certificate, they were able to enroll him in a general education program for teens and adults where he would be able to earn an elementary school equivalency diploma.

Mr. Guzmán was working in the United States at the time, and one day a DVD player arrived in the mail. "It was really cool," Quique recalled. "You couldn't get ones like that in Mexico yet." He took it to school to show off and lost it. Afraid to return home without it, he decided to stay with a group of street kids outside the Justice Department on *Avenida Reforma* that he knew from *Casa Alianza*. There he met 13-year-old Lupita, and they quickly became a couple. Quique never saw the Guzmáns again.

Soon after Quique's arrival, the group began to have problems with local business owners. "The cops took our things […] they didn't want us there anymore. A dude who's in prison now showed me the '*Garibaldío*' [a vacant building by the mariachi plaza in the neighborhood known as *Garibaldi*]. It'd be safer for Lupita because not so many people came in."

For the next four years. Quique and Lupita recognized the *Garibaldío* as their 'primary residence'. Over time, they developed a substantial network of churches, nonprofits, restaurants, and vendors in the area that provided them with food and clothing. When they wanted a break

from the streets, there were also several cheap hotels in the neighborhood that would rent them a room without asking for ID.

Nearing adulthood, Quique had several run-ins with the law. The first was at a public shelter:

> You know the old people who sit by the entrance in their wheelchairs? Well, they left a chair outside, and we took it. The security guard thought my friend was disabled and we told him we were going to the store. We knew a man who was really crippled not far from the shelter, so we sold him the chair for [three bucks].

A few months later, another guy who was staying in the *Garibaldío* showed up with a stove and some steaks. "All that was missing was the gas to make a super dinner […] You can jump from the *Garibaldío* to the houses behind it and that's where we saw a tank of gas. We got it, but the thing was the house belonged to a cop..." Both incidents resulted in Quique being locked up for less than a month in a youth detention center.

Shortly after his second release, I met Quique and Lupita at a drop-in center for street youth. He was the first person living on the streets of Mexico City who was willing to share his life story with me. "What are you trying to do?" he asked me over a plate of scrambled eggs and tortillas one morning. "I want to write a book about kids living on the streets and their relationship with organizations like this one," I responded. "Alright. I'll be your partner for the project. Just tell me what you want to know and where you want me to take you."

As others saw me with Quique, they agreed to be interviewed, as well. He let me tag along with him and Lupita to buy drugs, clean windshields, and hang out in the *Garibaldío.* However, part way through my documentation of Quique's story, he was arrested once again, but this time he was prosecuted as an adult. As a 'first-time offender', after three months in prison, the judge reduced his sentence for stealing a discman and some cash from another kid on the streets to 32 months of parole.

When Quique arrived at the *Garibaldío*, there was no sign of Lupita, and none of his friends had seen her for over a month. It was rumored that she had hooked up with a guy from another group and was prostituting herself on *Avenida Reforma*. Others said she had been stabbed to death in *Tepito,* likely the most notorious neighborhood in Mexico City for criminal activity. Quique hit rock bottom. He spent three weeks smoking crack in the *Garibaldío,* until Samuel, a *mairo* from the drop-in center where I first met Quique and Lupita, showed up.

Quique and the *maira*

When Samuel told me he had found Quique, it became my new mission to help him exit the street world, just like he had helped me to enter it. First, we set out to search for Lupita. We filed a missing person's report with the Human Rights Commission and distributed flyers with her photo to drop-in centers and other places frequented by street youth.[1]

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[1] Lupita appeared several months later. She had been in a safe house for underage sex workers and was released when she turned 18. In 2018 she contacted me through Facebook and told me she was off the streets, living with her boyfriend and their son.

Quique stopped smoking crack and began attending the center where Samuel worked twice a week. We knew that sooner or later he would be picked up by the cops for violating his parole conditions if he stayed at the *Garibaldío*. "Since I've already missed appointments, they won't give me another chance, they'll lock me up again," he explained. Furthermore, we all agreed that he would never leave the streets if he stayed in Mexico City, so we began to plan a fresh start for Quique in Guadalajara.

Taking advantage of contacts from my time as a street educator, I secured a place for Quique in a shelter for youth, and I set up a plan for personalized accompaniment from Beto, a CODENI *mairo*. It was agreed that he would go to Guadalajara with me as soon as I finished my fieldwork. However, three weeks before our departure date, he was picked up by the same officer who had originally arrested him for stealing the discman.

I tracked down the judge assigned to his case and told her Quique's story and our plan for a fresh start. She listened patiently with a stern face. "My husband was killed by a man who lived on the streets twelve years ago," she finally said. My heart sunk, imagining Quique as an opportunity for revenge for her loss. "Our youngest son was the same age as that Quique was when he lost his father. It hit him harder than any of us, he's still in therapy. If Quique stays in prison, we both know there's no hope for him." She set the lowest bail possible and explained what I needed to do to set up his parole process in Guadalajara. At 11 p.m. the night before our departure date, Quique was released from prison for the second time.

In less than a month I would begin another stage of my doctoral fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro, but Quique promised not to let me down. He began to work at a print shop owned by Beto's family just a couple blocks from the parole office in downtown Guadalajara, and he was well liked by the staff at both places.

While in Rio, Beto sent me weekly reports about Quique. He finally got a birth certificate, and he resumed his studies to finish elementary school. In his free time, he volunteered at CODENI, helping the *mairos* and playing with the kids. However, drugs were common at the shelter, and Quique failed to resist the temptation.

When I arrived from Brazil, Quique was living on the streets in downtown Guadalajara and told me he was "on strike from bathing." It had been weeks since he had showed up at the print shop, CODENI, or the parole office. Beto and I did not want to accept our failure. Over the next 12 months, we tried every pedagogical strategy we could imagine, and we enrolled him in rehab centers on two occasions. We even invited him to sleep in our homes. After a long year of forced interventions, I finally accepted Quique's decision to live on the streets. With tears in my eyes, I told him that I would not help him until he agreed to return to rehab.

He would break into shops at night and spend his days using drugs and cleaning windshields for change. I learned that there are no geographical limits to the street world.

Closing reflections

My relationship with Quique speaks to what Michael Carrithers (2005) has identified as 'interactive moral aesthetics'. As Carrithers explains, when guided by morality, a reciprocal appreciation emerges in relationships that are formed in sociocultural research. It was this morality that motivated me to look for Lupita, to pay Quique's bail, and to help him plan a 'new life' in Guadalajara. The same moral aesthetics motivated Quique to take me to parts of Mexico City's street world that, according to him, "no anthropologist had ever set foot in." As our friendship progressed, so did our support for one another. In Guadalajara, I made sure his basic needs were met and assisted him with his homework. In return, he listened patiently to my research findings and helped me rethink some conclusions.

When the addictions took control of Quique's life once again, morality (and ego) kept me from accepting the failure of my plan to help him 'overcome his attachment to the streets' (Lucchini, 1998). Letting go was painful, but eventually the pain began to produce knowledge. My ongoing reflection on this engaged learning process has not only broadened and deepened my understanding of street connectedness, it has also led to new understandings of intercultural relations.

As Carrithers explains, such relationships "must be built on a sense of the other's worth and on trust, that is, mutual predictability and the presumption of mutual aid" (2005, p. 438). In this line of thought, along with my intention to offer tribute to the life of one of my greatest teachers, I urge social scientists to allow themselves to be guided by morally based inter- and intrapersonal reflections.

To close, I would like to share three insights that I attribute to my relationship with Quique. The first relates to my understanding of cultural relativism (Cook, 1978). While there are aspects of street culture that I continue to condemn (such as robberies and sexual violence), I now realize that leaving the street does not make you a better person. Initially, the contrast between my own values and those I encountered in the streets generated the shock that motivated me to intervene in Quique's life. However, the more I learned about street culture, the more I began to recognize some of my own beliefs as contingent and arbitrary.

Bernardo Turnbull claims that one of the main obstacles for *mairos* is how they cling to the worldview of dominant society (Turnbull et al., 2009). They often insist that street children assimilate this worldview in order to receive assistance. Ultimately, this was part of my mistake when I tried to help Quique.

The second insight is related to the relativism of how violence is experienced. Shortly before accepting the failure of my intervention with Quique, he arrived at my house around midnight, his face covered in blood. He told me that he was keeping an eye on cars parked outside a bar downtown when some other guys came to take over the block. The confrontation escalated into a fight where a bottle was broken over his head. I hoped he had hit rock bottom and was going to accept my invitation to go back into rehab. However, he just rinsed off his head and limped back out the door. "It's the blows of street life," he said over his shoulder. "Don't worry about me." Here

I realized that violent acts affect each person differently. What is unimaginable for me is assimilated as daily violence for kids like Quique.

My third reflection regards the scope of sociocultural research. As academics, we generally focus on our contributions to a field of knowledge, but when we recognize interactive moral aesthetics, our appreciation for 'the Other', and our commitment to their well-being, becomes more relevant. The categories of activist, educator, and researcher need not be so rigid, considering that all three roles should be guided by the same sense of morality. Consequently, action-research projects involving participants with diverse profiles offer a much greater impact than traditional methods focused solely on the production of knowledge (Latorre, 2003). Perhaps the most radical insight that resulted from this engaged learning experience is how much more I learned after I stopped trying to be a 'researcher' and acted as a *maira*.

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Understanding Conspiracy Theory Belief Through Creative Writing

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Abstract
I am embarking on the journey of writing a novel as the creative artefact for a research degree. Using autoethnography as the research methodology has allowed the analysis and understanding of, not just the creative process but, also, the research process.
The creative artefact strives to be an action novel that is enjoyable to read but will also share knowledge with the audience on how conspiracy theories and propaganda are propagated, how to clarify if a piece of media is misinformation, and how to assist a friend or family member who has found themselves in a dangerous position of being in a cult-like group.

Keywords
Autoethnography, conspiracy theories, creative writing, misinformation

———————————————

I begin today by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land I'm on, the Kalkadoon People, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

I'm currently working on a research degree at CQUniversity where I am producing a creative artefact, a novel, that delves into conspiracy theory belief. Autoethnography is one of my methodologies and I am looking at understanding and analysing conspiracy theory belief through the eyes of a journalist.

The research, that is going into understanding conspiracy theory psychology and philosophy, has been, and continues to be, filtered through a personal lens as the autoethnographer, and interpreted into the creative artefact. This occurs through journaling, as does the creativity behind the characters and action of the story itself.

My research question is: How does the use of design, content and language within the media, including social media and websites, influence people's belief of conspiracies and propaganda plus satisfy someone's inherent need for community?

Ultimately, my goal is to understand what draws people into conspiracy theories, to pass on information to the general public, and to help friends and families of people lost to conspiracy belief.

I'll be achieving this through a creative artefact that draws on my experience as a journalist and as a researcher.

Plot Overview
- Amina is the protagonist.
- Amina's partner gets involved in conspiracy theory community.
- Amina needs to discover why he believes the information he is finding.
- She uncovers an actual conspiracy during her investigation.
- She finds new love and lots of action!

Subplots
- Multi-Level Marketing.
- Psychological Operations.
- Who makes money from conspiracy theories? (I believe there is always a money trail).
- Family dynamics and support systems.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is the vehicle that pushes the amalgamation of the psychology, of why people find solace in certain dangerous conspiracy theories, how believers find themselves in a conspiracy theory community, but also the creative practice of writing a full-length novel. These two practices are worlds apart, but this methodology brings them together so that the creative artefact's accompanying exegesis will provide a thorough understanding of the personal process and how the creative artefact can inspire and teach the community. It will be the story behind the story, providing insight into how the current research on conspiracy theories and propaganda has influenced and informed the creativity.

I will be looking through the advertisement library on Facebook for similarities or falsehoods. Taking into consideration font styles, colours, wording, photographic styles. I will also be talking to people about their beliefs and how they feel about terms such as conspiracy theorist and debunking. I have been also studying far right news websites and conspiracy theory sites to look at how they make money, what sort of advertisements they have and how they request donations.

This has all involved a significant amount of time trawling through fact checking websites such as Snopes then double checking their facts.

Methodology Example

Previously, I worked in a research communications role in government where I would sometimes have to fact-check and debunk a conspiracy theory. This experience has inspired and shaped the protagonist of my story and my understanding of how misinformation is created.

An example of this is a sign that was photographed at a beach in Victoria, Australia. On first glance, I see a piece of paper printed in black with a small amount of red and that straight away says that it wasn't printed by a council, but I need a bit more evidence than that.

City of Greater Melbourne doesn't exist. There is Melbourne City Council and several other councils that make up the greater Melbourne area but none by that name. There are also no beaches in the Melbourne City Council shire.

A quick internet search for the Supreme Islamic Council of Victoria shows that it also doesn't exist and that the closest name is the Islamic Council of Victoria.

The fact checking website, Snopes, has covered all of this but I followed up with a phone call to the Melbourne City Council to make sure that my research and the fact checking websites were correct. (Emery 2018)

This process is what I am hoping to teach people through my novel. That it is reasonable to ask questions and to look into the information you are seeing but that research needs to take into account official websites, and you can't do it all on the internet, pick up the phone and double check.

The Inspiration
I love fiction that involves secret organisations and conspiracy. A few pieces that have inspired me in beginning this process are the action/adventure/thriller novels by Lee Child, Matthew Reilly, and Dan Brown. I have also found inspiration through the strong female protagonists in novels by Sarah J Maas, Jennifer L Armentrout, and K F Breene. There is a long list of films that I've gained inspiration from but most notably the Nation Treasure and Indiana Jones franchises with their action and layered conspiracies.

The Journey
I am still early in the process, but I've already found when talking to people about my studies that I do need to listen to many conspiracy theories and that I need to be still and just listen. I don't try to convince the person otherwise; I simply listen and remain in a non-judgemental space. I will be conducting non-judgemental interviews and deep-diving into websites that I would normally steer clear of to understand the mindset of conspiracy theorists.

Why Autoethnography?
I chose autoethnography as I believe following my own research practices and then relaying them through the creative artefact is the best way for me to connect with the reader. I'm producing a piece of public pedagogy by relaying the analysis of different conspiracy theories through a process that comes second nature to me. New skills that I learn throughout the process will be learnt by the protagonist in the story and will give a more three-dimensional character development. All the research into the philosophy and psychology of conspiracy theories will be filtered through a personal lens into my journal.

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Whispers in the Margins

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Abstract
The call for equity, diversity and inclusion in educational spaces is a priority in many educational institutions. However, is it reasonable to expect instructors to do this before they can engage in self-reflection? Situated in anti-racist pedagogy in neoliberal schooling spaces, this presentation by an author who self-defines as a white settler looks at the steps that come before implementing anti-racist praxis. Drawing on arts-based research, this work explores multi-modal ways of knowing. This presentation is about the journey to self to disrupt racism in pedagogy. Using autoethnography merged with arts-based research, the objective is to provide a case for multi-modal forms of inquiry when engaging in anti-racist pedagogy, beginning with self.

Keywords
Arts-based research, anti-racist pedagogy, self

————————————————

This work is about the emergent epiphanies I experienced while engaged in an autoethnographic directed study, a required course for the PhD program at Brock University. I am purposefully situating the word/concept epiphany within Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2014). I use the TV series Lovecraft Country as a metaphor to centre the study. I am sharing the epiphanies I reached over the course of my directed study and the multi-modal platforms and knowledge I embraced in a non-linear way as I seek to dismantle my white privilege and understand how to teach and learn in an anti-racist and anti-colonialist manner.

I spent the winter semester engaged in daily walks in the forest and forest bathing where I reflected through writing, painting, and taking photographs. Often, I would walk in the morning and take pictures and then go back at sunset and take the same picture to study the nuances between photographs of the same place at different times. They looked so different, and they represented a dichotomy. I found myself looking at the nuances in the photos as a metaphor of my identity and my knowing, where I was teetering between troubling colonial ways of knowing and conforming.
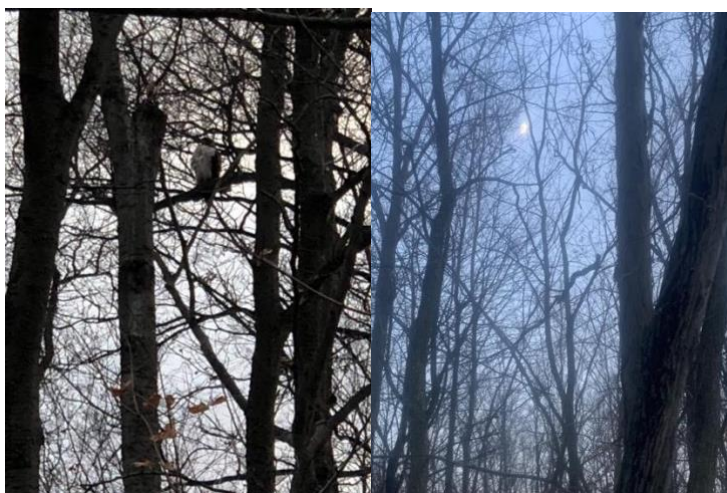
The impetus for my study came from a trifecta of events. First, I teach adult students how to write annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, and academic research papers. I had been exploring anti-colonial ways of facilitating classes and assignments, and my use of Universal Design Learning (UDL) had become an important part of my praxis. UDL eliminates the need for students to disclose disabilities because instructors provide accessible learning experiences to all. These methods have not been part of the more traditional colonial modes of teaching in my PhD program. Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic and the horrific murder of George Floyd in May, 2020 brought about an emergence of the Black Lives Matter (#BLM). Finally, in response to that movement, post-secondary institutions had mandating mandatory DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) policies. When I met with my supportive and amazing supervisor, Dr. Hilary Brown, we discussed how I wanted to move away from writing a formal colonial version of a literature review for this course. With her support, I embarked on an autoethnographic journey.

My positionality is important for this presentation, my research and in my career. So, here goes…

Hi! My name is Michelle and
Iamacisgenderheterosexualwhitesettlerhardofhearingwoman.
Deep breathe.
I…am…a…
Cis-gender - privilege
Hetero-sexual - privilege
White settler-privilege
Woman
And I am hard of hearing.

I teach at a local college in Ontario, in the Academic Upgrading program. It is a program where adult students can earn a high school equivalency credit. I spent seven years as a contract worker entrenched in the neo-liberal gig economy teaching in post-secondary and post-graduate programs before landing a full time job. The students in my class, mostly racialized women, are diverse in terms of socio-economic position, age, and education. Some students were born in Canada, but found that the public education system did not work for them and failed out. Others arefrom countries where they have completed post-secondary degrees not recognized in Canada. When they come to Canada, some choose to have their academic credentials assessed by The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (https://www.cicic.ca/1421/assess_an_academic_credential.canada) with the hopes of finding employment in the field they have earned their degree. However, in the case of my upgrading students, their degrees do not meet the International academic credential standards, so they choose to go back to school to become employed. Within my classes over the years, there are also 2SLGBTQQIA people, refugees, women escaping domestic violence, and women who experience homelessness, are drug users, and who are differently abled and/or neuro divergent. *And I used to not see colour.*

 What privileges do I hold? Power in the classroom as the professor. Power in the classroom as a student. As a white settler I know how to perform colonialism and can navigate the colonial mode of academia. *And the privilege to not see colour.* My positionality is important for my research and for who I teach. I hold power and I need to dismantle the power and interrogate it.

After reflecting and turning and interrogating this work for nuances related to a general cultural phenomena and cultural practices, which is what you do in an autoethnography (Poulis, 2021), I emerged with four quadrants of epiphanies. These quadrants are: (1) beginning with self, (2) colonial traditions,(3) anti-racism and anti-colonial spaces, and (4) lived experiences. The quadrants overlap, emerge, and re-emerge and they are woven throughout this work. If I was forced to provide a linear summary of each it would be beginning with self is concerned with dismantling privilege and checking self-biases. The quadrant of colonial traditions contains approaching a literature review in the trees through multi-modal and non-linear methods. Anti-racism and anti-colonial represent learning and teaching spaces. Finally, lived experiences includes trees life cycles, trees as witnesses and humanity. Each quadrant is embedded into each other. I used my photographs to represent each quadrant as well, below.

Beginning with self

Colonial Traditions

Anti-racism & Anti-Colonial

Lived experiences

Part Two: Explicating quadrants of epiphany
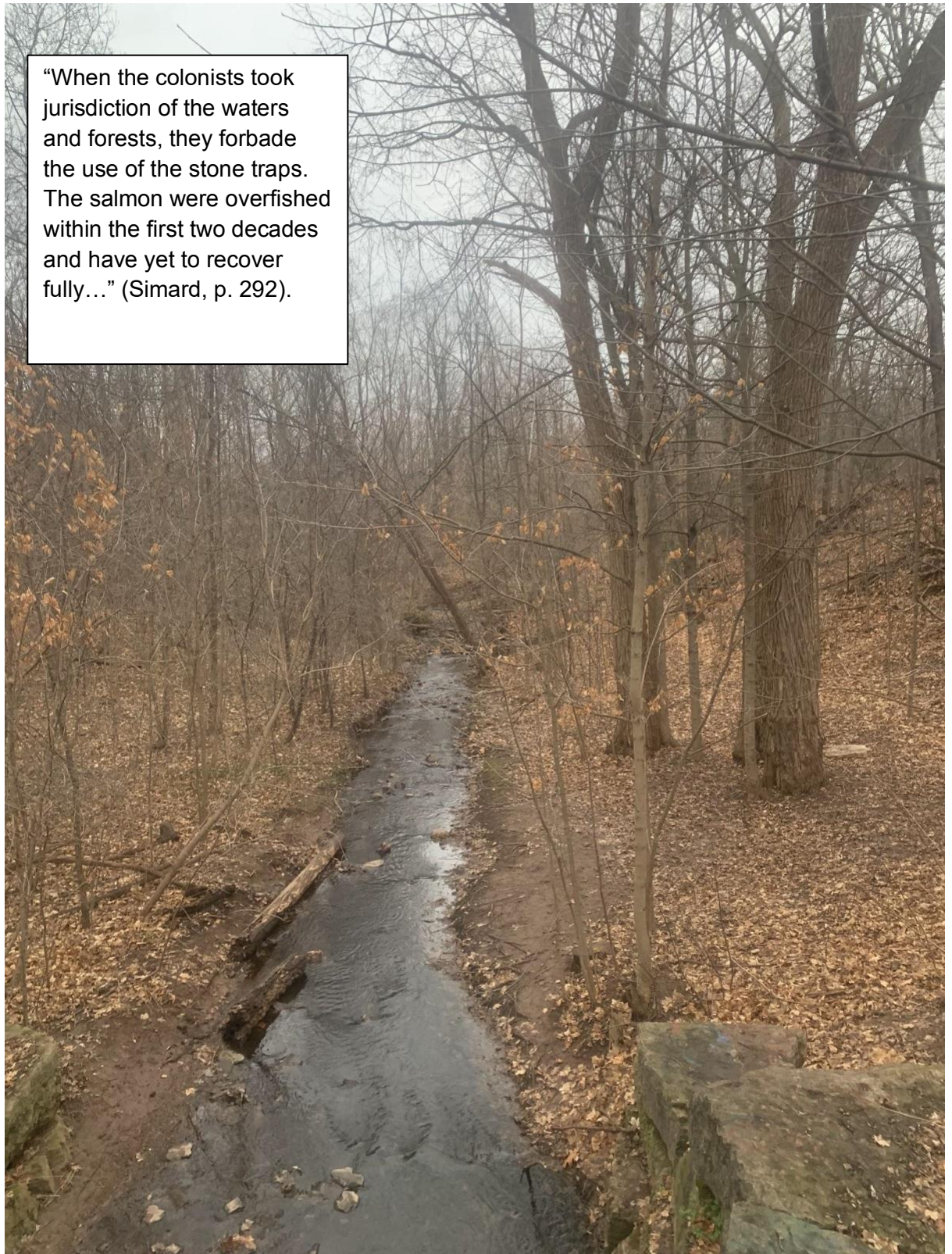
"When the colonists took jurisdiction of the waters and forests, they forbade the use of the stone traps. The salmon were overfished within the first two decades and have yet to recover fully…" (Simard, p. 292).

Through my extensive time in nature, I ended up getting to know the trees in the forests I visited. I wanted to know more about land and that desire led me to Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, an Indigenous scientist; Dr. Suzanne Simard, an expert in forest ecology; and Peter Wohlleben, a forester. All of these individuals are fellow lovers of trees. In the series Lovecraft Country, trees are used as metaphors. They provide shelter to the racialized people

at night when the Jim Crow-era sundown town laws come into effect. In sundown towns, white people were given carte blanche to murder racialized people during the Jim Crow era. It is then that the trees in the series turn into monsters and murder the racists. Itt is as if the trees are rebelling for being used as instruments of murder - in hangings - and they are taking revenge on human hatred and the perpetrators. Because trees live for hundreds of years and communicate differently (Wohlleben, 2016) they couldn't express their outrage in a way that humans could understand. They are too slow for us. Or our life cycle is too fast for them. This is their Land. They inhabit it longer and endure us; they outlive us. They stand as witness to the human trauma while also being tortured and used for human will. Through Robin Kimmerer, a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, I learned to situate Land knowing as being (2013). Reading Kimmerer's book, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) confirmed what I suspected; Land is a being. When I read, "we say that human have the least experience with how to live and this the most to learn – we must look to our teachers among the other species for guidance…their wisdom is in how they live" (p. 6) it resonates. Suzanne Simard taught me that trees communicate with each and through fungi mycorrhizal networks (2021). Further, as I spent time in the forests, I continually related the concept of Land as being to the COVID-19 pandemic. I heard Land whisper that this was a chance for humanity to learn; an opportunity to change our destructive ways. Simard writes,

> when the colonists took jurisdiction of the waters and forests, they forbade use of the stone traps. The salmon were overfished within the first two decades and have yet to recover fully. Climate change and a warming Pacific Ocean have been creating new problems by exhausting the fish on their marathon from the ocean, reducing their success at reaching the natal spawning streams. It's part of a pattern of destroying interconnecting habitats (p. 292).

Through Simard's complex scientific concepts,, I understand that trees and land communicate and are living beings and that the white settler colonial way of being is deadly for nature.

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As I further engage in this project, I can hear my colonial ancestors chanting po-wer, po-wer, po-wer in unison as if I have awakened them, and they are begging me to proceed with caution. Maybe they are awakening me. I like to think they remind me of the power and privilege I bring to this space and discourse and that I should use it mindfully, but I feel they do not want me to overturn this rock because I will be uprooting legacies and one-sided truths. Their medals of honour from wars fought long ago are no longer shining in a display cabinet. Instead, they have been wrapped up and hidden away. I wonder if my ancestors are reminding me of my privilege and are asking me to be careful. Is white fragility passed through their DNA?

I think about how I've been so protected by my whiteness. I have been able to use my privilege and my white power to advocate for myself. As soon as I feel oppressed because of my gender or my disability I know I can use my white power and my privilege to speak out and demand better. I always have that option. The ability to use my white privilege and power even when it comes to advocating for accommodations for my hearing loss. I take it for granted. Is there really such a thing as an ally?

Now we are hearing the call from Indigenous communities that the land acknowledgements must stop due to their performative nature. We acknowledge land and our personal identities in our academic institutions and sometimes I wonder if my colleagues only perform the acknowledgement and identities because they were told to do it. Is this just performative? Recently, a white settler gave a beautiful land acknowledgement and then proceeded to read a poem she had written in response. I think she had good intentions, but following the acknowledgement with a white-settler poem seemed wrong.Similarly, because I am constrained by colonial presentation and modes of communicating academic work, I worry that I sound inauthentic in my writing on decolonial studies. Because I have often considered the written word to be an extremely violent colonial ac stripped away Indigenous Peoples' way of knowing and culture, I have tried to communicate my love of Land and my gratitude to Indigenous Peoples through painting.

The recent murders of racialized people remind me of hangings in the past, and the role of trees I alluded to earlier. Trees are central in Wagner's operas as well. The mythical ring with magic crafted from trees - I see overlaps between Wagner and the Lovecraft series. I imagine that having Wagner's music in the background for all the mythical forest scenes would be perfect. Another layer, another story unfolding in tandem with the visuals and the actual storyline.

I go for daily walks on the land of several Indigenous nations' traditional territory, including the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, the Métis, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. As I walk on this land, I am always grateful, and every day I give thanks to the ground, the trees, the animals, and of course, the Indigenous peoples whose culture has been decimated for the sake of colonial and white settler land ownership. Walking on these lands is a meditation for me. I listen to the trees as they whisper. and the healing sound of water flowing. I couldn't hear that sound before I wore hearing aids as an adult. I hear the ground as my feet touch the earth and rustle the leaves, and sometimes I gasp at the beauty of the birch trees as they stand tall and endure because I cannot believe such beauty exists.

The colours of the land are vibrant and filled with endless possibilities. I think Indigenous people are connected to land and nature in a way I may never understand. How do you represent Indigenous ways of knowing and being within a colonial semiotic representation? How do you do that while still honouring Indigenous knowledge?

There is an area I cannot walk into, though. It is easily accessible from my home, but I

feel intense sorrow every time I enter this ravine. A visit to the Oakville historical society (OHS, 2020) informed me that Indigenous ancestors used the valley as a passageway during changing seasons. The sixteen-mile creek runs through the ravine down to the lake, and it is sheltered and protected by old trees. This passageway was well-trodden by Indigenous peoples for that reason.

This passageway was one of the first settlements during the early colonization of Oakville (OHS, 2020). I also learned that these first colonial settlers buried their dead on the steep muddy hills. Over the years, as the earth has eroded, the occasional corpse will fall from the slope down into the manicured lawns of what is now called Lions Valley Park. I think of those corpses buried on the side of a muddy hill and the role the trees play in the series. This forgotten magic they know. It became a metaphor for me. I want to find out so much more about how Indigenous peoples used the land in what is now called Lion's Valley Park, but I have only been able to find a paragraph of generalized information. It is indicative of how Indigenous people are devalued. Of how white settlers perpetuate power politics of knowledge. On the whitewashed historical plaques that anchor entrances to the natural paths, the inherent message is clear: laud the colonial settlers who survived the harsh realities of early settlement. I have yet to see any material which discusses where Indigenous people are now.

There is part of Gairloch Gardens in Oakville I gravitate toward. It is not part of the painstakingly manicured gardens though; rather, it is off to the side. It is messy and uneven. The trees are starting to wake up, the water is low, and the banks show the crevices and pathways from past water levels in their dirt. I like this perspective and consider it a metaphor for this piece of work. I have made crevices and pathways to understand myself and my white

privilege through Lovecraft Country. My journey is messy and unmanicured. This is a lifelong journey. It can't be wrapped up in a neat little package. I need to let the weeds creep in and follow the pathways of those who came before and forge my own crevices on the banks.

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When Resilience is the Only Option!
Highlighting Problems of the Education System in Rural Pakistan through the Story of a Child Who did not Give Up, Despite All Odds

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Abstract

This article highlights problems in the education system of rural Pakistan through my husband's (Noor Mustafa) journey as a student in a village called Lar, near the city Multan. His resilience reaped favorable results for him but sadly this is only true for a miniscule percentage of the population. His nursery school class had 53 students but he was the only one who studied beyond Grade 5. The reasons for this include a corrupt system that often resulted in poor teaching and; corporal punishment; as well as a lack of teachers, resources and infrastructure. Noor Mustafa's story suggests that changes in federal policy are needed before changes in local educational practices can occur. Through his story I depict my passion for the provision of education to children in Pakistan, recommendations for improvement and how I wish to contribute to the situation.

Keywords

education, rural Pakistan, resilience, familial values

Prologue

"You bury a seed in the earth, and it breaks to reveal a fragile seedling which can be damaged by even the slightest breeze but what you don't see is the strength and might it has exerted to push through the pile of soil to register its identity in the world, to live its dreams and desires. It continues its journey of perseverance and

بیج زمین کے اندر دفن ہوتا ہے۔
اور ایک نازک کونپل جو ہوا کے جھونکے سے بھی ٹوٹ سکتی ہے، زمین کا سینہ چیر کر پھوٹتی ہے۔
پودا بنتا ہے،
جو مظبوط سایہ دار درخت بنتا ہے۔
جو پھل بھی دیتا ہے۔

resilience to grow into a strong tree, bearing fruit and benefit for others and itself. We and seeds bear this commonality. No matter what the circumstances, resolve requires change, breakage, effort, damage...but we must remember that this breakage is not the end-it is just the beginning!"

بیج اور انسان میں یہ قدر کسی حد تک مشترک ہے۔

حالات کیسے بھی ہوں

نشونما کے لئے توڑ پھوڑ اور جدوجہد تو ضروری ہے۔

یہ ٹوٹنا تمہارا خاتمہ نہیں آغاز ہے۔

(Written in Urdu by: Syed Noor Mustafa Gillani. Translated in English by: Amber Noor Mustafa)

This is the story of one such seed which continued to strive and struggle to achieve, despite the challenges that came its way!

Introduction, Context and Background

I couldn't help feeling excited yet nervous as I sat down with my husband, Noor Mustafa to talk about a topic we had discussed several times during our 24 years of married life. But this time it was going to be different. I could sense that he was feeling the same as I tried to look at his eyes and he tried to avoid mine.

He has always been well aware of my passion for the provision of education to children in Pakistan, especially in rural areas, where access is painfully limited. We both knew that Pakistan has been unable to achieve primary education targets of the Millennium Development Goals (Planning Commission Government of Pakistan, 2013). There are 22.8 million school-aged children. Of that total, 45% are girls (Alif Ailaan, 2014, Naviwala, 2015, UNICEF, 2020); 60% reside in rural areas and most belong to low-income families (Alif Ailaan, 2014). Pakistan is predominantly agricultural and 39% of the total labor force is working in the agriculture sector, and so this factor is extremely significant (Food and Agricultural Organization in Pakistan, 2021).

Noor Mustafa has always contributed to my efforts to provide access to education, wherever and whenever possible. But he also knows that I long to influence federal level policymaking in a way that has an exponential impact, as there is a widening gap between policy formulation and implementation (Naviwala, 2014). I have shared with him several times that we need to understand why students do not attend school, as 70% have never been enrolled and 54% of children who enroll in grade I drop out by grade 5 (Alif Ailaan, 2014, ASER National, 2019). When schools around the world today are utilizing the fast-paced research and development in education and technology, to provide 21st century skills to students, we are still struggling to increase enrollments and reduce dropout rates. We realize, with a heavy heart, that the future of the country's prospects for development rest on resolving these matters.

With a keenness to explore this phenomenon further, I had been searching for stories to highlight the reasons contributing to the deplorable state of education in Pakistan, to a larger audience and for policymakers. In my quest, I realized that my husband was the perfect choice for such a narration for reasons stated below.

Setting the Scene

My husband is from a rural background. He was raised and attended school in a village called Lar, near the city Multan in Pakistan (Image 1).

Image 1
Map showing Multan in Pakistan
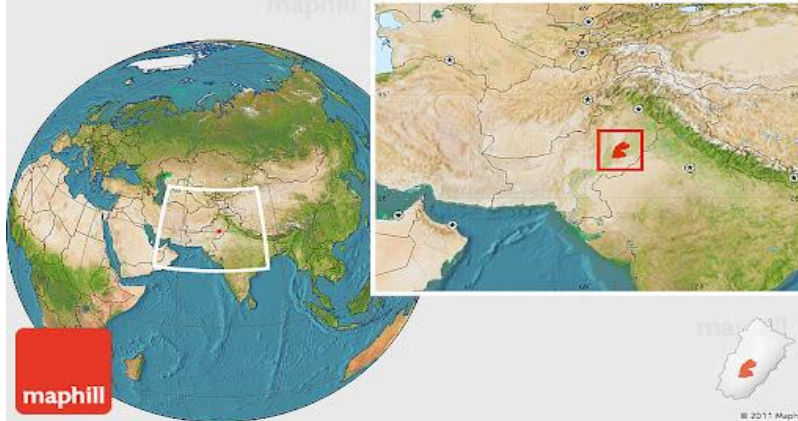
Most villages in Pakistan lack basic infrastructure like good roads, sewage systems, clean drinking water, natural gas for household use and uninterrupted supply of electricity (Image 2 depicts village life in Pakistan).

Image 2
Pictures from a Village in Pakistan
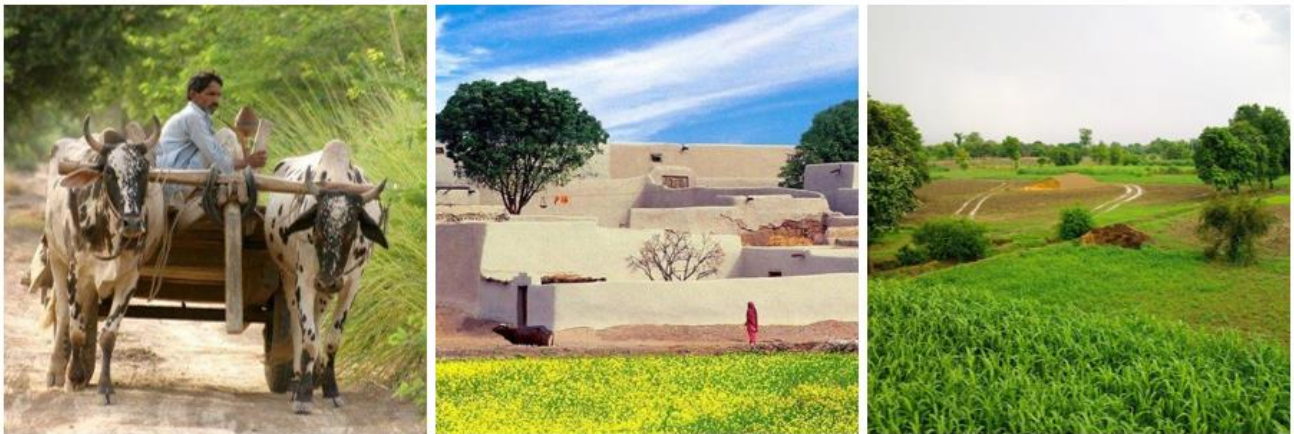
So, while he belonged to a rich and affluent family, he did not have access to basic amenities in his childhood, back in the late 1970s and early 80s. His mother (my mother-in-law) used to cook food on wood (Image 3).

Image 3
Cooking on wood in a Village where there is no gas

Even though electricity was available, it was disrupted by the slightest drizzle or wind, sometimes not working for hours or days on end. Schools were no different. They lacked resources, trained teachers, and an effective curriculum. However, Noor Mustafa's story has a happy ending, achieving more than his circumstances seemed to dictate.

His story justifies the three dimensions or commonplaces of narrative inquiry outlined by Clandinin et al. (2016). The first one is temporality, including the context and timeline. Second is sociality, including my personal involvement with the topic and the participant, as well as role of the society and environment in his story. And the third one is place, not just the place where his story started but also the sequence of all the different places where it happened.

Since the idea was to narrate someone else's life story, it was going to be a biographical narrative inquiry, which explores the lived experiences of others and their perspectives of their past, present and future (Denzin, 1989, cited in Kim, 2020). Furthermore, I decided to address the story through a branch of biographical narrative inquiry called bildungsroman. Kim (2020, p.12) explains that "It is a pedagogical story that projects the human being's resilience and persistence as well as his or her vulnerability." The author goes on to state that it is a good choice for a person who "developed into maturity despite or because of tribulations that were experienced by the participant while growing up." Since Noor Mustafa's life story had the same rhyme and rhythm to it, this genre seemed a logical choice for its narration. Another important factor that made his story valuable were the lessons learned during the journey and not really the ending. Swales (1978, p.34) endorses that this genre of narrative inquiry is written, "for the sake of the journey, and not for the sake of the happy ending toward which that journey points (cited in Kim, 2020, p. 13)."

Moreover, I decided to narrate this story as creative nonfiction, thus crossing borders slightly into the literary-based narrative inquiry camp too. This is because, while I wanted to report factual information, I wanted to do so in a manner which would arouse and engage the emotions of the reader, because I have always believed that after facts are forgotten, feelings associated with them are remembered. Caulley (2008 cited in Kim, 2020, p. 24) explains aptly that, "in creative nonfiction, you would present factual information using the tools of the fiction writer, while maintaining fidelity to fact and, at the same time, openly communicating the writer's subjectivity or personal feelings about the topic."

While writing this story, I was cognizant of the fact that readers may not be fully aware of the context and conditions of rural Pakistan. So, to aid the diverse audience and various learning styles I planned to include photographs and pictures relevant to my husband's story, in the hope of depicting its true essence and the message it is required to broadcast. Kim (2020) endorses archival photography as a means of depicting social and historical contexts along with

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helping readers understand concepts not easily expressed in words. Images can serve to develop a connection between the audience and the story in ways that perhaps words might not be able to do, especially for some readers.

I did not want to limit the parameters of my story by putting it strictly in any one box and therefore experimented with a combination of genres, blurring the boundaries so appropriate features from each could be utilized. I believe that human lives and interactions are complex and thus cannot be compartmentalized with strict boundaries.

Another important consideration of the narration was my positionality and presence in the story. While Noor Mustafa is from a rural background, I, on the other hand, had experienced a very different life. With an urban upbringing, I had limited experience or awareness of the 'other' side of the world (Image 4 depicts urban life in Pakistan).

Image 4
Images from a City in Pakistan

A couple of years after our marriage in 1998, we moved to Noor Mustafa's ancestral home in the village and for the first time I came face to face with rural Pakistan and the poverty which was an intimate and profound part of it. This is when my interest in studying the educational landscape of Pakistan actually started.

Also, I could not ignore my emotional attachment with the participant, my husband, in the process of writing his story. Therefore, I identified with the reflexive ethnography approach which highlights the role and positionality of the ethnographer/storyteller/researcher in the process of collecting and narrating someone else's story (Ellis, 2004). It entails how that person reached the context of the story and how it has affected their thinking and being. Ellis elaborates that the interviewer may also include their experience of the interview in the narration of the story too. Since I became involved in Noor Mustafa's story due to my personal passion for education and its relation to his life, I can relate to this approach for my story. What I realized while narrating it was how my attachment with him made this experience an emotional roller coaster ride for me too. Through his story I hope to depict how passionate I am about education in Pakistan and how I find myself contributing to it as I highlight its problems in this article.

And the Story of Noor Mustafa's Educational Journey begins…

Early Education

  The first time I mentioned the idea of writing his life story for my research, his eyes lit ups. I could sense pride, complimented by a sense of responsibility, to be able to contribute to my dream and the dream of an educated Pakistan. He hoped his story would be able to motivate others in similar situations to keep striving, despite the hurdles and hindrances.

  As I sat down on the living room sofa next to him, to document his life experiences, he wasn't sure where to begin and I wasn't sure what to ask. I hoped to capture the true essence of his narration, but how I would balance my emotional engagement was going to be a learning experience for me. I asked him to start with his earliest memories of school, how it made him feel, what made him go to school and what made him not want to go. He looked straight ahead at the wall across the living room, and I could imagine a flashback occurring in his mind, through a timeline, until he reached his house when he was five years old in 1978.

  As he spoke, he kept looking at the wall across the room from him as if he was describing what he could see there and I looked at his face, observing its changes. We were transported to his village where he was running in the streets with his cousins. They would run races often, he explained, but while running he would stop in front of some mud houses, with a cloth curtain as the door. Fascinated he would peep through the sides of the curtain and watch men working tirelessly on hand looms making a beautiful variety of cloth (Image 5).

Image 5
Cloth being woven on a Handloom

He said that little did he know then that his life would also be like those weavers, weaving his dreams with intricacy, perseverance, intense effort, being torn by so many people and then weaving again. At that moment he looked at me and said, "It is very painful when someone tears something you have put your heart and soul into, and it takes a lot to keep going." He sighed and continued.

  This time we were in his village house, where his mother sat on a charpayee (Image 6) in the courtyard of the house, trying to convince his father to get him admitted to the public primary school in the village, but he kept refusing as he thought his son was still too young for school.

Image 6
A Charpayee- A bed made with Jute Yarn
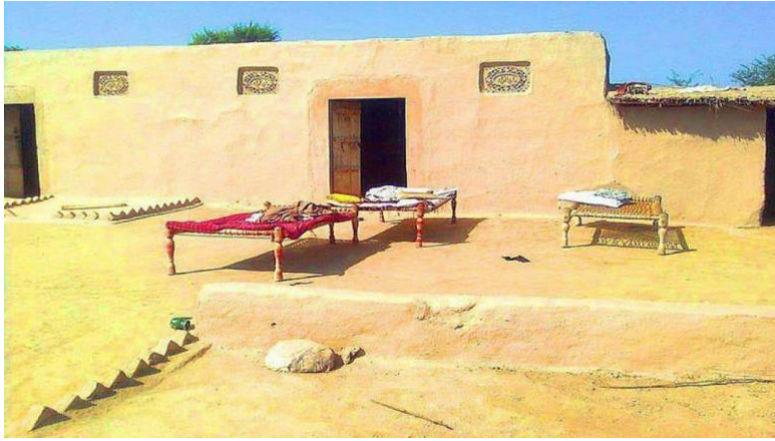
Two years went by in this argument. His mother belonged to an educated, urban family and used to go to school but marriage at age 15 disrupted her education and she came to a village where household responsibilities and minimal support for girls' education left no option to study further. Nevertheless, she played her part in motivating her six children to study. So, while waiting for Noor Mustafa to be admitted, she taught him herself, until he knew all the books by heart. She ingrained in him the significance of education.

Finally, at seven years of age, his father got him admitted. Relieved and excited, his mother stitched a school bag out of an empty fertilizer sack for him, all packed with an inkpot, a wooden nib pen and board and a carving knife (Image 7 is a cloth school bag and image 8 shows a child writing with a wooden nib pen on a wooden board, using ink from an inkpot).

Image 7
Picture of a School bag made with cloth

Image 8
Images show how an inkpot, wooden nib pen and board are used for writing

Equally excited, Noor Mustafa traveled on foot through dusty streets, amidst farmland, on the first day of school. (Image 9 shows children studying in a school in a village in Pakistan, quite similar to the one Noor Mustafa used to go to). He was made to sit on the ground, under a large berry tree, where he would be studying every day, with his 53 classmates, but only if the teacher would come!

Image 9
A Village School in Pakistan

For the whole of the next year, his mother kept sending him to school every day, but no teacher showed up, so she continued to teach him all that she knew over and over and over. Many children lost their motivation and stopped coming during this time, many kept playing in the streets while their parents thought they were securing their future at school.

In hindsight, he realized that teachers felt demoted when asked to teach younger children. According to the recruitment procedures in the education sector in Pakistan, teachers are hired for younger classes and with seniority they are promoted to teach higher grades. Also, there were many ghost teachers who would get salaries but never bothered to come to school.

After this brief discussion, Noor Mustafa resumed telling his life story via the movie on the wall where he seemed to be watching it. One winter morning as he was busy in his favorite pastime at school, which was making a honeybee and an ant fight, there was a sudden commotion and all the children looked at a man running towards their school, with a pack of

stray dogs after him. The man had just gotten off a bus on the highway next to their school. He jumped over the school wall to save his life (and his clothes) because apparently the dogs' excitement was due to the trousers and dress shirt he was wearing, which neither the dogs nor the children had seen before. They had all only seen their elders in the traditional Pakistani dress and they were also amused to see his strange attire. When the commotion died down, they were told that this person had agreed to be their teacher and so the first chapter of my husband's education started with the arrival of Teacher Sakhawat Ali Khilji. (At this point he emphasized that I use real names to give credit to the people who contributed to his life). That night his mother was overjoyed and he could feel her stress was relieved.

It goes without saying that the next day the teacher came to school in a shalwar kameez (Image 10) and started by taking a diagnostic test of the children. Noor Mustafa proudly said that he read out the whole book, without looking at it, something no other student could do. The wise teacher divided the class into two halves, based on children's academic abilities. Noor Mustafa and a couple of others were placed in the advanced class.

Image 10
Male version of a Shalwar Kameez- National Dress of Pakistan

After school ended that day, by chance the teacher asked my husband for places to stay in the village until he found permanent accommodation. Lucky for him my husband's family maintained a small 'saraye' (motel) to accommodate travelers free of charge. His father insisted that he stay there he was in the village, so for the next five years Teacher Sakhawat Ali Khilji lived at the saraye and in return, he would teach my husband in the evenings. At this point in the story, I could see tears swell up in Noor Mustafa's eyes as he talked about his mother's efforts to accommodate the teacher, preparing food for him, and making sure he was comfortable, just so that he would teach her son with full concentration. I put my hand on his and gave him time to gather himself until he was ready to move on. My mother-in-law was indeed a gem whom we lost to old age in 2013. I remember her as a mother after my marriage, always by my side, supporting me to study, to work, to grow (Image 10).

Image 10
My Mother-in-Law

I could also feel tears stinging my eyes and for some time only the sound of the fan and air conditioning in our living room dominated the silence, which was finally broken as my husband spoke again and I quickly gulped down my tears to listen to him.

He continued that in the second year, as he moved to grade 2, a different teacher taught him until grade 5. This teacher would require students to do his household chores after school which included everything from pumping water from a hand pump (Image 11), to grinding red chilies, to cleaning the whole house and even cutting crops in the fields.

Image 11
A Hand pump- Used to draw Water in Villages

At one time he made the whole class help him construct a room in his house for 6 months, without attending school a single day. So, 8–9-year-old children were made to carry bricks and cement and other hazardous and heavy materials so their teacher could save on labor costs. To

cover up his exploitation, he promoted everyone to the next class at the end of the year, but the real test came at the end of grade 5 when all the students had to take the centralized district wide board examination. All this time Noor Mustafa kept studying from Teacher Khilji in the evenings. So, at the time of the board examination, his hard work was rewarded as he got the highest marks in the whole district, which included hundreds of primary schools. And this was no simple exam. All subjects were tested without a break in one day from morning to evening. It is important to mention here that due to limited electricity supply, most of his study was done using a lantern (Image 12), which caused severe backache due to excessive bending. He also mentioned that Teacher Khilji's presence in his life was the turning point for him as he instilled the love and desire for learning which eventually became second nature to him.

Image 12
A Lantern

His parents were over the moon with his achievement! He had made his mark and a new chapter of his education started as Teacher Khilji went back to Multan and a new teacher, Teacher Kazim Shah joined the school in grade 6. The first milestone had been achieved but the journey had just started.

Middle Years Education and Transitioning to the City

Mr. Kazim Shah soon identified Noor Mustafa's talent and made him prepare for two classes together and he went directly to grade 8 from grade 6. Unfortunately, when he applied for the centralized board exam of grade 8 his admission was rejected due to his young age. And so, he had to travel by bus for the very first time, to the adjoining city, Multan, to get approval for himself from the Board Office. He requested male members of his family to accompany him but in vain and so he set out on his "maiden voyage" all alone; a child of 12 years of age. He waited for the bus to stop but after two buses had passed by, he realized that they would only slow down and never stop completely, so he quickly jumped on the third one which came, before he missed that too (Image 13).

Image 13
A Public Bus with Passengers in a Village

At the Board Office, they refused to approve his request without taking an aptitude test. He aced it with 100% marks and was granted permission to sit for the board exam. Overjoyed, he started his return journey by bus. When he reached his village bus stop and was waiting for the right moment to jump off, with his right foot hanging in the air and his left foot on the step, the impatient bus conductor pushed him off when the bus slowed down. He fell and before he could judge the situation, the posterior end of the bus brushed against his left foot, breaking several tiny bones and rupturing his muscles. The bus sped away unbothered, but he had to spend the next 6 weeks at home with a plastered foot. I was infuriated when I heard this and asked him "but why?" The government had made the bus service free for students, but the bus drivers wanted to accommodate paying passengers, so this was their way of discouraging students from getting on, he explained. And that just made me angrier!

Later that year, he got the highest marks in the grade 8 exam too, but his struggle to study continued as the village school was limited to grade 8. So, he had to travel to the city on the same wretched bus every day. But now, older and wiser, he would run behind the bus and get on the roof, irrespective of the season (Image 13 shows how Noor Mustafa used to travel to the city every day to study along with other students).

Image 13
A Public Bus in a Village taking students to the City
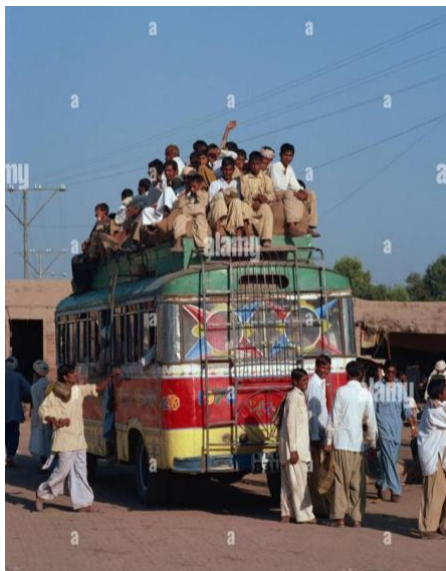
But realizing this travel wasted his time and effort his parents decided to move him to his grandmother's house in Multan, which had been locked up for many years. No one could move with him so as a 13-year-old boy he started living alone in a 4,000 square foot house which everyone believed was haunted. At this point in the story he looked at me and said, "Amber I would cry alone at night, missed my mother, wanted someone to cook and clean for me, warm up the water for a hot bath, I would hear sounds from the graveyard next door, but complaining meant they would take me back home and I did not want to stop studying at any cost and so I kept quiet." My heart melted as I listened to him and at the same time my decision to help the children of my country became stronger. Those were difficult days. At school he was bullied by city boys and hit by teachers for asking questions. In addition, the medium of instruction was not Urdu but English, which was a steep transition for him as he did not know English well. Students were introduced to English language as a subject for the first time in grade 6, and in grade 9 they were expected to study all the subjects in English; a language they had started learning to use just three years earlier. The village students had little support as few in their area spoke English. Noor Mustafa recalled that once in grade 5 he tried to read out the English alphabet in the class and the teacher beat him for reading something which he was not supposed to learn until the next year in grade 6. Also teachers discouraged students from asking questions by reprimanding the ones who
did.

When Noor Mustafa came to know of someone in a nearby village who knew English, he began cycling 5 km back and forth each evening to meet that individual and get some assistance in learning English. He would use his English to Urdu dictionary to translate whole books to understand the concepts and then answer questions in English. Listening to his struggles made me feel suffocated and claustrophobic; he, however, embraced this struggle as a challenge. Slowly he improved and started regaining his position. He also became the school champion in sports. In 1989, he passed his Matriculation board examination with flying colors, just 9 years after joining school which is no small feat as normally students complete it in 11 or 12 years!

All this time his religion was his biggest solace. He believed Allah (God) had a plan for him which kept him going. As he looked at me awith a certain satisfaction and peace in his eyes, I found myself hoping I, too, might achieve this level of peace someday.

He passed the Intermediate Board examination in 1991, earned his undergraduate degree in 1993 and got a job too and so things got better. His cousins had laughed at him for working so hard, saying that no one in the family passes the undergraduate examination the first time and neither would he, but he proved them wrong. As he said this, his shoulders rose with pride.

Goals Achieved but Journey Continued

Later, in 1994 he moved to Lahore, a large metropolitan city, to do his Chartered Accountancy. Adjusting to the fast-paced professional culture of the city was an uphill task but he had gotten used to persevering for his goals by now. In 1998 we got married (Image 14) while he was still studying, and his struggle became mine. After years of hard work, he got his degree. At that point in our interview, for some moments, we re-experienced the glory of the time we had experienced together so long ago.

Image 14
Picture of our Wedding Day- 7th November 1998

Noor Mustafa's life tribulations and struggles made him want to give back to his community and help its inhabitants come out of the problems they faced. In 2017 he established a philanthropic organization "Sharaf e Hayat Trust" in his parents' name and installed water filters in his village house to provide clean drinking water to people (Image 15 are pictures of the inauguration ceremony of the Water Filtration Plant). Also, he provided tutoring to numerous young students, even when he was studying himself, as well as financial support so they could complete their education and not face the hardships he had to face.

Image 15
Inauguration of the Water Filtration Plant

Although many people tried to tarnish the fabric of his life, he kept weaving. Some regrets are there as he would have liked to study more, which was his real passion but he knew that circumstances were beyond his control. With time and after our marriage he turned the direction of his dreams to include our achievements. He said that he wanted to be the ladder on which my sons and I could step and move up; the scaffolding we needed to succeed in life. And

there is not an ounce of a doubt that he has played his part immaculately in being our support always.

Lessons Learnt and Way Forward

Education is a crucial contributor to the social, economic and political development of a country (Ahmed & Zeshan, 2014). It is envisioned to eradicate poverty, gender inequality and religious extremism while promoting peace and harmony (World Bank's report on Understanding Poverty, 2019 ; Kristof cited in Khurshid, 2012). Unfortunately, since independence in 1947, Pakistan has not been able to decide upon and implement an education system to serve this purpose, and this has impeded its growth and development severely. Therefore, there are indeed many lessons to be learnt from different elements of Noor Mustafa's story.

Firstly, it must be acknowledged that the teacher is an important contributor . There needs to be a concerted effort, at the national level, to improve the process of teacher recruitment and career pathways for teaching staff, so that placements and promotions are according to their expertise and qualification and not years of service. This will motivate teachers at all levels to provide the most effective teaching experiences to children. This aspect is especially important in the early years of education, where the will to learn is instilled and foundation of academic learning is laid. There should be incentives to attract better candidates as is done in countries like Finland and South Korea (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland; Lee et al., 2012). There should also be investment in providing efficacious professional development opportunities to school leaders and teaching staff. These steps will help eliminate the culture of corporal punishment too, which is rampant in public schools in the country and thus eventually contribute to lowering of number of dropouts substantially. A robust system for regular and periodic monitoring and evaluation as well as mechanisms for timely feedback from stakeholders should also be deployed.

According to Naviwala (2014), corruption is a major reason for dearth of a strong and well-resourced infrastructure in public schools, especially in rural Pakistan. A system of evaluation and monitoring will be able to curtail this problem as well.

Another significant reason of shortfall in academic performance, increased dropouts and low levels of self-esteem in students is the language of instruction. Over the years, there have been frequent changes by the government in the decision to teach in Urdu or English and at what age English language should be introduced in K-12 schools. In public schools, the dilemma faced by students is mentioned above. According to Rahman (2004), 22 major governmental reports on education have been issued since a National Education Conference was conducted in 1947, right after independence, which Kaiser Bengali sums up as, "a continuing game, policy makers have played at great public expense (as cited in Rahman, 2004, p.308)." This is because they have not served to improve the standard of education in the country or help take a decision for the language of instruction in classrooms, in the interest of the students, mostly due to vested interests of ruling parties and political gains. This is a major point of contention and must be resolved by considering teaching both languages from a very early age, when language acquisition is easier. This would address the gaps in learning to enhance enrolments and develop an internationally competitive workforce.

Another important consideration is the role a society and community play in enrollment and academic progress of children in rural areas. Bourdieu's 'Social Reproduction Theory' (cited

in Richardson, 1986) explains that societies tend to reproduce themselves over generations, restricting social mobility. Over time, communal cultural, social, economic, and intellectual wealth is accumulated. Hence beliefs, mindsets and perceptions about certain phenomena tend to solidify or become well established, making transition from one area or community to another almost invincible. This transition can be made possible through an incremental change or external stimulus, so that people are able to move across socio-economic strata of society. The education Noor Mustafa struggled to gain was that tangential change which changed life for him, my sons, and me. This must be used as a case to realize how important it is to provide education so upward mobility and better standards of living can be achieved by bringing enrollment levels of rural areas at par with urban localities.

Last but not the least, we must acknowledge the positive role Noor Mustafa's mother played in his life, even though she had only studied to grade 5 herself. In her character we find endorsement of the fact that parents' aspirations and expectations contribute to the academic growth and development of their children (Good-now & Collins, 1990; Miller, 1988; Murphey 1992 as cited in Halle et al., 1997). According to the Annual Status of Education Report (2019), children are more likely to enroll in school if their parents attended school themselves. Similarly, Andrabi et al. (2012) validate that mothers who attended schools for an average of even 1.34 years participate far more in their children's educational journey than those who have never been to school. Similarly, Corwyn, (2000) believes that a conducive home environment established by an educated mother contributes extensively to a child's cognitive and behavioral development.

Unfortunately, at the moment, 62.3% of Pakistanis above 15 years of age are illiterate and 53.5% of them are women (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2020). How can we imagine academic growth of a country in which such an alarming number of women have never attended school? Needless to say, until effective adult literacy programs are introduced to improve parent literacy, change in the educational landscape of the country cannot be expected. There is also a dire need to implement social awareness campaigns emphasizing the importance of education for women, not only for themselves but for the greater benefit of the family and ultimately the society and country. Additionally, incentives like stipend programs could be executed for sending women and girls to school.

Epilogue

For decades we have failed the children of Pakistan by providing them neither the education nor the conducive environment which can equip them to compete internationally or change their circumstances locally. It seems to hold true that if the journey is longer for some than for others then there are greater chances of dropouts. Not **ONE** other student out of the 53 in Noor Mustafa's class reached high school. Most did not even complete their primary education. All these hardships, accompanied by corporal punishment for asking questions or even smiling in those early years of school, contributed to the low level of enrollment and high number of dropouts.

Until substantial efforts lead to efficacious measures we would have to rely on individual mothers and teachers like the ones mentioned to keep doing what they are doing to nurture the development and growth of fragile seedlings like my husband and hope their stories can have a ripple effect on others!

As an educator, I felt an obligation to take meaningful steps to try to rectify this problem, after listening to this story. I felt responsible for each and every one of the 22.8 million out of

school children and resolved to fulfil the goal I had set out to achieve. When I asked Noor Mustafa to explain his life in a nutshell, he shared the following piece of writing in Urdu, which I have translated below.

Weavers weave, not to cover someone's body, but in fact they weave their dreams and desires.	جولاہا کپڑا بُنتا ہے ، مگر کسی کا تن ڈھکنے کے لئے نہیں، بلکہ وہ تو اپنی خواہشات بُن رہا ہوتا ہے
We all are also weavers!	،ہم سب بھی جولاہے ہیں
We weave our desires but continue to unweave our lives.	جو اپنی خواہشوں کو بُنتے اور بُی ہوئی زندگی کو ادھیڑتے چلے جاتے ہیں
One day the dress of our desires is ready, but the dress of our lives has been unwoven completely.	ایک دن خواہشات کا لباس تو مکمل ہوجاتا ہے، مگر زندگی کے سارے دھاگے اُدھڑ چکے ہوتے ہیں
Like the weaver we collect the threads of our being and weave our lives on the loom of time.	جولاہا وقت کی کھڈی پر اپنی بھکری ہوئی ذات کا دھاگا دھاگا بُنتا ہے اور ایک شخصیت کا روپ دیتا ہے
But just as if even a single thread is left then the fabric's beauty is tarnished and it remains unfinished.	مگر جس طرح کپڑے کا کوئی دھاگا نکلا رہ جائے تو کپڑے کی خوبصورتی ماند پڑ جاتی ہے اور وہ ادھورا رہ جاتا ہے
Similarly, if a thread in someone's life is left unwoven-because it got pulled somewhere in the journey, their lives and desires are left unfulfilled.	کبھی کبھار کسی ذات کا بھی کوئ دھاگا رہ جاتا ہے، جس کا سرا کوئ راہ چلتا پکڑتا اور انکی ذات کہ ادھیڑتا چلا جاتا ہے
But you must weave again!	۔پر یہ اذیت تہ سہنا پڑتی ہے
You must go on as this is the price for the fulfillment of your desires	۔اپنی خوہشلت کی تکمیل کا تاوان اور قیمت تو ادا کرنا ہوتی ہے
Endurance and persistence are the ransom you pay for fulfillment!	

(Written in Urdu by: Syed Noor Mustafa Gillani. Translated in English by: Amber Noor Mustafa)

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Kedesha-Kraft & Immersive Erotic Theater:
Playing with Fire

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Abstract
An alliance of theater makers, sex workers, healers, academics, and activists developed "Kedesha-Kraft" and applied it to immersive theater as part of an ongoing attempt to create new modalities for sexual healing and erotic expression that are ethical, sustainable, and scalable. This autoethnographic account of Catherine Becker's participation in a Kedesha-Kraft training and an immersive erotic theater production, *Midsummer Temple Dream,* is framed by an introduction and assessment co-written with the performance's director, Christopher Fuelling, who is one of the creators of Kedesha-Kraft.

Keywords
Immersive Theater, Sexuality, Shamanism, Hero's Journey

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What will my participation in immersive erotic theater require, and what role will sexuality play? How does one write about what Corey and Nakama (1997) refer to as the fulcrum between academia and the language of sex? -Catherine's Fieldnotes, May 2022

One year after the event, I continue to reflect and integrate the experience. The opportunity to undertake a hero's journey as a pilgrim through A Midsummer Temple Dream was a highlight of my personal and professional life. As to whether transformation occurred and the role eros played, the embers are still burning. The connections that were formed over several days with cast and crew are ongoing. Given the brief amount of time we were together, I experienced a deeper intimacy than I have been able to forge in most of my relationships, especially the ones where eros is not present or is subdued. My identity has shifted from scholar to pilgrim, from participant-observer that was an "I" to a "we" that is co-constructing this text.

Dysfunctional social systems and ways of relating have left countless individuals traumatized, isolated, and stripped of their personal agency. In response, a collective alliance comprised of theater makers, sex workers, healers, academics, and activists has emerged around their shared observation that while the expression of sexual desires and needs can inflict deep wounds and foster shame, it also has the potential to act as a catalyst for healing and creativity. This inspired them to create Kedesha-Kraft as a transformative modality that harnesses the profound power of eros to catalyze personal and societal change.

Kedesha-Kraft

"*Kedesha*" (masculine form: "*Kadesh*"), from the Semitic root "Q-D-Sh" meaning "holy", was the Ancient Hebrew name for a priestess of Astarte, the Canaanite goddess of fertility and love. Temples like hers existed throughout the ancient Mediterranean before the rise of patriarchal monotheism. Although the nature of their cultic activities remains controversial, they were sexual enough for the Biblical meaning of "*kedesha*" to be "prostitute". (Lipinski, 2023). Ohad Pele Ezrahi, an orthodox kabbalist rabbi, who became a leading figure in the sacred sexuality movement in Israel and beyond, provides a historical fictional account of the suppression of Astarte worship in Jerusalem in the 7th Century BCE that suggests it contributed to the repression and stigmatization and of sex. (2018).

Ezrahi served as an advisor in the development of the Kedesha initiative and worked with Fuelling to create a 750-person interactive *Astarte Shabbat* at a festival in Israel in 2019, returning the celebration of the goddess to her lands for the first time in almost three thousand years.

"*Kraft*," which means "power" in German, refers to a set of socially defined skills and practices that develops capabilities and knowledge (physical, conceptual, and social) that create or change things (such as the psyche of the self or others, relationships, or culture).

The transformational art form of Kedesha-Kraft, as developed by the creators, includes the following postulates:

- All erotic interactions impact individual psyches and bodies, interpersonal relationships, and social agreements by confirming or transforming them, whether consciously and intentionally or not.

- Compassion and ethical accountability drive those who share this assessment to act more consciously, intentionally, and co-creatively in erotic encounters and other meaningful play.

- Intentional interventions are most effective directed at one psyche/body at a time. Delineating roles of "Giver" and "Receiver" reduces the confusion and conflicts that result from the unnegotiated needs-derby that typifies many human erotic interactions.

- Effectiveness flows from a deep understanding of the receiver's needs and desires for specific, meaningful words, touch, or actions, which may be activated by applying the "three C's":

    1. Curiosity in an earnest process of discovery before the interaction
    2. Creativity during the performance,
    3. Compassion in integrating its impacts via aftercare.

- The giver must know, express, and hold clear boundaries in every interaction with a receiver. Maintaining boundaries may require resourcing before and after each interaction to prevent a sense of depletion or exploitation.

- There can be many motivations to play the role of giver, including intrinsic ones (like love, pleasure, expression, exploration, empowerment, or mastery) or various extrinsic forms of reciprocity (whether by flipping the vector of the gift for the subsequent encounter or through a freely negotiated form of exchange for something desired by the giver).

Kedesha-Kraft offers gifts of love and attention across a spectrum of contexts, from massive public rituals and immersive erotic theater to private co-created interactions with a partner.

These interventions do not need to be sexual to be effective. For receivers with sexual trauma, non-sexual attention and care may be more healing and appropriate. Indeed, a frame of loving, shame-free curiosity and creativity may allow any receiver to feel "kedesha-ed." As demonstrate through Catherine's autoethnography, which follows this introduction, she felt most kedesha-ed when stories from her past that did not include erotic components were seen and witnessed. Erotic immersive theater imbued with Kedesha-Kraft functions as psychosocial, ritual play, enabling participants to explore, renegotiate, and rewrite identities, stories, agreements, and relationships.

Background

Le Mystère de Papa Loko. Ozan, Fuelling, et al.
Burning Man, 1999. Photo: Bret Amole

Creators of Kedesha-Kraft experienced the impact of creative play at transformational festivals like Burning Man, where Fuelling had directed several large participatory "opera" rituals in the late 90s. They employed ritual techniques of re-envisioning of myths and archetypes to invite hundreds of performers and thousands of participants to try on new characters, actions, and stories. Such festivals and events create liminal spaces and the *communitas* that Victor Turner identified as critical sites of social and personal transformation (1982). These meaningful and consequential "zones of ritual play" (Graeber, 2022) are "shamanic."

The appropriated Siberian religious concept came from the Tungusic word "shaman*,*" which describes a spiritual adept who uses "techniques of ecstasy" to access invisible upper and lower realms and intermediate between them and the middle realm of living humans (Eliade, 1951). Post-modern neo-shamanism emerged due to perceived disconnection and crisis in a modern disenchanted world. Neo-shamanism attempts to reanimate ancient and indigenous healing techniques that appear to work in magical, enchanted ways (Braun, 2010). Shamanic and tantric traditions employ techniques of ecstasy to transcend the egoic self to heal the body and connect with mystical sources and others "transpersonally" (Ezrahi & Ezrahi, 2019). "Shamans are required to be performers of the first order, to enact struggles with spiritual forces or magical flights to other realities, to sing, dance, and compose poetry" (Cardeña & Beard, 1996, p. 31). The ability to intentionally coax the psyche into experiencing another reality is the performer's craft, whether conducting a shamanic ritual, acting in a Hollywood film, or engaging in an erotic encounter or intervention.

As with shamanism, erotic encounters can also be seen as "performances" in the sense that, consciously or not, participants enact "roles." Erving Goffman addressed the fundamental

nature of performance in human interactions by defining it as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants." He further noted that "the issues dealt with by stagecraft and stage management are sometimes trivial, but they are quite general; they seem to occur everywhere in social life" (1959, p. 24). Like shamans, erotic performers, and sex-workers create desired impacts by performing symbolically potent actions and embodying archetypes from their audiences' and clients' collective and personal unconscious. Kedesha-Kraft intentionally implements these experiences in an emerging, neo-shamanic art form that attempts to safely channel the fire of sexual and erotic energy for personal, relational, and social transformation.

The creators of Kedesha-Kraft have been participants, practitioners, and coaches in the sacred sexuality world, studying with teachers who see themselves as "sex shamans" (McClure, 2020). During the creation of Kedesha-Kraft, much of the sacred sexuality world was inundated with accusations of unsafe practices and sexual abuse of power by its leaders, despite attempts to teach and hold standards of consent and empowerment. The creators sought to address this volatility by carefully selecting and screening the Kedeshas, creating feedback and support structures, and providing trauma-informed training to recognize signs of dysregulation and dissociation and to offer techniques to restore resilience if needed. They eschewed claims of divine knowledge that have led to so many abuses of power by those who are treated as gurus (Lucia, 2018). They also considered the feminist critique that challenges whether consent itself is enough or whether systemically disempowered people could meaningfully even give consent (Dworkin, 1988; Srinivasan, 2021). Consequently, they worked to create containers for interventions that would go beyond "enthusiastic consent," a meaningful higher "degree of consent" (Nagoski, 2022), to interactions and events that are "co-created" by all involved.

In their application of Kedesha-Kraft, the creators knew that what they were doing was theater, not therapy. Yet they sought to incorporate therapeutic principles and safeguards when possible. They adopted its healing orientation by conducting extensive interviews with each Pilgrim before the event to gain a sense of their goals, needs, desires, boundaries, traumas, and triggers. They then used this information to custom design scenes for each of the Pilgrims and create support structures for the Kedeshas outside of Pilgrim interactions. They drew inspiration from Psychodrama, the somatic group therapy Jacob Moreno (1946) developed in an actual theater. As research, Fuelling and three of the creators attended an intensive introduction to Psychodrama. They applied some of its principles and safeguards in the interviewing and ordeal design for their *Midsummer Temple Dream.*

To assess the performance and its impact, the team created multiple feedback channels during and after the events, including talking circles and exit interviews with the cast and the participants, who were called "Pilgrims," to refer to their potentially transformational journey. They held post-performance reflection sessions with the creators that included Catherine. Due to her research on personal and cultural transformation (Becker, 1993), archetypes (Becker & Nardin, 1999), trauma (Becker & Geist-Martin, 2022), healing (Geist-Martin, P., Becker, C., Carnett, S., & Slauta, K., 2009), and past participation in eros-focused events related to their project, Catherine was invited to serve as resident ethnographer to provide another assessment of the project's impact. However, the timing between the invitation and the event was not long enough to allow her to get the human subject clearance that would allow her to conduct research interviews with the participants. Alternatively, she offered to attend the Kedesha-kraft training before the event, participate in the performance as a pilgrim, and compose an autoethnography.

A Midsummer Temple Dream

The site of the Pilgrim's transformation was designed to be a 48-hour immersion in an extraordinary world that included ritual theater performances and an interactive script inspired by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest.* The setting was a retreat center, and its forested grounds in the mountains of Colorado represented the imaginary reality of the play. It included a Kedesha Temple staffed by human priestesses and priests yet frequented by the magical nymphs and satyrs from the nearby woods and visited by the queen and king of the fairies themselves, Titania and Oberon.

The entire Pilgrim's experience, from the initial interviews to the pilgrimage to the special world and experiences therein and finally the return home, was designed to animate the stages of a "Hero's Journey" in the psyches of the Pilgrims. Joseph Campbell (1949) noted that this socially meaningful "monomyth" exists in many cultures. The monomyth describes a personally transformative journey undertaken by a protagonist that begins in the "ordinary world" of their home/community, followed by a "Call" to travel to a "Special World" where they are tested and ultimately face an "Ordeal in the inmost cave" (of their psyche). Following the ordeal, they are rewarded and return home in a changed state, bringing an "Elixir" (a potent physical or conceptual tool) gained upon the journey to offer to their community.

(Friel, 2022)

The creator's custom-designed each Pilgrim's ordeal in the inmost cave to engage them to face parts of their personality that may be unconscious or in what Jung refers to as the Shadow (1938), thereby fostering the opportunity for transformation. Performers embodied meaningful

characters and social constellations and invited the Pilgrim to physically interact with them in impactful, embodied ways. Both Psychodrama and Alejandro Jodorowsky's (2010) creative "psychomagic" interventions consider the performance of meaningful actions as the site of psychosocial transformation. As the ordeal was the climax of the entire journey, the rest of the immersive experience was designed to arouse and prepare the Pilgrim's psyche and body for this ordeal and help them integrate its rewards afterward.

At the start of the 48-hour event, each Pilgrim was assigned two Kedeshas to accompany them through the group activities and rituals and to provide nurturing, acceptance, safety, and support before and after their ordeal. From the moment they were dropped off in the middle of a forest without their cell phones or luggage, the Pilgrims were guided through an array of liminal, multisensory experiences from unexpected Shakespearean moments in the forest to a sumptuous, choreographed Fairy Feast served by opera singers and cirque performers. The scenes culminated in an "Invocation of Desire" ritual with the entire cast. These experiences were designed to arouse the Pilgrim's psyches for the upcoming ordeals and to provide a context where their desires are welcomed and celebrated. Following the conclusion of the ordeal, the Pilgrim was offered a "Reward" Bacchanalia and then, on the final morning, a final reintegration ritual before beginning "The Road Home." In a "meta" twist upon a theatrical ritual, after the final reintegration ritual and the cast de-rolling, the Pilgrims were invited to join the cast backstage for their debrief and part of the strike.

An Autoethnographic Hero's Journey through Immersive Erotic Theater

After turning sixty, I vow to spend some of my sabbatical year engaging in activities prioritizing my health and body, including my sexuality. My academic life and family responsibilities have led me to prioritize ideas and obligations with little time left for self-care or pleasure. The exception to this is when I've attended events sponsored by organizations such as the Network for New Culture, the Human Awareness Institute, and the International School of Temple Arts that create containers for exploring intimacy and sexuality while advocating for empowerment, expression, consent, community, and self-care. I've had the privilege of participating in many of these events during the past decade when I can get away. Doing so has provided me a glimpse of what is possible when a body courses with adrenaline, dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin surrounded by a supportive community of love and acceptance: peak experiences, exhilaration, expanded awareness, increased capacity for healing, pleasure, and creativity.

*However, after the retreats end, and I return to my **ordinary world** of overworking and ignoring my sexual, physical, and psychological needs, the experiences of ecstasy and love I know are possible soon fade as if they were only a dream.*

*So, when I get **the call** from director Christopher Fuelling asking if I'd be willing to research the impact of the Pilgrims' journey through an immersive erotic theater production,* A Midsummer Temple Dream, *I'm intrigued.*

In addressing the 21st-century call of the Humanities in Asia and the Pacific, Communication scholar Ronald D. Gordon (2020) points out that, like much of the humanities, Communication is a "disembodied discipline." The same could be said for most social science research. Gordon reiterates Goleman's (2017; 2006; 2002) contention that "cultivating emotional and social intelligence (including self-awareness, emotional-self management, empathic capacity, and respectful relationship practices) is every bit as important as developing intellectual intelligence" (p. 3).

I'm in.

However, I'm having a negative visceral reaction to the word "Pilgrim." As a scholar situated in Hawaii on the ceded lands of the Kānaka Maoli, for me, it carries a negative connotation associated with colonization and genocide. Christopher explains,"Ohad Pele Ezrahi, our advisor, suggested the term because it has been used for thousands of years in many languages to describe an initiate who undergoes a transformational journey," While it clarifies their intentions and motivations for using the term for the role I'm about to play, it doesn't stop me from cringing.

*As soon as I alleviate one concern, another arises. What will it mean to be a Pilgrim? I scroll through their website to seek more information. The invitation to participate in the Kedesha training or as a Pilgrim contains an image of an enticing fairy. What the Kedesha training or the performance entails, however, is obscure. There is no additional information other than the dates of the events. Maybe I should retract my offer and **refuse the call**.*

TITANIA in *A Midsummer Temple Dream*

The text under the fairy image teases, "Are you sure that we are awake? It seems to me that yet we sleep, we dream." There is something strange, yet familiar, beckoning about the image. I remember my commitment to be more embodied.

I'm going.

My plane lands in Colorado. A message appears on my phone. It's a text from my Kadesh with the results of his STD test.
I was supposed to get one too.
Shit.

With the busy end of the semester and perhaps some subconscious blocking, I wasn't able to or didn't. The reception of the results and my awareness of my non-compliance heightens my anxiety regarding what is to come.

The site where the event is to be held is forested and remote. I leave my luggage and sleeping bag in a rustic cabin and head out to explore. Between building sets, the cast and crew offer hugs to one another and to me. They gaze lovingly into one another's eyes and touch frequently (after asking permission). Erotic energy is everywhere: in their bodies, which are clad and unclad, stunning, much younger than mine, and full of verve. They are adorned in slinky, silky, shape-enhancing outfits tinged with glitter and fur. Even the landscape appears erotic. Cracked boulders appear to me as buttocks or female genitalia, and tall, slender stones as phalluses.

The Kedesha training involves workshops on consent, sensual and erotic touch, signs of trauma and dissociation, conflict resolution, and theater and ritual skills. We explore three axioms of Kedesha-Kraft: 1) Kedeshas are sex shamans: creating change in our world by embodied ritual interventions; 2) We are all on our own Hero's journey that requires resourcing ourselves and others; 3) We are co-creating a new imaginary reality through a field of intersubjective agreements (which is how ALL realities are co-created).

Whenever specifics of the upcoming performance and the ordeals are discussed, they ask me to leave the room. During those times, I continue my exploration of the forest.

I come to a door in the forest. Although I have no clue what to expect, I imagine it is the **threshold** *I will cross a little over a week from now to begin one of the most critical stages of the Hero's journey,* **the ordeal.**

Although the Hero's journey has distinct states, it isn't necessarily linear. I notice that I am already spiraling in and out of the various stages several times: reconsidering again how I might refuse the call as I begin to understand there will be **tests** *that will require me to confront the* **enemies** *of various fears in* **the inmost cave** *of my own mind. During the three nights between the Kedesha training and the performance, I'm asked to leave the site as they conduct the dress rehearsals.*

I stay alone in a nearby town and try to prepare myself for my role as a pilgrim ethnographer and turn to books and articles about ritual theater and erotic performance searching for **allies.**

> If anthropologists are ever to take ethnodramatics seriously, our discipline will have to become something more than a cognitive game played in our heads and inscribed in (let's face it) somewhat tedious journals, we will have to become performers ourselves and bring to human existential fulfillment what have heretofore been only mentalistic protocols. We must find ways of overcoming the boundaries of both political and cognitive structures by dramatic empathy, sympathy, friendship, even love. (Turner, 1982, p. 111)

Tough call.

Performance anxiety is kicking in: what if I cannot "perform" for the others who are sweating, rehearsing, and giving so much time and energy to create this experience? Will I choke? We all signed consent forms that said we were part of an immersive theatrical experience and that sexual activity was not an expected or guaranteed part of that experience and that, if sexual activity occurred on-site, it was consensual. Still, what will be expected of me?

I worry about vaginal atrophy–thinning tissues that come with aging and a lack of estrogen that lead to painful intercourse, bladder infections, tearing, ripping? Oh my God! Why hadn't we talked about this? Why didn't I even know much about it until very recently? Certainly, erectile dysfunction gets spoken of, if not by those who suffer from it, at least by those with treatments such as Viagra. Both happen to 50% of the population sooner or later. Yet, despite being immersed in the world of sexually themed events–I'd never heard of vaginal atrophy or what to do to maintain vaginal health after menopause. What role will my sexuality play in the event? How will I write about what Corey and Nakama (1997) refer to as the fulcrum between academia and the language of sex?

I need support.

I call one of my former students, who's gay, now a Ph.D. He studied queer bars in China; he may be able to mentor me through this. Queer people have always been outside the norm. Isn't that where change happens–outside of cultural norms? We talk about cultural change and the risks it takes, and he reminds me of the work of other scholars whose research transcends cultural norms. We talk about how when we are removed from the constraints of a dominant culture, one discovers that there can be other realities, and other ways of being. From there, seeds of transformation are sprouted.

I find additional encouragement from reading ethnographies of sex workers and reports from other scholars whose work transcended the boundaries of what is acceptable or even legal.

> Confessions of field workers' identities and involvements are more than academic self-indulgence, they serve as essential components in any full accounting of fieldwork field research knowledge in the context of sexuality and science. Foucault describes the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth. In the present context, we can understand the field researcher's confession as an emerging ritual designed to flesh out the fieldwork experience and to produce situated understandings of the fieldwork research and field research findings previously submerged under mythologies of researcher objectivity and distance. (Ferrell & Hamm, 2018, p.12).

*These scholars serve as **allies** and **mentors** that give me new resolve to continue forward. If eros rises, I'll deal with the implications later. Later, I will decide what to tell and not tell in my story, as all autobiographers do.*

I meet the other three pilgrims at the rendezvous point where a limousine comes to pick us up. A bag is put over our heads, and we are taken to an undisclosed location. Despite arising anxiety, anticipation, fear, and excitement, the prior interviews, my participation in the Kedesha-Kraft training, and the prior boundary and consent conversations with my Kadeshes allow me to surrender with some degree of trust and calm.

Rendezvous Point-of-no-turning-back

At the entrance, we are interrogated about our goals, motivations, and expectations. I have **crossed the threshold** *into surrender and have stated my deepest truth. My goal? "Pleasure." My motivation? "The liberation of all beings."*

Ritual Challenge at the Threshold

After the interrogation, I am taken to my room, where I meet my two Kadeshes in person. Buzz, a comrade, comforting force, a bit of a trickster, and my lead Kadesh, nicknamed Dragon for the event. He calls me "My Queen," and I call him "My King." Dragon's job is to linger with me in my chambers and accompany me to the events leading up to the ordeal.

DRAGON

The first day includes a rumpus of Nymphs and Fairies at an opening reception and a fun-filled evening that includes revelry and a ritual to invoke the Goddess of Eros. My Kadeshes are attentive to my comfort and needs. They offer massage, conversation, and protection. They fend off wild centaurs and tickling Trixies.

On the second day, Dragon guides me to the Portal, through which I will go on to my ordeal.

Alone.

I am not allowed to bring my phone. I am not allowed to bring anything.

With encouragement from Dragon and Buzz, I say goodbye to them and pass through the portal to travel on through the forest.

Ahead of me is a Labyrinth. As I start to traverse it, characters appear from amongst the shrubbery, each dressed as someone from my past.

The characters that emerge from the trees are dressed as my child-self, my teen-self, my adult-self, the minister-who-threatened-hell, the kids-who-taunted-me–telling me I was never good enough, my father, my mother, my mentors. The performers are saying lines spoken to me throughout my life. It occurs to me that during the interviews, I'd mentioned to my Kadeshes that I was a black-market adoptee and had written a memoir, The Mother Road, *about my search for my birth mother, identity, belonging, and acceptance.*
They read it!

Suddenly my life sprouts into three dimensions and I'm surrounded by **allies and enemies** from different phases of my life.

In the middle of the labyrinth, stands my younger self, cowering and crying. Through writing my memoir and years of therapy, I know that I need to integrate her with my adult self. What is different here is that others see my challenge and are allowing me to defeat the negative voices that torment her. Cautiously, I wind through the labyrinth toward the actress playing my younger self in the middle of the maze. The voices continue to shout,

"You're going to hell."
"You'll never get out of Buffalo."
"A professor? Ha! Who do you think you are?"

When I reach the younger me in the center of the labyrinth I embrace her, integrating my adult self and my Wounded Child, in full witness of my community. By demonstrating my ability to move beyond the negative voices from my past and care for my inner child, I've passed **a test.**

Although the healing potential of memoir writing is familiar to me (Becker and Geist-Martin, 2022) the opportunity to interact with others enacting scenes from my memoir takes it to another level. I am overcome with awe at the care taken to create this experience and the sense of belonging that comes from being witnessed and fully seen.
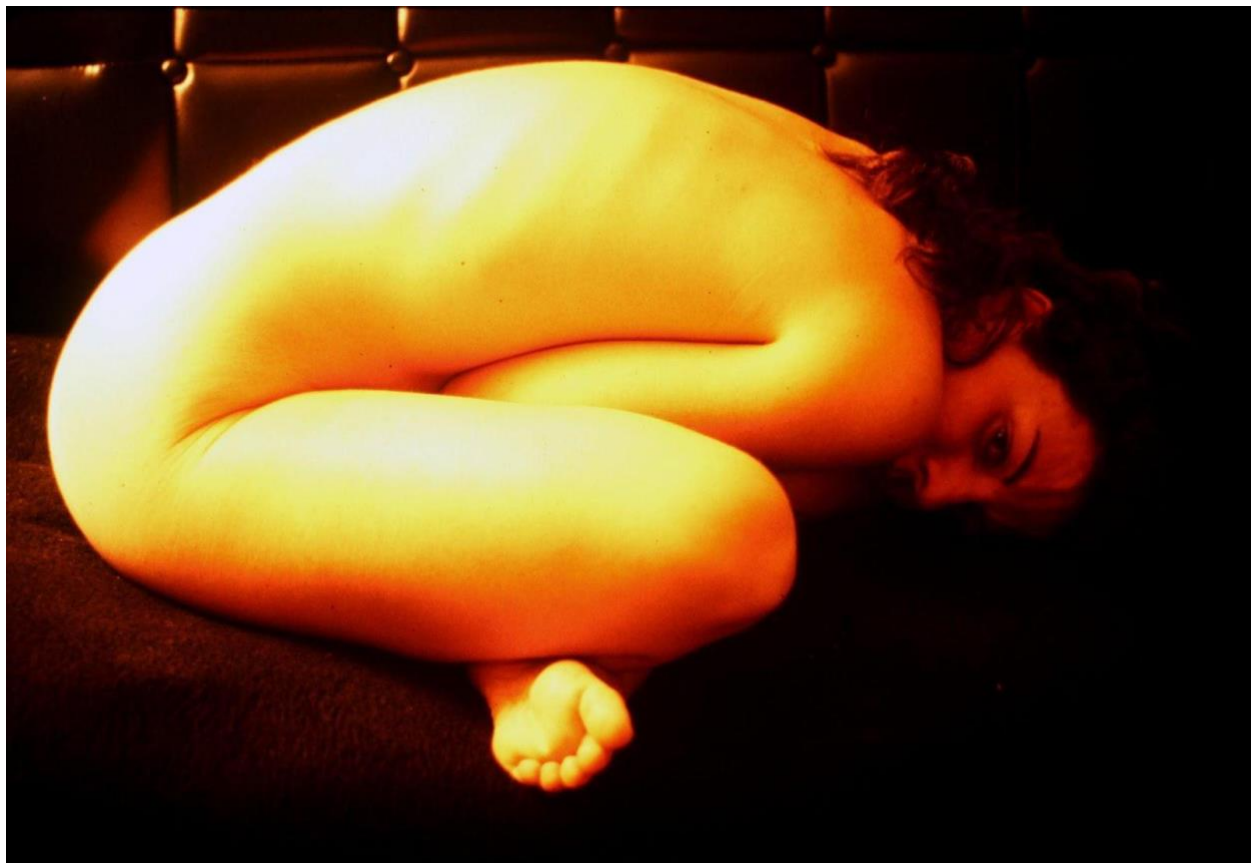
The Mother Road (Catherine)

*Next, I come to a remote cabin. As I enter, a woman dressed as my birth mother is relinquishing my birth certificate to my adoptive mother. I'm again in my **innermost cave,** this time confronting the primal wound of the adoptee that comes from feeling abandoned, rejected, and given up–not good enough to keep (Verrier, 1995). Fuelling, also an adoptee, is perhaps familiar with the wound. Maybe that informed the script? The actress who plays my adoptive mother looks strikingly like her. All of a sudden, reality became slippery: what am I watching?*

My Adoptive Mother   The Actress who played her

My birth mother's face shows sorrow as she hands over a swaddled infant to my adoptive mother, who is crying tears of gratitude and joy. The women look into one another's eyes. A guide asks, "What do you want to say to them?" I stammer, "I forgive you; I love you." By then, we are all crying, the actresses, the guide, the cameraman, and me–as we experience the conflicting feelings of irreparable loss from severing the bond between a mother and her child, along with the joy of love emanating from my adoptive mother. The retraumatizing phrase adoptees often hear that invalidates their primal wound, "you are so lucky," is negated by how the scene has captured the complexity of the adoption triad and feelings related to being both unwanted and wanted. All the years I have spent composing the memoir in an attempt to heal and understand adoption, converge at this moment. Through being witnessed, I am made whole.

*The ordeal ends at a large nest of twigs and sticks, where I am joined by my two Kadeshes and several actors playing the roles of my high school friends having a picnic. I join and relish my **reward**.*

As we snack, a mystic appears from the woods, shrouded in a hood and carrying a staff. He sits silently before me, unwraps a Tarot deck, and invokes me to shuffle and select cards. The reading is strikingly similar to questions I've had about my life that are currently unfolding.

The Wild Unknown Archetypes Deck and Guidebook (Kras 2019).

I am aligned with the forces below, above, around, and within me. The power of all parts of me being out of the Shadow and fully seen, witnessed, by a community is immense. I feel integrated and like I belong as never before. Everyone leaves except Buzz and me. We cuddle under a blanket debriefing the experience gently, softly.

A thunderstorm rolls in along with a cool, quiet, rain. I am fully landed in my body and the present moment.

Lingering Questions: Do we have the Elixir?

We are left with lingering questions, some of them regarding gender expectations and politics. We debate whether feminist porn and other forms of "sex positivity" function as liberation or further oppression in a sex-negative patriarchy (Taormino, 2013). We wonder about the semiotics of some motifs and gender roles unconsciously played out. Kedesha-Kraft seeks to encourage shame-free desire expression and exploration of the unconscious Shadow while maintaining boundaries and safety for all through enthusiastic consent and intentional co-creation. The goal is to "meet people where they are" rather than creating more shame that they are not where the team wishes they were. However, where is the line between empathetic engagement and complicity?

We also wonder about the expectations the participants placed upon themselves. There is a tension between the necessary expectations of playing a particular theatrical role and the

optional field of consensual sexual activity. Even when it was emphasized and contractually clarified that any erotic and sexual activities were optional and consensual, during the debriefings, the Kedeshas, and the Pilgrims reported that the role itself, social scripts and pressures, and the expectations of others influenced their choices and behaviors. Catherine wasn't the only one with performance anxiety. In her brief interactions with the other pilgrims, one expressed concern that they would not be able to "perform" and therefore take part in all the gifts the Kedesha's bestowed on them. While audience interaction is a core topic of immersive theater, attempting to transcend the passivity of the audience in traditional theater, it becomes especially tender (and potentially transformative) when engaging eros and bodies. The challenge is how to engage "audience" members as participants in the performance in a way that stays in their "growth zone" without traumatizing or retraumatizing them.

Other concerns were expressed by cast members from different communities, mindsets, standards, and levels of training. For example, some of the Kadesha said they were exhausted and that the balance between caring for themselves and others was hard to find. She referred to the event as a "marathon," adding, "we work out and we train and then we get there, and we run the marathon… and after the marathon, you're really fucking tired, so you recuperate. But it doesn't mean you don't run the marathon." Such sentiments, including the enthusiastic choice to "keep running the marathons," are common to professional performers who have made an informed choice for a meaningful career they love that is often demanding and exhausting.

Similarly, successful sex workers have many strategies to resource themselves before and after experiences that can feel emotionally and physically draining. But some of the Kedeshas were not professional performers or sex workers who had already made these choices informed by their experience, understanding, and expertise. And everyone, by the virtually unique nature of this hybrid production, found themselves in multiple, unfamiliar situations.

These concerns reflect that immersive erotic theater is a nascent art form with neither a well-articulated skillset of personal strategies nor established institutional practices. These are crucial areas to attend to if this field is to develop. Kedesha-Kraft is the first known attempt.

A procedural solution may be to "professionalize" the next iterations by moving away from "training" non-professionals from the sacred sexuality workshop world to employing only cast and crew professionally trained and experienced in their roles. However, there is tension among the creators regarding how to create impactful productions while making them accessible. Professional productions of this scale are prohibitively expensive. Business models that would lower ticket prices generally require massive front-end investment. This may be tolerable since the creators initially planned for "premium pilgrim productions" to pay for developing a Kedesha-Kraft that could be given away to the world for free.

Regardless of scale, could such efforts bring about sustainable transformation in individuals and culture? Might they function like the "hot tub diplomacy" at Esalen that is believed to have led Soviet leaders, through individual transformation and dialogue, to bring about *perestroika*? (Krippal, 2008) The majority of the collaborators agree that the ultimate purpose of this initiative is healing and social change beyond either art or entertainment. But do immersive erotic theater and Kedesha-Kraft offer something different and more potent than existing intimate and group practices in relationships, coaching, workshops, or other erotic interventions?

Other emerging questions include:

- What are the relative benefits of compelling stories and characters embodied by professional performers and presented with high technical production values compared to experiences that require less labor, expertise, and expense, such as one or two practitioners creating a meaningful erotic or psychomagic ordeal?

- What might happen by including the darker realms of kink or diving deeper into The Shadow?

- What is transformation, and how do we know it has occurred? If it occurs because of an intervention or immersive event, is it sustainable? Or does it require further specific actions or ongoing relationships?

- What is the role of eros and sexuality in transformation? Does it play an essential role in enabling a psyche to prepare for a meaningful ordeal leading to transformation? Is it the key to the most potent ordeals?

- Does a spiritual component to the experience lead to more profound and more meaningful transformation? What are the implications of attributing motivations and actions to a "Divine Source" versus acknowledging it as a human "performance?" Might attributing actions to a divine source lead to spiritual bypassing (Welwood, 2002), interpersonal disconnection, cultural appropriation, or unaccountability? These questions have led to the most contentious disagreements among the creators.

Despite the constant themes of sacred reverence, empowerment, and consent, the rapidly expanding sacred sexuality world is still dealing with accusations regarding the abuse of power. Perhaps this has come about due to the Me-Too movement exposing the systemic abuse of power in the entertainment industry or the emergent Sex Worker's Rights movement's resistance to legal disenfranchisement, criminalization, and social stigma. Some sacred sex practitioners, teachers, and coaches speak of holding themselves to a high ethical standard or claim they are transpersonal healers connected to and guided by "a divine source." However, there is no recognized educational standard or licensing body to regulate either. We suspect that if business models that invoke eros or involve sex depend upon hype, scarcity manipulation, dependence formation, and claims of superhuman knowledge, some people understandably will feel "burned."

Even if ethically questionable practices are avoided, erotic inventions can still be fraught with difficulty due to wounds and shame related to sexual experiences that are endemic to our contemporary sociopolitical systems. In "dominator societies" (Eisler & Fry 2019), patriarchal structures reduce and limit women's socioeconomic status, rights, and freedoms. Such social realities, as well as beliefs, institutions, and laws designed to control women's bodies and sexuality, have dampened female desire and sexual expression. In societies and situations where women have power and safety, their desire and sexual expression run at levels very similar to men's (Martin, 2018). A lifetime of dominator patterns creates so much trauma that it is hard to imagine that the resultant mindsets can allow free, informed choices.

Toxic masculinity is not only harmful to women; it's toxic for men, trans, and nonbinary people as well. Sexism, sex-negativity, and competitive, traumatizing constructs of masculinity create an unhealthy environment for everyone. Jungian psychologists consider the pain of first

social reactions to pubescent boys regarding their emerging sexuality as "the Male Wound." These adverse reactions have a formative impact not only upon the man's developing sexuality but also on his entire life and career choices. (Stewart, Marchiano, & Lee, 2021).

Erotic interactions exist within these contentious social frames between psyches and bodies shaped by such experiences. Therefore, to avoid retrenching social domination structures, a sober and caring understanding of psychosocial dynamics and skillful action is required to realize their healing, mutually empowering, creative potential. As in the world beyond ritualized events, trauma or re-traumatization may occur due to boundary violations or unmet expectations. Proposed and implemented solutions include more stringent pre-event intake processes, mediation, trauma-informed training for facilitators, and stricter ethical guidelines for interactions between participants, facilitators, and assistants. The discussion is ongoing.

As we continue to scrutinize the impact of our event, we evoke the metaphor of fire because, like fire, the erotic is powerful and potentially dangerous. Those who play with fire could be (and have been) stigmatized, misunderstood, or burned. Creating safe spaces that still allow the wildfire of eros to burn is an ongoing challenge. Immersive erotic theater is expressly presented as "theater" and not "therapy"; the impact and motivations of participants (and creators) seem to function in a gray area in between. The creators are committed to scrutinizing the efficacy of interviewing/screening participants and other procedural safeguards However, they support taking the risk of unleashing it in a cauldron of intentional co-creation because without it–we are frozen, lifeless, and frigid.

There are no easy answers to the questions, contradictions, and paradoxes of a movement that attempts to create transformative art that includes eros. We are left with an idea, which according to Barthes (1977), "is always a scene of pathos by which I imagine and by which I am moved. In short, a theater" (p. 197). Kedesha-Kraft and erotic immersive theater encourage shame-free desire expression and an exploration of the unconscious Shadow to reap the healing, life-affirming benefits of sexuality through clear boundaries, agreements, enthusiastic consent, and co-creation. Although these are earnest attempts to improve erotic interactions, more research is needed on effective and ethical techniques of intentional, accountable erotic co-creation and expression.

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The Relational Self Generated by Caring Experience and Collaborative Autoethnography

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Abstract

In Japan, interest in the care and the ethics of care is growing. The self in the ethics of care, called the relational self, had been considered " women's self" and regarded as inferior to the autonomous self of men. Recently, the relational self has been considered generated and developed by the experience of care, regardless of gender, and has the potential to transform this hierarchical and competitive society. The similarities between relational ethics in collaborative autoethnography and the ethics of care have been referred to by Carolyn Ellis (2007).

Drawing on these considerations of previous studies, I hypothesize that the process of creating autoethnography will generate and develop the relational self of the researcher. To clarify this hypothesis, I revised my previous autoethnographic works and reconstructed them in dialogue with the works of Carolyn Ellis, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carol Rambo Ronai, to present the process as a "layered account" (Ronai, 1995).

Keywords

relational self, the ethics of care, relational ethics, collaborative autoethnography

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1. Introduction: the ethics of care and relational ethics in autoethnography

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled us to confront the lack of care and reminded us of its value. Okano (2022) and other Japanese researchers have urged us to rethink the value of care, calling for the need for "Democratizing care and making democracy centered on care" (Okano, 2022, p.120).

According to Carol Gilligan (1982), the ethics of care is "the language of responsibility" and a "weblike imagery of relationship to replace a hierarchical ordering" (Gilligan, 1982, p.137). People identify themselves among these "weblike relationships"; that is, the self in the ethics of care is regarded as *the relational self*. The relational self, also called a woman's self-recognition, had been valued less than the autonomous self, constructed by "the language of rights," which had been called a man's self-recognition. Nevertheless, it plays a significant role in creating a society in which people care for and help each other.

Joan C. Tronto argued against the capitalistic and gender-dualistic perception of care (Tronto, 1998). Interpreting the ethics of care based on gender binaries fails to capture its true value. By not viewing the relational self as a woman's specific self-recognition but as non-binary self-recognition generated by the experience of care, we can change the dualistic gender roles fixed by heterosexual norms, and transform the society constructed by competitive and capitalistic autonomous languages.

The similarities between the ethics of care and relational ethics in autoethnography are mentioned by Ellis (2007). Ellis suggests adding "relational ethics" as a third dimension of research ethics, following the previous two dimensions, "procedural ethics" and "ethics in practice".

According to Ellis (2007), relational ethics is related to the ethics of care, feminist

ethics, and communication ethics, which emphasizes mutual respect, dignity, and connection between the researcher and the researched. It requires that the researcher acts from the heart, recognizes relationships with others, and seeks to initiate and maintain the conversation.

Based on these discussions of Gilligan, Toronto, and Ellis–that the ethics of care is generated by the experience of care, and that the ethics of care and relational ethics in autoethnography are analogous–I hypothesize that the process of creating and practicing autoethnography will generate and develop the researcher's relational self.

To deepen the discussion on this hypothesis and present it as an autoethnographic work of myself, I tried to engage in further dialogue with my previous works of autoethnography (Suzuki, 2020), recent significant works of autoethnography by Carolyn Ellis, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carol Rambo Ronai, and the memories of my precious experience during ICAE 2022. I have attempted to represent these processes of reflection through multiple conversations between the inner voices inside myself to try to represent "the Unsettled-I" (Spry, 2018) state of my relational self as a "layered account" (Ronai, 1995).

2. The relational self, relational ethics, and autoethnography
2-1 Relational self and the ethics of care

As I mentioned above, the relational self is the fundamental difference between the ethics of care and the other liberalist ethics; the ethics of justice, typified by Kant and Rawls (Gilligan, 1982, Noddings, 1984, Shinagawa, 2007). Theorizing the ethics of care from the perspective of the relational self is not an easy task in the fields of ethics and political science. This is because it requires a fundamental rethinking of the theoretical foundations that have been constructed based on the autonomous self.

Despite the theoretical nature of the debate surrounding the ethics of care and justice in the field of modern ethics and political science, it is important to acknowledge the value of Gilligan's original emphasis on the individual's lived experience of caring and the inherent conflicts within the self that arise within this context. This perspective highlights the complexity and contextuality of caring and underscores the importance of considering the voices of those who experience caring in shaping an ethical framework.

Gilligan and others in the field of psychology have also researched the relational self (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021, Anderson & Chen, 2002), and Gilligan & Eddy has published the Listening Guide（Gilligan & Eddy, 2021） for listening to the voice of the polyphonic, vulnerable self in the relationship in a qualitative interview. The listening guide includes the following points: because human nature is relational so the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is co-constructed, and to hear the interviewee's vulnerable and multiple voices, the interviewer needs to open themselves.

2-2 Polyphonic voices in autoethnography; "Unsettled-I(Spry2018)"

Writing about oneself in autoethnography is writing about the relationship between oneself and others, so care for others is essential(Ellis ＆Bochner, 2000, Adams, Holman. Jones ＆ Ellis, 2015). Within the self and the other in autoethnography or collaborative autoethnography, there are multiple voices of various dimensions (Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2013). For example, in collaborative autoethnography, because there are multiple voices of the others as collaborators, how to represent those voices as multiple voices in a single work is an important question. Furthermore, to maximize the function of reflexivity as a practice in autoethnography, it is important to listen to carefully the inner vulnerable and multiple voices of the researchers themselves. Spry (2018) named these vulnerable, tangled, and multiple voices of oneself as "The Unsettled-I".

2-3 Empathy and compassion

In this presentation, I focused on empathy, to connect autoethnography with the relational ethics of the ethics of care. Slote (2007) discusses the ethics of care from the perspective of the theory of moral sentiments. Slote (2007) mentions that empathy is a distinctive aspect of the ethics of care that is not found in other types of ethics.

Carolyn Ellis also mentions the importance of compassion in the relational ethics of collaborative witnessing (Ellis, 2016) and notes "We come to understand others through our self-understanding, and we come to understand ourselves through understanding others, so it's a two-way street" (Ellis, 2016, p7).

According to Cambridge Dictionary, empathy is "the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation", and compassion is "a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them". Compassion for others requires an understanding of others, and to maintain a sincere attitude of understanding others, empathy for others is necessary.

"To understand others through our self-understanding" and "to understand ourselves through understanding others (ibid, p7)", I suppose this idea is about the relational self itself in the ethics of care. Therefore, I decided to create my autoethnography with a focus on empathy.

3. My autoethnography: My life as an autoethnographer focusing on empathy
3-1 Conflict with the word empathy

This is my autoethnography. I am a Ph.D. student, the mother of two children, and an autoethnographer in Japan. In recent years, my research has focused on the ethics of care and women's social activism. I tried to write about myself to face the meaning of the word empathy for me as an autoethnographer. However, this approach did not work well, and I was confused.

When empathy is mentioned in the context of ethics, the matter of distance is often discussed together. While it is easy for us to feel empathy for friends and family members who are close to us, doing the same is difficult for others who are far away and whose names we do not even know. For example, if an island far away from Japan is about to sink into the sea while my child next to me is suffering from a fever, can I be equally considerate of the child next to me with a fever, and the lonely child who has been forced to leave his birthplace and separated from his family as a life that is equally important and deserves care?

I remembered a video of young environmentalists on Twitter.

Van Gogh's sunflowers splashed with tomato soup
Two young people were screaming furiously in front of it
The earnest voice of Van Gogh, who fought against his madness and cut off an ear yet
* continued to paint until the end of his life.*
The earnest voices of the young environmentalists in front of the painting.
Can I empathize with the earnestness of their voices?
On a tree-shaded bench, far from either of them, I ate 7-Eleven sandwiches.
Who cares?

Who is the other? Who is the other person with whom I think I am empathizing? Am I not merely creating within me *the other* that is convenient for me and empathizing with that other? I was so tormented by my inner conflict over empathy that I could not even think about who I am or whether I exist. I felt nauseous.

* Empathy is important.*

But what is "empathy"?

Messy
Tangled

Nausea

This was when I was reading Sartre's "Nausea" at the recommendation of a professor in a college class. It was truly nausea. I was feeling nauseous about myself, who had created a fantasy of a convenient other within myself, pretending to empathize with that fantasy self while also pretending to be conflicted. This may be different from the nausea Roquentin felt; however, it was a relief for me to be able to name that tangled, unproductive, and sterile waste of thought with something like nausea.

2-3 Dialogue with my previous works
I have published three papers on autoethnography in Japanese. My first piece was about Ronai (1995). I described the process of reading Ronai (1995), a well-known layered account work, in a dialogue format as "the Unsettled-I" (Spry, 2018) accounts in my mind. I attempted to represent the process by which a non-experiencer of child sexual abuse tries to empathically understand the true voices of those involved.

Another example of my experience with autoethnography worth mentioning is ICAE 2022 in July last year. At ICAE 2022, I tried collaborative autoethnography with my dog. I examined whether my dog and I could be "we," but it was also a question of how to empathize with others without language. In addition, the workshop of Kitrina Douglas and David Carless at ICAE 2022, and an online discussion of our study group with audiences taught me the possibility of empathizing with others while being far away. At that moment, I certainly experienced that autoethnography allowed us to empathize with others who were far away and whom we had never met. We empathized with each other during the session. We were not fantasies, but real people with our bodies.

2-4 Dialogue with autoethnographies of Holman Jones and Ronai
The first piece of autoethnography I read in English was Holman Jones (2005), Autoethnography: Making Personal Political (Holman Jones, 2005). I had never been so excited to read an academic paper. I am not a queer; I am a Japanese, cisgender housewife, and mother of two children. But it did not matter. I could relate to every word.

The next piece I read was Ronai's (1995) layered account piece. As mentioned before, after reading this piece, I tried to write my own autoethnography about the experience of reading Ronai (1995). When I first read it, I did not understand the real meaning of the work. However, gradually, I came to understand her self-heart-ripping words and realized that I should not just end up reading this work objectively. In my own words, I must respond to Ronai.

At that time, I felt alienated from my academic life at graduate school. Ronai's plexiglass metaphor fits the alienation I was feeling. However, I also felt that I would never understand her true hurt: Simply saying that I could empathize with her words would mean that I would be depriving her of them. As Spivak said, I cannot say that I can understand.

I want to empathize.
But I can't say that I can empathize.
Minority and majority
alienated from both

The plurality of myself
I wrote down every reflection of these "the Unsettled-I".

I believe that in that paper, I have accomplished one challenge as an autoethnographer; however, I still have regrets. Every time I reflected on my inner self trying to empathize with Ronai, I felt as if I was gouging deeper into her wound and deepening her loneliness.

2-5 Autoethnography as care

Later, I began studying the ethics of care. As I was sinking into the tangled darkness of language and self-reflection, the ethics of care was the anchor that held me together on the ground.

Ellis and Rawicki's collaborative autoethnography taught me what relational ethics in autoethnography is. I must confess that when I first read this piece, I felt a little uncomfortable. I thought the part where Ellis suggests Rawicki change his interpretation of the survival experience was overstepping. However, after learning about the relational self and the ethics of care, I understood that this is what relational ethics means and the true value of relational ethics in collaborative autoethnography. Ellis and Rawicki (2013) describe the relationship between the survivor and listener in collaborative witnessing as "being with" (ibid, p378) the teller, and that means they listen to the stories of the survivor not only listening to their stories as if they live *with* them but also as if they are "in the stories" through "preverbal resonance" (ibid, p378). And for that, Ellis emphasizes the importance of "the intimate and total presence" (ibid, p378) of the listener as *an other* who listens to the survivor's storytelling. The listener needs to listen to both the story about the trauma itself and that of the survivor themselves, the existing there, in front of the listener. And to do so, the listener must exist there with their body as *an other* to the survivor.

When I read Ronai two years ago, I tried to empathize with her by erasing my existence. However, to empathize with others as I am, I must not erase myself. If I were to erase my presence, I would cease to be *an other*, the intimate and total presence of the other. In autoethnography, it is by caring that the listener listens to the survivor's storytelling. Simultaneously, to tell the story by constructing it is to care for the storytellers themselves (Ellis, 2007). That is, the process of autoethnography, in which we construct, tell, read, and listen to the story, is care itself.

When I feel and respect the very existence of my body and my life,
while responding to the very existence of your body and your life,
you and I can become the relational self through empathy based on the ethics of care.

3. Conclusion

This research clarified the hypothesis that the process of creating autoethnography will generate and develop the relational self of the researcher and present the process as a layered account work of autoethnography. To do this, I used empathy as a keyword.

Reflecting on my autoethnography works while reading Ellis, Holman Jones, and Ronai's works again and again, I tried "to understand others through our self-understanding" and "to understand ourselves through understanding others (Ellis, 2016, p7)". However, I felt that I faced the wall and crisis. The more I tried to empathize with them, the more I felt alienated from everything about myself.

When we try to empathize with others, we cannot empathize if we try to assimilate ourselves into others by erasing our existence. The existence of our body where our vulnerable and multiple voices are uttered is necessary, because to empathize with others and listen to their vulnerable and multiple voices, we have to be *an other*, the intimate and total

presence for the other.

This point is a reason why it was difficult for me to empathize with Stacey and Ronai through reading their works. Meanwhile, at ICAE 2022, I felt that I was able to feel empathy and care with the online participants because their voices and my voice were able to convey physically even online.

As for about physical aspect of voice, Gilligan & Eddy (2021) notes as follows:

1. Voice is embodied: it is physical, part of the physical world of sound and breath, vibrations, and resonances.
2. Voice is in language: it is cultural, embedded in social and cultural worlds.
3. Voice is an instrument of the psyche (soul, self, sense of being); born with a voice, we can communicate our experience, giving voice to what we think and feel and know. (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021)

Regarding the possibility of embodiment and the multidimensional nature of voice, Carless & Douglass (2022) describe it as follows.

The term "voice" often refers to the possibility of different experiences being heard, valued, and given space, possibly for the first time. But voice can also reflect the tonal vibrations produced when we talk, hum, or sing. When different notes are produced simultaneously in the same melody, we refer to them as harmony. This kind of process is characteristic of collaborative autoethnography and the aspiration to share a collective voice which is melodic and harmonious yet preserves individuality and diversity. (Carless & Douglass, 2022, p156)

When I listen to the voice of the other as an other, I can empathize with the other, and the relational self and relational ethics between me and others are generated. That is the ideal relational nature of our society filled with harmonious care.

Notably, interest in autoethnography and narratives is growing in Japan, with new works being published in various fields. However, studies on relational ethics remain insufficient. Given the importance of both the ethics of care and relational ethics in autoethnography, I argue that these topics deserve more research attention.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

The above is my conclusion as a researcher: From here on, I would like to reflect a little on my experience in the symposium session as a mother, a housewife, and an autoethnographer.

This was my first individual presentation in English at an international symposium and I was very nervous. However, thanks to the warm response from the facilitators and audience, I was able to learn a lot. In response to the facilitator's question about "what we should do to promote the ethics of care and change society?", I answered that what I could do was practice and perform the ethics of care in my daily life as a mother, a housewife, and an autoethnographer because my life was the stage on which we could perform our life as an autoethnographer. I was not sure if I could tell my thoughts well in English, but one of the audience members responded to my response. She said that she always tries to greet every person she meets with a smile to share her willingness to welcome all the people she meets in her town. I felt that her words also gave me some of her feeling of willingness to welcome me. At that moment, I felt that the relational self between myself and the audience was filled with the ethics of care.

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Acknowledgment

Tensions Between Positionalities in the Field:
Research Involving Vulnerable Children

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Abstract

I present a reflective analysis of my experience as a researcher when conducting fieldwork in an elementary school for my master's thesis. I part from the premise mentioned by Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2010) that encourages incorporating the experience of the researcher in the study of others. Using autoethnography, I depict my positionality as a researcher through reflections regarding the ways in which I responded to unexpected situations, the conflicts that took place and how my position within the field, as well as the interactions within it, transformed throughout the research.

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I arrived at the school at 1:30 pm and although classes began until 1:50 students were already arriving, alone or accompanied by their mothers. It was April, and I could feel the spring warmth while sitting at the edge of a planter in the playground. It was not my first visit to the school, but I still felt somewhat nervous as I watched a group of boys playing soccer in front of me. The teachers were talking among themselves in front of the classrooms. We were all waiting for the bell to ring. A few minutes later, the gate to the school parking lot opened and the green bus came in, it arrived at the same time as every other day. "Ya llegaron los de la casa hogar [the children from the foster care institution are here]" I heard one of the teachers say. After the bus stopped and the driver turned off the engine, boys and girls of different ages began getting out one by one. They walked towards the playground in pairs or small groups, playing and laughing and finally made a line at the door of each classroom. At 1:50 the bell rang, and we all walked to the classrooms.

Introduction

In this article, I propose a reflective analysis of my experience as a researcher when conducting fieldwork in an elementary school during the writing of my master's thesis. For the above, I part from the premise mentioned by Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2010) that encourages incorporating the experience of the researcher in the study of others. The reflections revolve around how I responded to unforeseen situations, the conflicts that took place, and how my position within the field, as well as the interactions within it, were transformed throughout the research.

According to Hemelsoet (2014), the researcher is not only a researcher, but a person with different positions or roles, being a researcher is only one of them. The mutual interactions between these perspectives constitute the positionality of the researcher,

> A large set of interrelated tensions constitute a highly complex situation with a continuously altering position of the researcher. These are not dichotomies, nor are the factual and desirable positions of the researcher on any of them definitive; they all depend upon each other, and the context may change over time too. Their mutual interactions constitute the 'positionality of the researcher.' (p.225)

The concept of positionality, as defined by the author, is a pertinent conceptual tool for analysis since it enables me to explore the different roles that make up my subjectivity, resulting in a particular position from which I observed the case.

Context and characters

In 2017, I carried out fieldwork for my master's thesis in a Mexican public elementary school. The study was conducted as a degree requirement of the master's program I enrolled in. The report was embodied in the thesis entitled "Childhood in Alternative Care Institutions: school narratives" (2018) and had as its primary objective to analyze the construction of the self of children living in alternative care institutions from their daily interactions in the school context and their place of residence (Díaz, 2018). Designed as a case study, I conducted fieldwork in a public elementary school that, since 2015, serves a group of children living in a foster care institution run by the state government, they consist of about 50% of the school population. During my visits, I used participant observation, interviews with teachers, and children's narratives. In this article, I narrate a scene that took place during a visit, in which I conducted the activity planned for them to compose their narratives by writing or drawing about themselves.

Using three different characters, the grad student, the teacher and the daughter, I present some of the inner dialogues I had with myself during the visit. From 2016 to 2018, I was a graduate student enrolled in a master's program in social research, I am also a teacher with a degree in elementary school education. Teaching was my previous position before entering the master's program. Furthermore, I have a familial connect to the school because my mother taught there for several years. I first learned about this case through her, and it was my relationship with her which granted me access. I use these inner dialogues as a way of depicting the unfolding positions of myself in the field and present them in italics throughout the text.

A scene in the fourth-grade classroom

The bell rang, indicating the end of school recess. As the playground emptied and the sound of children laughing began to mellow down, my mom and I were standing outside her classroom, waiting for the students to finish entering the building. Before going in she asked me:

– Do you want me to introduce you as a teacher?
– No, I don't think so – I answered.

I had given a lot of thought to this question before and, I learned early on it was important the students didn't see me as an authority figure. Her next question was even more conflicting:

- Do you want me to stay in the classroom with you?
  Grad student: I hadn't thought about this, what should I do? Maybe not having another authority present can help me build a more horizontal relationship with them.
- No mom, it is not necessary – I answered.

We walked into the fourth-grade classroom together. It was 11:30 am, just after recess, and there were 10 students sitting at individual desks arranged in small groups of three or four students, who were chatting and laughing among themselves. Still energized by the games played during the break, they didn't look at us when we entered, nor when we stopped at the front of the room. They turned to look at us only when my mom (their teacher) started speaking, they looked at her reluctantly, waiting for directions.

- Hi class, please be quiet. I would like you to meet Estefania, she is a student, she is going to stay in school with us for some time and today she will be doing an activity with you – she said.
-

Then she left the room. Once she left, the students remained silent for a few minutes, watching me. Feeling their eyes on me waiting impatiently for my directions, I began to hesitate. I had carefully planned and mental rehearsed the activity. It seemed very clear and simple. However, as I stood in front of the kids, I was not so sure.

Grad student: What should I say? What tone should I use?
Teacher: They are waiting for your instructions, just tell them what you want them to do.
Grad student: But I don't want it to sound like an order, and I don't want to sound like a teacher.

At last, I said:
- Hi everybody, my name is Estefanía, and I am a student at the university. I would like to get to know you: who you are, what you like, anything you want to share with me. You will not be graded for this, there is no right or wrong answer. So, I am going to hand out some sheets, in which you can tell me who you are. You can write or draw, use a pencil, colors, or markers, whatever you want.

After a few minutes, the silence began to break, some children started to murmur in the small group in which they were sitting, others got up from their seats and went to visit other groups, little by little the voices became louder and louder. Suddenly, some students at opposite ends of the room stood up and began shouting and throwing pieces of paper at each other, tearing them out of their notebooks, they threw pencils and other school supplies, including the materials I had given them for the activity. They screamed, ran and dodged playfully, after just a few minutes, the classroom had turned into a dodgeball field.

Grad student: This could get dangerous, what if this turns into a fight? Maybe I should do something

Teacher: Finally! Yes! Do something. Tell them to stop throwing things around (or to each other. . .). Tell them to stop shouting. Tell them to return to their seats and get to work.

Grad student: I don't think I will be able to gain their confidence by shouting at them.

Teacher: Are you not going to do anything? They are screaming and running around, we have already lost control of this. The classroom should be a quiet place.

Grad student: I don't understand why they don't want to do the activity.

Teacher: You can ask them to do it, we have done this before, regain the attention and control of the class.

Grad student: But as a researcher I don't remember reading about this in the manuals, what if I do or say something wrong?

Finally, I decided not to yell, neither did I ask them to return to their seats. Instead, I tried to remain calm and approached the students who had started drawing or writing. I walked up to a group of girls and asked them to tell me more about what they were writing. Little by little, the conversation grew and so did my confidence with my decision. Some of the kids I spoke with were keen to talk to me about themselves, their families, and lives in foster care. Others were reluctant. I kept an eye on the whole classroom, watching for the safety of the children that were running and playing, but I didn't try to change their behavior.

- How did it go? My mom asked me when the bell rang indicating the end of the school day and the students were once again in the playground
- It went well, I think... I am not sure.

When good intentions are not enough

When analyzing my multiple positionalities in the classroom that day, preconceptions about student behavior become evident from my being a teacher. However, beyond my college degree, a relationship dynamic that is more difficult to transcend, the adult-child relationship, came into play. Children belong to a social group (childhood), which is immersed in power relations with respect to other social groups, the situation of dependence leads childhood to permanent subordination (Pavez Soto, 2012). The problem, argues Mayall (2000), lies in the elements of control inherent in adults' responsibility to protect and provide for children, which limit their possibilities of participation. I, as an adult, had the expectation that children would show attention and obedience to my instructions because it is one of the main characteristics of this relationship: the subordination of children. Liebel (2007) warns that, even when trying to transcend traditional paternalism in the relationship with children in different contexts, adults resort time and again to authoritarian practices. Adults who recognize children's right to live in a world of their own often react with a lack of understanding - and easily resort, to everyone's surprise - including their own - to authoritarian practices. Time and time again, the breaking

point at which understanding, and patience suddenly run out is children's attempt to participate (Liebel, 2007).

As a teacher, what I understood as participation in the classroom differs greatly from how I had begun to understand it as a researcher. According to the Declaration of Children's Rights in relation to research, participation consists of an "effort to include all children in diverse societal processes, including consulting them on matters of education [and] research" (Livingstone & Bulger, 2014, p.320). As a teacher, what I defined unknowingly as participation was their willingness to take part in classroom activities and, I was taught how to encourage and even force that participation. My expectations were to not be seen as a teacher but, at the same time, for them to behave as if there was a teacher present in the classroom.

A few final thoughts

Hemelsoet (2014) mentions that the tensions that arise from the interaction of the researcher's roles do not constitute only personal challenges for him or her, they also shed light on the different positionalities in the field, their ethical and political implications. Using autoethnography as a methodological framework for writing of this text, I was able to use my own decisions, actions and attitudes taken in the fieldwork, as data to be analyzed to account for the ethical and political implications mentioned by Hemelsoet.

I agree with Liebel and Markowska-Manista (2020) when they state that, if one avoids describing difficult situations in one's own research, the unpleasant or invalid becomes invisible, remains hidden and, consequently, it does not disturb. There is an unpredictability and lack of control inherent to fieldwork, to which manuals cannot provide an answer. In this sense, the development of student creativity to navigate and deal with uncertainty, as well as self-reflection on how to position oneself are actions that, as Hemelsoet (2014) indicates, open opportunities for more directed and intentional changes.

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An Autoethnography of Seeing the Other:
Reflections on the Narratives that Led Me Out of Far-Right Ideology

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Abstract
This autoethnography explores the role stories play in ideological transformation by reflecting on my enculturation into – and journey out of – a far-right, "us-versus-them" worldview from which I had come to dehumanize and 'other' all who did not think like me. I begin with a story highlighting the construction of my far-right belief system, followed by a second story describing the narrative process that began the transformation of my conflict-saturated beliefs. By exploring my own ideological transformation at the hands of stories, I also use this autoethnography to reflect more broadly on the role narratives can play in ideological transformation.

It's been said that humans are fundamentally storytelling creatures (Fisher, 1984);we make sense of our world through the stories we tell ourselves and the ones that are told about us. It is thus no surprise that my worldview was profoundly shaped by the narratives I encountered in my upbringing within a tightknit, fundamentalist community.   My upbringing led me to see the world through a clear binary of "us" and "them." Through my community's stories, I learned that all those who did not think like me were an Other--fully separate from me and my community. But stories not only have the ability to construct harmful views of the world that separate people, they also have the power to lead us out of totalizing viewpoints. This autoethnography is my account of how stories built *and* broke my bigotry, leading me on a journey of becoming the Other I once disdained.

The Narratives that Built my Bigotry

November 4th, 2008. The night of President Barack Obama's first presidential election, I listened to the election results over the radio in my family's large shop/garage building with my parents and five siblings. Since we lived too far out in the Washington State countryside to get high-speed internet or cable TV, this was the only way we could get the results live. We were all huddled around the big wood stove which kept the November chill at bay. Standing in the dim light with big taxidermied deer, elk, and bighorn sheep heads staring down at us from the shop's walls, we listened attentively to the results. As more and more electoral college votes were decided in favor of Obama, the mood of the room fell lower and lower. As it became clear that Barack Obama would become our next president, a sense of abject dread and terror began to fall over the room. The mood was far beyond disappointment or even fear. It was as though the dissolution of our country had just been announced. In particular, I remember my father and older brothers fatalistically discussing how this would likely represent the end of our country as we knew it. Indeed, the feeling was that we would certainly now face persecution for our faith as

Christians and that we may even face prison for holding to our religious beliefs because, as my family discussed, the *true* agenda of the Other, the Democrats, was to break down the constitution and silence Christians. There was talk of how they were on a campaign, likely funded and driven by secretive influencers like George Soros, to intentionally destroy our country and persecute Christians.

My family did not engage in these discussions in a didactic or evidence-based manner but instead structured these conversations as stories about our world and about the world of the Other. For example, rather than discussing the rationality of or evidence for the proposition that Democrats were trying to abolish adherence to the constitution, the discussions took on the narrative elements of actors (the Democrats, Obama, George Soros) taking actions (packing the Supreme Court to overrule the constitution, rigging the election, etc.) through time (working towards their end goal of persecuting Christians and establishing a New World Order). These small stories, snippets of stories, and allusions to stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006) thus functioned not only as stories in their own right but also as elements continuously building an "us-versus-them" metanarrative about the world. These small stories of exclusion and isolation took myriad forms, beyond just the political realm. For example, the pastor of our 30-person church told us that even stepping foot in a movie theater was evil because of the film industry's sinful messages and images. Even the movie posters conveyed this evil. My parents warned us against the immorality of music with drums, asserting that much rock music was written by Satan worshipers. My mother coached us on what to say if any strangers came to the door. After all, it could be Child Protective Services coming to take us away because they were, according to my parents, out to get homeschoolers. Put simply, these small narratives worked together to build an overarching metanarrative of our world as one in which anyone who did not believe, act, or live exactly like we did were evil, dangerous, and to be feared. My worldview envisioned life as cleanly bifurcated between "Us" and "Them." These two groups were at odds, were fundamentally incompatible, and could only engage with each other through conflict.

However, while stories had the power to create an exclusionary orientation to the world, other stories had the power to construct bridges over the socially constructed chasm between myself and the Others. Alongside many small experiences,, there were key stories told by those outside my group that helped me empathize, understand, and connect with those who were different. This process helped lead me out of far-right ideology and, ironically, into becoming a version of the Other that I had so vehemently despised.

Scholars have long noted the power of stories to persuade, to effect change, and to transform. For instance, using their narrative transportation theory, Green and Brock (2000) demonstrate the power of stories to transport us into different mind spaces in which we are more open to considering alternative viewpoints. Social psychologists Kenneth and Mary Gergen (2006) also highlight the power of stories to construct – as well as deconstruct – our conceptions and realities. Finally, John Winslade and Gerald Monk (2000) offer a model of narrative conflict mediation that illustrates the value of stories in transforming conflict. While many others could be named here, these highlight the role stories play in transforming conflict-saturated mindsets like the one I developed in my upbringing.

It is from this academic tradition that I approach one of the transformative stories from my own life that began to break through my conflict riddled, fundamentalist, far-right ideological viewpoint.

The Narrative that Broke my Bigotry

Growing up, my father had "his spot" in our living room. He would sit on the end of our rich, brown sectional, an antique floor lamp casting a warm glow over his seat. On many evenings, I'd find him sitting there, rimless reading glasses perched precariously at the end of his nose, studiously reading his well-worn leather bound Bible. As a boy, this vision of my father sitting in his spot shrouded by an austere and wizened aura convinced me that his knowledge and wisdom was unassailable. After all, our religious community explicitly taught that wives and children had to submit in all things to the father as the head of the household, and this image of my father studiously reading his Bible seemed to be the perfect embodiment of a family patriarch.

It was from this position of authority that my father would occasionally opine about any number of pet topics, all of which were deeply conservative (whether of a religious or political nature), including his views that LGBTQIA+ individuals were not only "living in sin," but also that they were "an abomination to God." Swimming in these ideological waters, and with virtually no exposure to alternative perspectives as a homeschooler living in the rural countryside, I too, endorsed these views and their veracity. But it only took one profound experience to cause cracks in my bulletproof veneer and dissonance between the values of love I espoused and my hateful beliefs.

One afternoon when I was thirteen or fourteen, my father invited me to join him in attending a local town hall meeting where our Republican state representatives were going to be fielding comments and questions from the public. After driving thirty minutes in his old Chevy pickup truck into town, we filed into the gymnasium and took our seats on those cold, backless metal bleachers that posed a stiff test to my teenage attention span. The steady stream of questions directed towards the representatives began to blur as my focus waned, but I was snapped out of my reverie when one attendee began her question by introducing herself as a lesbian and a member of a local LGBTQIA+ advocacy group. I was no longer having trouble focusing as this immediately brought a whole host of prejudicial perspectives about her to my mind, including my father's description of queer people as "an abomination."

Yet something else struck me at this moment. Up until this point in my extremely sheltered, homeschooled life, I had never personally encountered anyone publicly identifying as LGBTQIA+, and this woman in front of me did not match the prejudiced images I had in my mind. Instead of being the angry, antagonistic protester I imagined, she was calmly and graciously telling her story and asking her Republican lawmakers (who clearly disagreed with her) how they could better support the LGBTQIA+ community. And notably, she used a narrative approach to explain herstory. While I don't remember many of the exact details, I do recall her sharing stories of the myriad ways she had faced both systemic and direct oppression over many years and why she continued to fight for representation even in the face of a social and political environment so hostile to her. . As the movement of her story unfolded, my tightly sealed perspective began to crack. Rather than conforming to my image of some almost inhuman individual, her kind demeanor broke through to me and helped me humanize her, despite my internal conflict with my beliefs telling me to view her with disdain.

I was so caught up in the tension caused by the contradictions swirling in my mind that I don't remember exactly what she was asking of the representatives. But whatever it was, it triggered my father. He jumped to his feet, cupped his hands to his mouth, and bellowed a resounding "BOOOOOO!!!" – interrupting her as she spoke.

I sat still. Stunned. Recoiling. Shocked at the hatred I had just witnessed from my father. This man I respected had just been driven by his beliefs – *my* beliefs – to an ugly act of dehumanization that appalled me. How could my father engage in such a lurid display of animosity--especially to this woman I had just begun seeing as human? Surely no one was deserving of such a vitriolic response to expressing their desire for better representation and care? And most markedly, how in the world could I reconcile this kind of hatred with the standards of unconditional love, sacrifice, and care that I had been taught were the center of my faith?

The town hall progressed, and others continued to approach the microphone to ask their questions, but I didn't hear a word from any of them. I was too numbed by the internal conflict threatening to rip apart my worldview. It was this emotional dissonance – seeing within myself the contradiction between the kindness and love I claimed to value and what I actually believed – that first cracked my ideological obstinance.

Until this point, my story of the world was fully coherent and had the fidelity of ringing true with my experiences. Walter Fisher's landmark narrative paradigm argues that coherence and fidelity are central toa rational, harmonious narrative understanding of the world (Fisher, 1984). Once one of those pillars is ripped out, the entire system can begin to crumble.

This woman and her willingness to share her story of discrimination offered a conflicting narrative that tore apart the coherence and fidelity of my view of the world. No longer could I see my belief system of discrimination and dehumanization as either logically consistent or as a true representation of the world I was now observing with fresh eyes. This invited me to connect with those "Others," to see them with empathy, to begin listening to them.

Conclusion

This was just one small experience inspired by one small story, and the process of transformation was just beginning for me. My journey out of a bigoted worldview has been a long one and has occurred through many more encounters with the small narratives from those with challenging perspectives. But slowly and surely, the new stories I've encountered have bridged the gap that once profoundly separated me from others and caused me to see them as enemies.

Following Boylorn (2014), I have used this storied process of autoethnography to "demystify difference, to examine how my interior life shapes and is shaped by larger culture, to implicate and interrogate myself in my prior and present prejudices, to emphasize intersectional components of identity, and to instigate positive cultural change by challenging the homogenous groupthink that is often rooted in small rural communities" (p. 316). This autoethnographic process not only challenges my own patterns of Othering but also reveals broader principles of how storytelling can bridge divides. As such, I believe there are hints here in my journey that can help us learn how to transform other contexts of ideological division and conflict.

 The stories we tell constitute our world(s). This is true of the unifying, tolerant, and understanding parts of our world, but it is equally true of the divisive, oppositional, and intolerant parts of our world. Indeed, narratives are what built my bigotry; I unconsciously constructed my hate-filled understanding of the world through the swirling matrix of small stories told by people around me. But my story didn't end there. Narratives were also the key that broke my bigotry; all it took was a well told story by someone from outside my community to expose the dissonance between my beliefs and her reality, causing my entire metanarrative to crack open and for a more inclusive and empathetic one to begin forming in its place.

My experiences bear out the various ways storytelling produces this transformative effect. Stories have the power to highlight the lack of fidelity and coherence in the problematic social narratives around us (Fisher, 1984). Stories have the power to deconstruct problematic narratives and instead build new, shared narratives that allow space for difference and diversity (Winslade and Monk, 2000). Stories have the power to break down ignorance and animosity by transporting us into the world of the storyteller (Green and Brock, 2000). As storytelling creatures, constructing our world through story (Fisher 1984), perhaps narratives are just the tool we need to bridge divides, build empathy, and transform conflict.

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The Reverberations of War:
Ukrainian and Polish academics Perform a Collective Autoethnography of Experiencing War in Ukraine

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Abstract
Our presentation is an effect of collective work of people who, calling themselves Autonomous Authoethnographic Collective, shared their autoethnographic stories during their meetings and discussions, sometimes lasting for hours. The stories told within our informal, non – institutionalized group of autoethnographers led us gradually to unique shared autoethnographic discourse. Each of us and we all together found ourselves in the situation of war from day to day and coped with facing the new world differently. Each of us was experiencing the war in a different way, trying to help or generating various defense mechanisms in our minds. The moment of the war begining in which we found, alike each of us as an individual and as a collective is the one we present during ISAN 2023.

Keywords
war in Ukraine, collective work, trauma

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Our project was an effect of the collective work of people who, calling themselves the Autonomous Autoethnographic Collective, worked on their autoethnographic 'war stories' during meetings and discussions, sometimes lasting for hours. The stories shared within our informal, non-institutionalized group of autoethnographers have gradually led us to a unique, autoethnographic discourse. The night when the war started (Feb. 24, 2022), each of us had to cope with facing the new world differently. We were experiencing the war differently, trying to help or generating various defense mechanisms in our minds. Our individual and collective lived experience of the beginning of the war is what we wanted to present during ISAN 2023. Our voices were not the only form of showing our own experiences, but we also decided to show the audience images and short films depicting the war in Ukraine. They included:scenes with innocent people, even children, who are getting killed, their bodies are lying on the streets or are

buried in the yards in front of their houses, mothers and daughters are getting raped by groups of soldiers, Russian soldiers are stealing Ukrainian savings, TVs, or jewelry from their empty houses, abandoned in a hurry. It is all going on just a few kilometres away from our own houses, our *lifewords* (Schütz: 2008). And since that unable-to-be-forgotten February night, many Polish people have abandoned their daily routines and plunged into helping Ukraine.

We wanted the audience to hear especially Andrii's voice—Ukrainian man locked by the borders of his country in the midst of the war. In order to achieve our goals, which included drawing the audience's attention to the ongoing war in Ukraine, we decided to engage all the senses of the audience. We used not only our voices, but also the sounds of air-raid sirens, the national anthem of Ukraine, private photos of Andrii and headlines from the news.

Andrii's story was the core of our presentation and the voices of other people (Poles) only the reverberations. Using this word we wanted to emphasize that even though Poland borders on Ukraine and Poland as a country has received 3 million refugees from Ukraine, we still cannot talk about our "voices" from the war, but only about "reverberations." We can almost hear bombs falling in our neighborhood—in Ukraine.

Each of us chose a different mean of communication to express his or her feelings and the examples of it are shown below.
For instance, Oskar recites a poem:

> *I tried not to think about war*
> *I don't read reports from the front*
> *I'm not talking about the war.*
> *I close the door.*
> *I don't want to write about the war.*
> *This project—makes no sense.*
> *Nothing makes sense.*
> *Bombs are falling.*
> *It does not make sense.*
> *just consume*
> *Your short life*
> *Sweet drugs of pop culture*
> *I got the comic „Doomsday Clock"*
> *On the first page, I read:*
> *Russian troops are entering Poland.*
> *The Third World War begins.*
> *Falling bombs.*
> *Atomic mushrooms adorn the planet.*
> *Fuck me.*
>
> *Bombs explode*
> *Bombs falls*
> *Did they make any sense?*

Anna or Colette, tries to use "usual" words to describe their experience. Here is a sample of Anna's voice:

The incomprehensible view: people shot while riding a bicycle, bodies lying in an empty street. What is this? These words and images shock me. How could such monstrosity be allowed to happen?

She also emphasizes her feelings with a painting of Anton Legov called "Butcha."

Colette's voice describes her dreams about running away to the shelter, and, after getting out of it, discovering her home is already gone.

Hanna adds her point of view while walking with anger:

Hello, this is Poland speaking
Here in Poland we have women, children, old people and pets from Ukraine in our homes
In our homes the stories of their bloody breasts are poured out
So don't slap the faithful nonsense
Stay safe from afar and shut it, if you cannot watch it for yourself
Don't lie to us that there is no war going on
Because history does not forget liars
And it repeats itself.

Then Anna adds her feelings again:

On the day of deep depression, a friend from the Buddhist sangha shares with me a sentence from Andrzej Getsugen Krajewski Roshi: "The emotions we experience during the war in Ukraine are like missiles passing through us. We have to be careful that they don't explode in us."

Oskar shows his cat and said: *The cat rescued from Ukraine meows that he wants to eat.*

Marcin's two separated voices are presented in a mode of reflexive thinking concentrated on a changing character of his own feelings coming to relation with different sources of perception consisting of e.g. scattered personal memories, media messages, and voices of nature.

Kala performs an imagined dinner with two Ukrainian women visited her home.   The three of them eating dinner was their ritual. The three women sit down at the table and start talking about the war. One of the Ukrainian women has become an expert, one could say she became a polemologist. She knew everything: where the Ukrainian troops are located, from where missiles are flying bombing not only her beloved city of Kharkiv, but all other cities in eastern Ukraine.

Krzysztof expresses his feelings by poems. In our movie he reads one of them titled "The world is the visible of the invisible (Being)," whereas during live session he shares another one, namely "Take that, meat grinder." Here it comes:

Who came up with the first Idea for this machine?
May he be condemned, damned forever, and burn in the depths of the hottest volcanoes!

I am already a machine; you are a machine. We talk to each other as machines can speak. They don't feel. They send signals.

Where has the human being gone?

It's a good thing that a meat grinder was invented.
You can finally grind him there so that what's left is Pulp, not a drop of living blood.

The meat grinder grinds human flesh.
You can hear the crunch, the rattle of bones.
I hear the muffled singing of the last man. But who hears it?
ME?
So, I'm not all meat?

Good thing there is a meat grinder that grinds human bones, skin, fingers, and eyes.

The holes in the mesh of the meat grinder.
Globs come out, like slimy slime, wriggling around the table.
The stench is worse than on the tenth level of hell.
All meat energy leaked out.
Shapeless, no form.
Nothing left but the meat grinder.
It grinds only air anymore.

The audience seemed to resonate within our reverberations. After hearing this poem Carolyn Ellis wrote on session chat: "Thanks for this poem. The meat grinder. Amazing in its imagery," and then Sakina Jangbar added: "The poem was so deep and interesting. Is it possible to pose it in the chat? I feel like I need to read it again and again."

The live session was very moving and powerful, which can be confirmed by the words of support from many people—our panelists, including Carolyn Ellis who wrote: "This is so powerful. We so appreciate your being here with us. Brings tears to my eyes." Faustina Mensah also said: "it was moving—I was speechless after watching it" and added: "and it is hard to even comprehend what you are dealing with emotionally and internally. How are you all coping?". Krzysztof responded: "It is not easy. But by working on the autoethnography, poems, we try to go through. I am thinking all the time about Andrii, and I do not know what to say to him!" and the next message from Krzysztof: "We should be all the time mindful and thoughtful. There is still the war aimed at killing the Ukrainians people! Destroying of the country completely!".

The last message from Krzysztof is the most accurate summary of the goal we set for ourselves when creating our performance autoethnography. After seeing people's reactions and reading their moving and supporting words, we know that our purpose has been achieved: to draw the attention of as many viewers as possible to the drama still taking place in Ukraine.

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Autoethnography – Accessing Academia

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Abstract

For researchers in the early stages of their career, breaking into the academic world via publication can seem incredibly daunting. Autoethnography in a way levels the field. When Bochner and Ellis (IN PRINT) began challenging pre-existing, positivist ways of writing for publication, they did so as mid-career researchers with a lower degree of risk. Thanks to this, current researchers just starting out have a methodology by which they can move past prestige, past the need for huge datasets. Autoethography requires only authenticity, a compelling idea or story, and good writing.

With this philosophy in mind, those in the early stages of a research career can write autoethnography with confidence, and better explore their areas of study. With major journals appreciating the importance of innovative, less "rigorous" methodologies to the discipline (The Sociological Review, 2014), academia appears now more accessible through autoethnography.

I will approach this subject from the perspective of a Psychology post-graduate. As a Masters student, I have published both quantitative (Hurst & Prescott, 2021) and qualitative (Hurst et al., 2022) articles. However, I found the experience of writing an autoethnographic piece (Hurst & Carson, 2021) the least daunting and most rewarding publication project to date. Unlike Sociology though, Psychology is still in many way shackled by a love of rigid science. Therefore, I will explore not only what autoethnography can do for early career researchers, but what we can do for autoethnography."

Keywords

Early career researchers, accessibility, students, publishing, psychology

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Entering academia as an early-career researcher can be a really daunting thing (Hanley & Steffen, 2012). You spend your undergrad years reading however-many-thousand articles, journals, books, and you end up asking yourself whether you belong in that world, whether you are good enough. Unfortunately, the mindset of within contemporary academia, intentional or not, is 'publish or perish'. You have to keep up your publication count if you want to be a part of the academic world. People doing doctoral studies are often required to publish during the course of their studies. In the UK, Universities have research quality frameworks, most notably the Research Excellence Framework, and this is where the quantity and quality of publications is assessed yearly to make sure that staff are contributing to the discourse. This does have its benefits, but can also put researchers under pressure.

My story is a little different. I had a desire to publish without any further goals in mind. I wanted to publish my undergraduate dissertation, but I wasn't really thinking about PhDs or becoming a teacher at that point. I was just somebody who wanted to write, and who was operating outside of an institution. The urge to publish began during lockdown. I had a gap-year

after my undergraduate studies where I did a lot of research, and then I went on to enroll on a Master's degree at the University of Bolton. Being based at a smaller institution perhaps gave me more access to the time of my tutors, which meant that I felt very supported when I was trying to get my work published in journals.

So how does one become a researcher? Perhaps you want to get an academic post, or get onto a doctoral programme? Publications really help those prospects: it shows that you're engaged with the current literature and that you have the ability to write to a publishable standard. But how do you do this if you are currently not enrolled at an institution with all the resources that come along with enrollment? This was where I found myself. Though, I wasn't really motivated by a desire to be a researcher; but rather, to write and make the most of my lockdown in April 2020. I met with my dissertation supervisor Professor Jerome Carson on Skype. We got my undergraduate dissertation submitted, but it didn't feel like we were quite finished. We had so many ideas that we wanted to work on, however we were limited by the fact that I was on the fringes as an independent scholar. With all of our ideas buzzing around, we asked ourselves, "how can we do this without having to ask for ethical approval from an institution? How could we do this without having to recruit participants?" The answer to these questions was autoethnography.

Now, a quick history lesson. As a methodology, autoethnography was trailblazed principally by Art Bochner and Carolyn Ellis. In a special issue of Social Work and Social Sciences Review on autoethnography, they explain: "We used whatever 'street-cred' we had as senior and well-published scholars to break away from our domestication, critique homogenizing ideas about truth, reality, and knowledge, and legitimate new forms of research and writing" (Bochner & Ellis, 2022, p.15).

Essentially, being in established positions at their institutions, they were able to take a risk and push the boundaries by bringing the Self into academic writing - which is what autoethnography does so well. By doing so, early career researchers in 2023 are in a place where they can do autoethnography with far less academic risk attached. Bochner and Ellis have paved the way so that somebody at the start of a career now has the opportunity to use this methodology as a way to get some much-needed publications through the possibility of accessing a dataset that exists independently of any institution – their Self.

I believe the fact that autoethnography in its fundamental form can require only one participant is what makes it accessible. Now, that does not mean that it is easy! Or even that you isolate your Self from the context in which you live when writing autoethnography. You cannot just write every thought that comes into your head and submit it to a journal. Autoethnography of course requires rigour, something that Alec Grant talks a lot about in his writing (e.g. Grant, 2019). We are not speaking of rigour in the positivist meaning of the word, scientific rigour. Rather, whatever experiences and stories that you write, you must interrogate in a detailed way. You cannot just throw some loose ideas together into a document and hope for the best. You need to write your narrative, harvest your experience as data. Then you must ground it in a social context, and supplement it with surrounding literature (Ellis et al., 2011).

So, to make sure that I am practicing what I preach, I should ground some of what I have been talking about in my socio-academic context. I am based in psychology, and within psychology, researchers tend to like experiments. They do not, ironically, experiment with writing styles and methodologies. A number of journals are averse to qualitative research as a whole. Many will not accept an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study unless it uses mixed methods or the sample size is large and from multiple populations. Each editor will have

their own values, and for some journals, only quantitative research makes sense. Because psychology tends to favor a positivist mindset, autoethnography is still in its early stages within the discipline.

I have published quantitative research (Hurst & Prescott, 2022) and qualitative research (Hurst et al., 2022). However, I found that writing autoethnography (Hurst & Carson, 2021) was the most gratifying publication project I have completed. To me, I think autoethnography allows for such deep interrogation and rich data. I love the accessibility of it to those who operate within fields of research. If you have an idea, and you cannot find that idea within the literature, then this methodology gives you an opportunity to write about your observation or describe ideas without needing a huge years-long research project with hundreds of participants. That can come later, but autoethnography allows you to explore those thoughts in-depth, in an academic way, outside of the kind of type of rigour that positivism demands.

It can be hard to look at friends in other disciplines, for example sociology, without feeling somewhat jealous. The Sociological Review, a major journal in Sociology, outlined how they intend to harness and utilize "multimedia offerings" within their journal to "open up further space for creativity and dialogue" and "disrupt taken-for-granted understandings of the world as is" (The Sociological Review, 2014). They publish poetry and art and photography. That is something that I wish my discipline embraced. In doing so, we could stretch the definition of 'academic' to mean more than just a positivist outlook. I think that there are different ways to tell stories and share ideas outside of the 'introduction, methods, results, discussion' format. It is possible to take stories in forms other than a written report, and critique and ground it in literature and theory. In some ways, are artistic expression not even more thick, layered data? A song is layered with lyrics, melody and rhythm in a way that is impossible to mirror in words on a page. I am glad that colleagues in other fields are able to do that more openly and freely. It excites me, too. What else might come?

In this paper I have looked backwards, and at the present. Now looking forwards, I see scope for this blossoming methodology to go further, to push those boundaries more. This paper has touched on what autoethnography can bring to early career researchers, which is an accessible way of getting yourself into the academic circles and into the literature. But as well as what autoethnography can do for you, what can you do for autoethnography? A lot of the papers that I have read have been written by researchers who have found autoethnography in the later stages of their careers. These papers provide insight into decades of experience in work, practice, and research. Autoethnography allows these researchers to share those wisdoms, but what might early-career researchers offer to the discipline?

I see autoethnography as much as a philosophy as it is a methodology. By that, I mean that it is a way of looking at and examining the world around us, putting it into an academic context. It is a "way of being" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p.69). By practicing that from the very start of a career, there is exciting potential for those who are employing autoethnography as they make their first steps into academia. It is something we should be encouraging. Think of the perspectives that individuals at the very start of a research career might bring to the work. The first autoethnography article that I wrote was with Professor Jerome Carson – with him as an established professor in a university and me as a student. These different perspectives that we could bring to the same idea made for an interesting article. In that way, I don't think that it is necessarily a weakness to be early in one's career because the insight is going to be interesting, especially to those who are established in the field.

So just a few concluding thoughts. I would encourage those early in their research careers to consider autoethnography in a considered way. I am not advocating autoethnography as an 'easy win' – this is certainly not the case. But what this methodology does do is stretch the definition of what a researcher can be, especially in my field. No longer is the "researcher" somebody who has collected data from a sample and then analysed it and written it up in the appropriate format. Now this researcher can also be somebody who has harnessed the data available to them, and analysed this in an incredibly deep, thick way. A research can be somebody who writes the sum of this research up in a beautiful, aesthetic way. Ultimately, it is exciting. It is part of the future of research. Qualitative or quantitative in approaches - we should all get on board with what autoethnography can offer our research.

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Mirar Nuestros Modos de Enseñar:
Un Relato Autoetnográfico Colaborativo

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Abstract

Somos docentes que desarrollamos nuestra tarea en dos universidades latinoamericanas. Juntas y en una conversación colaborativa, la autoetnografía que aquí presentamos nos permite develar parte de lo que nos sucede al enseñar en estos lugares. Lugares situados en las circunstancias vitales, curriculares, sociales. Lugares únicos del nosotras mismas y de los y las estudiantes. Enseñar para cada una es una escena irrepetible, mediada y relacional. Es una conversación de palabras, miradas y gestos inconclusa que sin el otro no tiene posibilidad de narrarse. De esas conversaciones vamos a contar entre epifanías, lecturas y ecos.

Palabras claves

enseñanza universitaria, autoetnografía colaborativa, docente universitario, universidad

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Presentación

Esta comunicación busca contar y contarnos sobre nuestros modos de enseñar como docentes de dos universidades latinoamericanas. Para ello nos presentamos y narramos luego nuestras epifanías de aulas universitarias en dos situaciones formativas diversas: la planificación de nuestras clases y los encuentros durante el cursado de la materia. En ellas se asoman, entre otros, dos rasgos que construyen nuestra enseñanza y diseñan sus modos e interacciones. Nuestro relato arriba a las in-conclusiones de los sentidos del enseñar para cada una.

Algo del quienes somos

Soy Elda Monetti profesora de Didáctica General en la Universidad Nacional del Sur (UNS), Argentina, materia que se dicta para todas las carreras de profesorado de la UNS. Esto pareciera implicar que sé cómo dar una clase, cómo enseñar y cómo aprende el estudiante. Muchas teorías sobre estos temas (Souto,1993; Camilloni, 2007; Davini,2008) las enseño a mis estudiantes del profesorado. Sin embargo, se escabullen las palabras, como agua entre mis dedos, cuando quiero explicarme lo que yo hago para enseñar.
Me pregunto si tal como dicen los autores: diálogo, escucho, apruebo, doy lugar a la palabra (Mazza,2016; Merieu,2016). ¿Es posible que tenga un discurso teórico sobre la enseñanza y otro discurso en la acción de enseñar en mis clases? Esta pregunta sobrevuela mis pensamientos. Sé cómo me siento: plena, maravillada cuando intercambio con los estudiantes en la clase, cuando finaliza el curso y noto que logramos construir una comunidad de aprendizaje. No creo que todos aprendan lo que yo quería, sería iluso de mi parte.

Pienso que en el diálogo con Graciela puedo no solamente comprender mi manera de enseñar para reflexionar acerca de lo posible en la enseñanza sino llevar a los estudiantes mi experiencia. Experiencia que puedo en este diálogo revisar y contrastar con las teorías.

Yo soy Graciela Plachot psicóloga y docente universitaria. La invitación de Elda a pensarnos desde nuestros modos de enseñar ¡me pareció algo maravilloso! Me pregunto si con su ayuda podré desmarcarme de lo esperado y dicho para descubrir otras claves identitarias de mi docencia. En mi, la enseñanza nació de la mano de las asesorías pedagógicas, dentro del equipo de la Unidad de Apoyo a la Enseñanza de la Facultad de Psicología, en la Universidad de la República en Uruguay. Buscando las formas de poder llegar a los y las estudiantes que ingresaban a la universidad fui aprendiendo y recreando en escenarios nuevos como recibirlos y acompañarlos. Después llegó la aventura de coordinar y enseñar en una asignatura del primer semestre del plan de estudios: Inicio a la Formación en Psicología. Esta asignatura me permitió aprender a enseñar en los inicios de las trayectorias estudiantiles, repensando las formas del qué decir y del cómo conversar con los/las estudiantes de ingreso. La implementación del curso propone grupos de 45 estudiantes (en una matrícula que supera los 3000) en los que se busca una primera aproximación a conocer la universidad y la psicología. Yo estoy atenta, sintiendo y buscando las formas de que se sostenga su deseo de iniciar la formación, la facultad los hospede y que yo, de alguna forma, pueda ser una buena anfitriona. Me preocupo por mi enseñanza a la vez que exploro e intuyo sobre los modos en que los/las estudiantes están pudiendo transitar y existir en una universidad que mucho pide y poco tiempo da para comprender y hacer en lo nuevo-pedagógico, lo nuevo-relacional y lo nuevo- institucional.

Nuestras conversaciones nos llevaron por diversas temáticas, en este escrito decidimos hacer foco en dos momentos que para nosotras son relevantes: la planificación de nuestras clases y el vínculo con el/la estudiante.

El lugar y des-lugar de la planificación en los encuentros

E-- Estamos en junio y se acerca el inicio del segundo cuatrimestre. En nuestro gabinete ya estamos todas, la reunión empieza en unos minutos.

Elena nos cuenta sobre los avances de su hijo, un bebé de apenas diez meses, Mariela está contenta porque este año puede trabajar con nosotras nuevamente. Le damos la bienvenida a Marian, la nueva y jóven integrante del equipo.

Mientras Sonia prepara el mate para compartir nos sentamos alrededor del escritorio y encendemos nuestras computadoras portátiles. El primer tema a tratar es la necesidad de revisar el programa del año pasado. Allí está lo que vamos a hacer este cuatrimestre. Nos detenemos en algunos de sus puntos. Sonia propone un cambio en la bibliografía obligatoria porque el capítulo de uno de los libros le parece que fue de difícil lectura. Elena dice que sería importante mantenerlo aun cuando sea difícil. Se hace un silencio. Tomo la palabra y pregunto: - "¿Qué hacemos?". Mariela, Marian y yo acordamos con Elena. Finalmente Sonia también asiente y no cambiamos el capítulo. Así continúa la reunión en un clima distendido, con ganas de compartir ideas y experiencias. Finalmente me comprometo a incorporar los cambios acordados y enviar el programa junto con el cronograma de la materia a la secretaría académica para su aprobación.

Al revisar el programa me doy cuenta de que es el producto de muchas reuniones e intercambios. Esas hojas escritas en que podemos leer la planificación de nuestra enseñanza para un curso dado representan mucho más que el texto escrito (Molina, Monetti,2021)Los argumentos que sostienen las decisiones tomadas están invisibilizados, sin embargo, son estos los que habilitan el desarrollo de los dicho en nuestras prácticas. Esto se revela cuando

Marian, que recién se inicia en la materia, nos hace repensar lo escrito con sus preguntas sobre los significados de lo planificado. Ella cursó la materia como alumna hace pocos años y desde sus comentarios, además, va revelando las "otras" lecturas que hacen los estudiantes del programa.

También hay otros momentos que dedico a la planificación. He aquí uno de ellos.

Estoy pensando en que mañana tengo que dar una clase. Hace más de veinte años que lo hago y siempre siento un cosquilleo en el estómago. ¿Podré hacerlo? ¿Entenderán los/las estudiantes lo que quiero decirles? ¿Qué difícil es saberlo?

Planificar mis clases es un desafío, me encanta anticipar algunas de las actividades que vamos a realizar. Imagino que los/las estudiantes van a encontrar un sentido a lo que están aprendiendo y que van a disfrutar la propuesta.

Con mis cuestionamientos en mente y mis sensaciones a flor de piel me siento en el escritorio, abro un archivo nuevo en la computadora y escribo "Clase de comunicación".

Lo primero que aparece en mi mente es qué quiero lograr con este contenido, qué es lo que me interesa que los estudiantes aprendan, qué puede ofrecer este saber sobre la comunicación a docentes o futuros docentes. En simultáneo se presenta también la sensación de crear una situación, un lugar y un entorno que me lleve a disfrutar del encuentro con los/ las estudiantes. Disfrute que tiene que ver con los saberes, con repensar lo que yo sé y lo que ellos saben para volver a recrear ideas, autores, experiencias y vivencias.

Viene a mi mente una duda. ¿Quiero construir con ellos esos saberes o imponerles los saberes oficiales que la academia y la universidad quieren que aprendan? Filloux (2001) hablaría de la imposición del deseo del docente sobre el del estudiante. ¿Será así? Rápidamente cuando me surgen estas preguntas vuelvo a contestarme que es necesario enseñar esos contenidos. En realidad soy una representante en el aula de esa sociedad que pide y exige el conocimiento de ciertas teorías y el desempeño de habilidades determinadas para poder enseñar. Qué difícil el navegar entre la construcción en colaboración de saberes, lo cual parecería algo indefinido, abierto a pensar, con la obligación de aprender cuestiones que se definen de una manera y no de otra. En mis clases debatimos acerca de lo que es la enseñanza como práctica social.

Alicia, que siempre levanta la mano para dar su punto de vista dice que la enseñanza es una práctica porque es lo que hacemos en la clase. Patricia agrega que para ella la enseñanza es una práctica porque el docente tiene que dirigir la tarea que da a sus estudiantes. Es desde estas definiciones personales que intento explicar la definición de práctica dada por Kemmis (2010). Aquí es donde me pregunto si en realidad co-construimos los saberes a enseñar o hacemos un traspaso de dichos conocimientos a la manera de la transmisión lineal docente-estudiante (Monetti, 2015).

En un instante aparecen enfrente de mí las contestaciones que año a año dan a mis propuestas los estudiantes. Juan decía: - "Uyy siempre nos estás haciendo preguntas sobre lo que decimos!". María opinaba: - "A mí me gustaría que explicarás más la teoría". Estela me mira y sin palabras pide que me acerque para aclararle la consigna que tenían que resolver.

En este ir y venir entre recuerdos e ideas voy punteando un orden de las actividades que voy a proponer. Empiezo por el punto uno: "presentación del contenido" escribo, luego la propuesta de trabajar con un caso. No, inmediatamente se me ocurre hacer primero un rol playing, cambio el orden de las actividades. De esta manera voy armando en líneas sucesivas una de mis clases. Es como si viera en mi mente como las piezas de un rompecabezas se van ordenando y encastrando. Listo! Ya está armada.

En estrecha relación con mi preocupación anterior aparece otro de los aspectos de la planificación que me inquietan: la evaluación. Aún cuando planificar las estrategias que voy a utilizar para evaluar y diseñar los instrumentos de evaluación se encuentran entre las actividades que me encantan realizar, usualmente están atravesadas por mis dudas ante lo

justo y lo injusto, el cuidado por no hacer los trabajos prácticos muy difíciles o muy fáciles, el pensar que todos los/los estudiantes van a poder responder a lo solicitado.
Pero qué sucede desde este momento en que planifico y aquel en que estoy frente al grupo…
¿A vos qué te sucede Graciela?

G- Desde mi punto de vista Elda, las planificaciones de nuestras aulas son un mal necesario. Juego mucho con esta imagen cuando acompaño los procesos de enseñanza de los docentes nóveles. Compañeros que también al igual que los estudiantes se están iniciando en sus prácticas docentes en la asignatura sobre la que quiero contarte.
Así como el inicio a la vida universitaria convoca mis deseos de docencia, la primera clase se me representa como un encuentro mágico, donde desplegar y dar lugar a aquello que planificamos.
Disfruto revisar junto a los y las estudiantes el programa de la asignatura. Aproximarnos a la co-construcción de un contrato pedagógico que les antecede e invita a transitar su formación. Discutimos cuáles serán los temas, qué posiciones y expectativas tenemos todos y todas para lo que allí pueda suceder entre los saberes, las subjetividades y las primeras exploraciones a la disciplina y a la universidad. Siento que este acuerdo es sin duda parte fundante de mis modos de enseñar. En la oportunidad de presentar el curso, me esfuerzo para promover la idea de que este espacio tiene condiciones pedagógicas en las que se realiza donde la presencia y existencia de los y las estudiantes es relevante.
Esta asignatura es la única del semestre con control de asistencia. El grupo es mediano, esta condición otorga tiempos particulares a la planificación que en dos horas y media abre y despliega el encuentro con la posibilidad de utilizar los tiempos, los contenidos, la mirada y las distancias corporales en el aula. Los y las estudiantes saben que sucederán otras cosas que en los plenarios teóricos de 300 pérsonas, pero no se imaginan que tan diferente pueden ser.
Llegado el día del primer encuentro, la planificación y las diapos están en algún lugar de mi cerebro. Pero antes y más cerca, están todas las emociones vueltas preguntas. ¿Quiénes y cómo serán mis estudiantes? ¿Qué experiencias voy a conocer de sus elecciones a la disciplina? ¿Podré contribuir a sus filiaciones institucionales?¿Cuántos de los inscriptos en la lista llegarán al aula? ¿Cuántos quedarán por el camino en este semestre? Mi planificación del primer día tiene mucho de promesa y convoca a la existencia. Seguro se relaciona a escenas de mi historia en mis primeros días en la universidad, de mandatos y presencias para mí misma,para mi familia y de algunas ausencias y otras existencias institucionales en la interacción.
Reconozco en mi posición algo de lo propuesto por Cifali (2012) sobre la cualidad del encuentro. La autora propone distanciarse de las asimetrías rígidas para inaugurar encuentros flexibles entre humanos. En estos, la docencia tiene otras herramientas para mediar y dinamizar la formación de los estudiantes.
Inicio explicando los momentos que vamos a transitar hoy y los escribo en el pizarrón, mientras instalo el power point, con el mandato interno de lograr trabajar el objetivo del curso, la metodología, la evaluación y algo de la composición de la bibliografía. Esto es lo que contienen las diapositivas que armé. Intento estar allí en el encuentro, sin que ello me lleve a perderme de la intención pedagógica del mismo: conocerlos y realizar un contrato sobre los objetivos y los modos de trabajo de la asignatura.
Pienso en lo que Cifali (2012) propone del horizonte de espera, como aquello que debería ocurrir de un modo y luego no sucede así, donde la lógica de acción programada se desvía y transforma lo planificado. La misma autora habla de aceptar el riesgo de que la acción de lo que acontece supere la palabra y la intención.

Siempre intento regular los tiempos de las dos horas y cuarto de la planificación, pero como siempre al cierre me faltan ver algunos puntos de lo planificado. Los y las estudiantes me avisan con sus cuerpos y movimientos ¡que se quieren ir! Miro el reloj y suelo estar pasada del tiempo asignado para la clase. Consigno la lectura en profundidad del programa para el próximo encuentro, les solicito que estén atentos a los comunicados a través de la plataforma virtual y les saludo hasta la semana entrante. Ya nos estamos yendo, agradezco nuevamente su presencia y les digo que los espero con las lecturas realizadas. Me preocupo de mirar a quienes me miran. Son muchas más que al inicio. Se sonríen y se retiran del salón conversando. Algo de la ruptura del aislamiento se dió y eso me reconforta.

R2: Palabras, miradas y lugares vinculares

E- Es lunes y ya es casi la hora de entrar al aula. Los/las estudiantes están conversando en el pasillo en pequeños grupos, van levantando la cabeza y me saludan mientras abro la puerta, ingreso al aula y les pido que entren.
Siento que el espacio es inmenso, es un aula para más de 100 estudiantes con una tarima debajo del pizarrón que ocupa todo el ancho del aula. Sobre ella hay un escritorio con una silla en la que encuentro el borrador, la caja de tizas y el cable para conectar el proyector que se encuentra en el techo. Sobre el pizarrón también es posible desplegar una pantalla para proyectar diapositivas o todo aquello que uno pudiera llevar en su computadora portátil.
Casi nunca subo a la tarima, solamente en las situaciones que tengo que usar el pizarrón. Siento que estando allí arriba estoy validando un instrumento de poder sobre los/las estudiantes.
Me paro en el frente del aula delante de esta tarima.
Elda: - Buenas tardes, ¿Cómo están?- Así comienzo.
Varios de los estudiantes que estaban conversando levantan, giran su cabeza y saludan, otros siguen conversando por lo bajo pero creo que logré su atención.
Mi materia se dicta para casi todas las carreras de profesorado y así se van agrupando por la materia que van a dictar cuando sean docentes. A mi derecha sobre la pared se agrupan los estudiantes de historia, en el centro adelante, los de biología y geociencias, a mi izquierda los de ciencias de la educación, al fondo los de letras. Cuando son pocos como los de física o de administración de empresas se mezclan con alguno de estos grupos.
En los primeros minutos van entrando algunos estudiantes que, al verme en el medio del aula, apuran su paso como si se sintieran culpables.
Hay un momento después de mi saludo que los ojos están puestos sobre mí y es desde ese instante que empieza la propuesta de trabajo.
En un principio a manera de broma les digo que ese es el tiempo de "los avisos parroquiales" en referencia a los anuncios y pedidos que hace un cura en la iglesia a sus feligreses. Aquí les aviso de las cuestiones formales como pueden ser los horarios de la consulta o los requisitos para presentar un trabajo práctico, entre otras. Luego les pido que tengan a mano el cronograma de la materia para ubicar en este el contenido que vamos a trabajar ese día.
Hay ruido de papel moviéndose y veo a muchos de ellos tomar el celular y comenzar a buscar en el aula virtual el cronograma. Releo en voz alta lo que estaba planificado para este día y anticipo lo que vendrá en la próxima clase. María levanta la mano: -"Profe, este texto de Romero que había que leer para hoy no lo pude encontrar en la plataforma". Varios asienten con sus cabezas como confirmando esta situación. Ana, y una de las estudiantes de historia sentada al lado de ella rápidamente explican en voz alta cómo hacerlo. Siento que vamos entrando en tema. Es como cuando queremos hacer gimnasia y empezamos con los ejercicios de precalentamiento.

Y largamos. "Hoy, tal como lo tenemos en el cronograma vamos a trabajar sobre la comunicación en la clase", afirmo. Les reparto una situación en la que se relata el caso de una docente que dice a sus estudiantes lo que tienen que hacer y luego se transcribe lo que los estudiantes interpretaron de lo dicho. Se incluyen preguntas sobre la situación y les pido que las vayan resolviendolas en grupos de seis. Para ello deberán reagruparse para conformar los subgrupos. ¡Que difícil hacer que se reorganicen! Algunos se quedan en su lugar, otros mueven sus sillas… Voy pasando y pidiendo que se unan a aquellos estudiantes que se mantienen solos, como queriendo decir "Yo trabajo mejor así". El trabajo al interior de los grupos comienza, en algunos de ellos todavía están hablando de lo que les sucedió el día anterior, me acerco y les sigo: -"Ya pudieron leerlo". Ahí cambian las caras, sonríen, me miran y parecen retomar la tarea.

Me paro en un extremo de la clase y observo. En el grupo de la izquierda la chica con sweater rojo está hablando acaloradamente. Los demás la escuchan, uno de ellos hace dibujos en la hoja. Por momentos otra de las estudiantes toma la palabra y los demás asienten.

En el grupo del frente todos están leyendo individualmente la teoría. Me acerco y les pido que en ese momento traten de resolver el caso con lo que recuerdan o lo que saben de otras materias. Me miran asombrados como diciendo "Tendríamos que usar la teoría".

Ahora viene lo más interesante para mí y lo más misterioso. Abrimos el debate, lo que en didáctica llamamos "puesta en común". A la primera pregunta sobre el caso Juan levanta la mano y dice: "¿No le parece que lo que pasa acá es que la profesora no explica bien, no se comunica?". Estoy tentada de contestar, de dar la respuesta que surge en mi mente enseguida, pero me callo y re pregunto a todo el grupo - ¿Qué opinan de lo que dice Juan? Siento que están atentos, quizás no todos pero la mayoría. Contestan la pregunta por lo bajo algunos, otros , los que siempre participan, lo hacen a viva voz. Algunos toman sus biromes para empezar a tomar nota. Levanta la mano María y dice: - "Yo creo que no es así porque el problema está en que los estudiantes no leyeron los textos y no comprenden". Volvemos al mismo intercambio.

Hay momentos en que sus respuestas me causan asombro. Este está ligado a lo impensado, a aquello que no se me había ocurrido pensar pero que es posible de relacionar con lo que estamos discutiendo. También aparecen comentarios que dan cuenta de que las relaciones que establecieron con la situación y las concepciones acerca de la comunicación muestran una comprensión equivocada de la teoría.

Escucho atenta las respuestas y trato de seguir el pensamiento del estudiante que responde. A veces llegamos a conversar de aspectos de la enseñanza que no tenía planeado trabajar ese día o situaciones que escapan a lo propuesto por el programa. Es un dejarse llevar en un ir y volver de la enseñanza pensada a la realizada, a la necesidad del otro de cuestionar y replantear.

Como en un juego de pin pon la palabra va circulando pero , para mi pesar, siempre se dirigen a mí y yo soy la que re pregunto. Es como si al jugar, la pelota en lugar de pasar de un contrincante a otro tuviera que pasar por un intermediario que la redirigiera al jugador contrario. Romero (2001) diría que estamos en una comunicación radial, de la que yo soy el centro, aun cuando me esfuerzo porque se comuniquen entre ellos. Esto implica una dependencia que no busco. Aparezco como la dadora de turnos de habla, la que habilita la palabra. Con un grupo de cien estudiantes es difícil darle la palabra a todos o que ellos /as la pidan.Es por esta razón principalmente que siempre organizo alguna instancia de discusión en grupos pequeños, esto me permite circular por el aula, escuchar los que dicen, cómo lo dicen…

G- Llego al salón siempre cruzando el patio. Salvo que llueva, prefiero atravesar por el aire libre a través de los árboles y las pérgolas, en vez de llegar por los pasillos. Me doy cuenta que contacto con lo cálido de la facultad en lo edilicio.

Recuerdo mis tiempos de estudiante y las luchas que dimos por tener este lugar para la facultad, las clases en anfiteatros, container y las goteras.

El patio está habitado por los y las estudiantes en pequeños grupos. Conversan, almuerzan, estudian. Allí está nuestra biblioteca y los tres espacios físicos destinados a estudiantes, funcionarios y docentes para las agrupaciones que sustentan el co-gobierno. Observo sus interacciones y los modos en que cuerpos y presentaciones comunican parte del estilo institucional. Estudiantes muy diversos, en posiciones cómodas se apropian del espacio. Sentados en las mesas, los bancos y el piso. El bicicletero está repleto. Siento que algo funcionó y ellos están en su casa. Transitar ese recorrido me ayuda a dejar atrás los ritmos de trabajo, los temas y las acciones de gestión en las que estoy y ponerme en clave de aula, para este espacio docente. Más lenta, receptiva, focalizada y motivada a lo que sucederá en el aquí y ahora de la apertura del curso.

Ya veo a los estudiantes de ingreso para nuestro primer encuentro de aula. Muy pocos están acompañados. La escena es el de cuerpos aislados, grandes ojos que miran, y muchos celulares en acción. Algunos prefieren bajar la cabeza y solo esperar mi llegada, percibir los movimientos para pararse e ingresar al salón. Me detengo a mirarlos.

Skliar(2011) dirá que se debe educar la mirada. A su entender estamos debilitados para poder ver, entender y producir con los efectos de lo mirado. Educar nuestra mirada se trata de multiplicar las formas y las posibilidades de mirar lo que las imágenes producen. Requiere llamar la atención a nuestra atención y ponerla a disposición de atender otras cosas y a sí misma. Se propone en ello una ética de la mirada, que en lo hospitalario y disponible, mire sin manchar y con ojos limpios la experiencia educativa en relaciones de alteridad. Miradas que acompañan, ayudan, donan un tiempo y espacio al otro abriendo la posibilidad de la existencia.Me pregunto siempre si lograré prestar atención a lo que miro sin que mi mirada sentencie y definan.

Suelo comenzar por agradecerles su presencia. Hace tiempo que pienso en esta acción que necesito e instalo como apertura. Los últimos años opté por trabajar con los turnos de la noche. Me conmueven los y las subjetividades que llegan -como pueden- a tratar de ser estudiantes universitarios. Su presencia y su existencia me darán la oportunidad de actuar y cambiar mi identidad docente. Intento leer mucho, formarme sobre cómo enseñar mejor, las posibles rutas del aprender y los factores de riesgo hacia la permanencia, pero solo ellos y ellas en cada posibilidad de estar allí sentados y presentes me dan la oportunidad de ser y luego tal vez de enseñar, para que en algún momento puedan desplegarse aprendizajes.

Luego les invito a presentarnos y con ello comienzo a calmar mi inquietud de conocerlos. Les cuento que en la plataforma hay un formulario diseñado con algunas preguntas que me ayudaran a comprender más rápidamente algo de sus caminos educativos previos, de quiénes son y de la elección a la profesión. Es un tiempo colectivo-individual. Inicio con algunas consignas de dinámicas grupales para romper el hielo. Percibo la incomodidad de algunos. ¿Voy a tener que hablar ante todos? Reconozco la disposición de otros ¡Acá voy a hablar! Me pregunto si lograré acompañarlos a tomar su voz, si sabré transitar sus silencios y habitar los míos.

Mientras esto sucede, siempre me acompaña el mate, integro la ronda, escucho, pregunto y observo cómo nos escuchamos. Suelo sentarme lejos del pizarrón. Una rápida dinámica me ayuda a mostrarles que no estan solos y luego a darles el lugar de singularidad en esta inmensidad institucional que maravillosamente hoy se atrapa en un encuentro entre algunos. Propongo armemos una ronda y por medio de preguntas dicotómicas los y las estudiantes perciben y se perciben entre pares como padres y madres, de la capital y del interior, barrios

en los que están viviendo, horas de trabajo semanal, hinchas de tal o cual cuadro de futbol, optando por cantantes, bachilleratos de procedencia, corrientes de la psicología, palabras que describan sus primeras semanas en la universidad. Ellos y ellas inevitablemente se levantan, se desordena la ronda, se mueven, se miran hablan y el murmullo en el salón me hace sentir que iniciamos el proceso de deconstrucción de las posiciones para aprender.

Despés de todo este desorden volvemos a la ronda inicial del aula. Veo el alivio de muchos de volver al asiento del estudiante y la sonrisa de quienes disfrutaron de la ruptura y el espacio. Nuevamente recurro a una dinámica de jerarquización de palabras, ahora individuales de esas primeras semanas. Cada quien tendrá la oportunidad y el mandato de hablar.

Luego de este desarmar volvemos al programa del curso, a los sentidos del espacio que en los objetivos se definen. Las palabras de los y las estudiantes, suelen hablar de la valoración del formato del curso; lo posible del enseñar y del aprender en grupos medianos. En este sentido, relatan las condiciones que vivencian en los grupos numerosos: el caos, el cambio, la sorpresa y el posible anonimato.

Siento que es necesario que ocupe el rol esperado del docente "explicador", percibo el alivio de que aparezca por un rato mi voz presentando el curso. Les pido que nos orientemos a trabajar el power point en que se presenta el programa. Doy lugar a los silencios, intercalo la consulta ¿Dudas hasta aquí? - pregunto. ¿Que creen que trabajaremos en esta unidad? Es un power point en interacción, entre mi voz y la de algunos estudiantes que comparten su percepción.

Cuando conversamos de la evaluación se instala un momento particular. Quienes estaban de alguna forma fuera de lo que sucedía pero atrapados en la silla, levantan sus cabezas, acomodan hojas, y miran. La sola referencia a la palabra de cómo evaluaremos el curso despierta el adormecido lugar estudiantil. La asimetría se dibuja en la interacción. Así los voy a evaluar. Me doy cuenta de que ahora todos están atentos. Me preocupo de sus huellas por situaciones de evaluación vividas y de otros lugares asimétricos que hayan transitado. Me pregunto y actualizo la duda sobre mis posiciones sobre evaluación y mis huellas. Siento que la institución en lo instituido (Fernández,1994) se apodera del espacio, en el sentido en que aun cuando la asignatura habilita a tener grupos medianos, flexibles e interactivos, estos devienen en un requisito que a modo de peaje, habilita su avance curricular.

Los instrumentos de evaluación formativa que se proponen en la planificación del curso intentan invitar a fundamentar opiniones, a dialogar con los autores y descubrir su voz entre la de ellos. Cada día del aula me interpela la tensión entre la herencia disciplinar y producción situada de los saberes al enseñar. Encuentro en la investigación un escenario propicio para materializar esta tensión. Así las búsquedas de nuevas preguntas disciplinares de los y las estudiantes cuando enseño propiciarán espacios de aproximación a investigar desde su curiosidad.

Trato de vincular los objetivos del curso, con los instrumentos de evaluación y su relación con la profesión. Intento que la profesión, sus avatares y aventuras habiten el aula continuamente. Me recuerdo a mí misma buscar el diálogo con el deseo que los puso a formarse en psicología, encontrar esas huellas y no perderlas en el camino.¿Podrán sostener sus sentidos en los objetivos del curso y la institución?

Algunos estudiantes se acercan, sienten la posibilidad y hacen preguntas, vienen a despedirse, agradecen verbalmente el espacio. Me doy cuenta que cuando circula el agradecimiento para mi es relevante. No tengo tan claro qué agradezco y agradecemos. ¿Disposiciones? ¿Modelos universitarios? Se me representa la posibilidad de estar en la universidad, en este lugar y entre nosotros: para mí y para ellos. La oportunidad de acompañar su posibilidad de ser estudiantes y devenir profesionales en esta disciplina que me enamora y convoca.

Les pido que conversemos afuera ya que entra otro grupo al salón. Vamos caminando y me cuentan. Allí voy acompañada hacia mi instituto mientras les acompaño. Casi siempre lo que preguntan les propongo que lo retomemos el encuentro siguiente y si es algo que me preocupa, les digo que me escriban al correo para darnos el lugar y tiempo adecuado en el horario de consulta para pensarlo juntos. Al igual que cuando consigno el control de asistencia y trabajo la evaluación me hace sentir bien estar allí para recibir su voz y sostener la distancia cercana e institucional para ver juntos desde mi rol de profesora que acontece en sus procesos de inicio a la formación universitaria.

¿Entonces enseñar: qué es ?

E. Juntas y en conversación colaborativa la autoetnografía nos permitió develar parte de lo que nos sucede al enseñar en estos lugares. Lugares situados en las circunstancias vitales, curriculares, sociales. Lugares únicos del nosotras mismas y de los y las estudiantes. Enseñar para cada una es una escena irrepetible, mediada y relacional. Es una conversación inconclusa que sin el otro no tiene posibilidad de narrarse.

Las miradas que se producen dan cuenta de ese salto del no saber o creer saber al saber , al comprender la idea. ¿Cómo hacemos para que esto suceda? Seguimos su pensamiento, tratando de comprender desde dónde los/las estudiantes están siguiendo el hilo de la pregunta, de la situación, al decir de Ritchhart y otros (2014) , intentamos hacer visible su pensamiento.

Aparece en este momento la idea de la danza, el baile de un tango o de un vals en el que cada uno hace sus pasos pero es de la coordinación de ambos partenaires que surge la coreografía, el baile y el disfrute de él.

G- Parece ser que nuestro enseñar va a tener que ver con formas diversas de agradecer y acompañar para aprender los modos de estar en la universidad, pendulando en lo individual y lo grupal, lo heredado y lo creado. Se trata de propiciar y facilitar conversaciones reales e imaginarias, miradas, sonrisas, proximidades y silencios entre pares, con las docencias y con los autores. Encontrar las preguntas y poder sustentarlas. Integrar la investigación como herramienta de respuesta y búsqueda, como un posible espacio horizontal al que se arriba juntos en la relación con los saberes. Poder ocupar lugares de cercanía, contención y disponibilidad propios, disciplinares, interdisciplinares e institucionales. Los lugares asimétricos necesarios parece que nos preocupan si no se alternan y se desarman. ¿Serán huellas de asimetrías cristalizadas y de momentos sociales en los que lo horizontal no era posible?

En este enseñar la mirada juega para nosotras un eje relacional. Skliar (2011) dirá que se deben educar las miradas, sacar lo borroso que mancha y mata al otro en su alteridad. Me pregunto cuánto de limpia buscamos esté nuestra mirada en la relación con los/as estudiantes, para contactarlos y percibirlos en lo único y posible de su existencia.

Nuestros modos de enseñar en los inicios y en cada encuentro tienen mucho de memoria y de nuestras memorias. Buscan tener presente el recuerdo de lo ajeno de la institución, la percepción de lo complejo y la violencia de lo numeroso en quienes desean ser estudiantes universitarios. En ello intentamos habitar conscientes todas las expresiones de las interacciones comunicacionales para hacer presente y existente al otre-estudiante. Parece ser que se trata de *estar a tiempo* para sostener el *tiempo de poder aprender a estar.*

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The Symbolic Power of Language:
A Reflection on My Language Learning Experiences

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Abstract
As a multilingual, my experience of learning the three languages that I use shows a process of identity formation and capital accumulation, through which I got to know both the world and myself better. Also, my cultural capital, as well as the social and economic capital of my family, all had an essential role in facilitating my learning process and shape my linguistic behavior. However, I did not fully realize the privilege I had until I lost it in a new country. This paper is a reflection of my language learning experience, which I think can be labeled "contradiction."

Keywords
Multilingualism, language learning, linguistic identity, linguistic inequity, symbolic capital

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I was born and raised in Chengdu, a beautiful city located in southern China that is also known as the "Country of Heaven" and the "Land of Abundance". In many Chinese people's eyes, the city is associated with delicious food, friendly locals, the laidback lifestyle, and the cutest animal in the world—giant panda. However, to me the most significant symbol of my hometown is the dialect, the language that I grew up with. Chengdu dialect, featuring flat vowels and long ending syllables, is rather soft sounding. It reminds me of the scent of pink Hibiscus loaded with dew, the cool breeze on a summer night in the plain, the autumn sunshine falling through the golden leaves of gingko, the whispers in the library that I used to visit when I was a kid, the laughter of the old chatting under the tree, and the poems my grandfather read to me which brought me back to his youth. It reminds me of all the hidden treasures of the city, some almost lost memories of childhood, and importantly, where I come from.

However, this language that is so gentle and delicate from my perspective does have a cruel side, when it is used as a tool of normalization and marginalization. Since Chengdu is the capital of Sichuan province and the economical center of western China, the Chengdu dialect is also called Sichuanese/Southwestern Mandarin. Hence, when people mention Sichuan dialect (the singular form), they are usually talking about Chengdu (and sometimes Chongqing) dialect, although there are over 100 dialects used by Sichuanese living in the 150 cities of the province. In addition, the Chengdu dialect is used as a standard with which to evaluate other Sichuan dialects, which degrades the latter and labels them with "vulgar" and "inferior". This adoption of Chengdu dialect among others as a prestigious variety gives its speakers what Bourdieu (1991) calls symbolic power, which refers to the resources available to an individual on the basis of honor, prestige, or recognition. This power pushed some of my classmates who came from other cities in Sichuan away from speaking their own dialects and discouraged some Sichuanese parents from teaching their children the dialect they spoke to prevent them from picking up the accent. In contrast, as a member of the privileged group who inherited Chengdu dialect from my

parents, I automatically get the respect and recognition that many of my peers have been longing for. In that way, my dialect forms and represents an important part of my cultural and linguistic capital.

As I grew up, my privilege could be also identified in my Mandarin learning experience. Although I did not speak Mandarin at all before the age of six, I got well prepared for learning this language of schooling. My grandfather was a professor of Chinese literature at a local college, and he was also my primary caretaker until middle school. He taught me how to read and write in Standard Mandarin and I had learned 3,000 Chinese characters, which was the standard for a third grader, before I started elementary school. Also, my parents and grandparents managed to send me to the best elementary school in the district using the social networks they had. In addition, my father, who was born and raised in Beijing and thus spoke Standard Mandarin, gave me a lot of help with pronunciation as I learned the language. As a result, I mastered Mandarin quicky in school and Chinese soon became my best subject. Importantly, my proficiency in Chinese literacy and school literacy gave me great advantages in learning other subjects, especially social sciences, which largely contributed to my academic success.

The language that seems to add the most to my linguistic capital, however, is neither of the two that I have discussed, but rather a foreign one, English. My English learning experience, including my evolving perception of and attitudes toward the language, is much more complicated than my experience with the other two. And it is this experience that I want to discuss in more detail in this paper. Afraid that I would be left behind by my peers, my parents sent me to learn English in a private language school when I was just three years old, even before I started to learn Mandarin. This kind of after-school tutoring was a routine for me as a child and teenager. I took courses in vocabulary, grammar, speaking, and writing, and I practiced using the language every day at home using materials such as videos, tapes, picture books, games, and learning websites. I was not sure if I liked English when I was a child as I do now, but since I did not end up hating the language despite receiving such extensive training at that young age, I guess I might have had an interest in English.

With all this training and practice, starting in middle school English became another strong subject of mine alongside Chinese. My happy experiences with and competence in the two languages that have the greatest power in Chinese education to some extent cultivated my interest in literature and paved my way to an elite college in my country. When I was 18, I was an owner of rich linguistic capital in my country. My language skills helped me in passing exams, finding good internships, and applying for overseas programs. Also, I could communicate fluently and confidently with people in different communities to which I associated, because I was proficient in every language that had the symbolic power in those communities (i.e., Chengdu dialect in my hometown, Mandarin in the country, and English in school and job market). Yes Notably, my mastery of the three languages was through an increasingly formal learning process: I acquired Chengdu dialect in natural settings; I learned Standard Mandarin in half-natural settings (learned the language in classroom and practiced it in certain situations in my daily life); and I learned English in almost totally formal settings. In all three cases, my cultural capital, such as the linguistic repertoire of my parents and grandparents and the education that I received, as well as the social and economic capital of my family, which enabled them to send me to good elementary and secondary school, both had an essential role in facilitating my learning process and shape my linguistic behavior, including my accent and the way I use the languages.

However, I did not fully realize the privilege I had until I lost it in a new country. After I came to the United States for my master's program, I gradually understand that the way I use English, especially in speaking, may not be valued in the linguistic market of this country. Bourdieu (1991) defines a linguistic market as the social structures in which the value of an

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individual's speech depends on the ability to speak appropriately according to specific situations. Importantly, the same language, or the same way of using the language, may take on different value in different linguistic market. While Mandarin has high prestige in China, it is not valued the same in the U.S. linguistic market. Also, in the eyes of many Chinese, I may be a competent user of English, whereas to some Americans, I speak nonstandard, "incorrect" English. Hence, in this new country, I have to constantly monitor my language and pay attention to my accent and diction to make sure that I can be understood. Also, I would organize my words in advance and rehearse in my mind for many times before I opened my mouth. In contrast, my American classmates enjoy the privilege of feeling at ease when using their mother tongue and thus many are more fluent, accurate, and efficient in finding the right expressions when talking in the class. Their English, the language that they grew up speaking, has both "private market value" and "private non-market value" in this country (Skutnabb & Phillipson, 2013, p. 91).

Fearing being marginalized and treated differently due to my use of English, in graduate school I tried to write more and talk less, because writing gave me more time to think about my language. However, soon I found that the field of writing is not a shelter either, as it is also featured with conventions established by the native speakers in power. First, as an English learner brought up in another culture, I needed to learn how to write based on American English context, where people have different expectations of what should be included in the content and in what logic things should be organized. Additionally, as a graduate student, I have to learn to follow the rules of academic writing and publishing to get recognized in both my discipline and academia in general, where the English language and culture have a privileged role as they do in daily life in this country. Meanwhile, I clearly understand that although one day I may be able to write in Standard English proficiently (if I practice hard and agree to confirm to the norms), I can never do the same in speaking, because I can never drop my accent at this age. This accent, which is an inseparable part of my identity, will always leave the door open for judgement.

In addition to accent, diction, and grammar, I start to see that the value of one's speech also depends on the social status of that individual (Bourdieu, 1991). As a foreigner and student of color, I do not always enjoy the right to be listened to (with care and respect) in the U.S. society. I sometimes felt people have low expectations about my language proficiency because I come from a foreign cultural that may be inaccessible and important to them. As a result, they tended to passively agree with everything I said without taking any part of it seriously. Also, when there was a cultural gap, some people easily lost interest in my thoughts and made no efforts to understand my views. While this happened more often outside the university, it did happen in my school as well. For instance, a professor in my department, who had been doing critical study on marginalized groups (ironically), always mispronounced and misspelled my name in the last two years. I have told them that they could use the short version of my name, but they never remembered. That really bothered me as I felt they did not pay attention to what I said at all, not even once, and I did not know if they ever felt sorry about that. I wonder if I were a professor or local student, things might be different, because they never messed up their names. This discrimination towards my language and identity has made me feel excluded by this country and its culture. Since I am a powerless international student who does not speak Standard English or have an American identity, I do not always enjoy the right to be heard or cared about.

However, while I sometimes feel frustrated in using English in the U.S., I have never hated English itself, as the language not only adds significantly to my linguistic capital but also reminds me of many wonderful memories in my life. For instance, I had a great time reading English literature, which finally became my major in undergraduate school. The works of Shakespeare, Wilkie Collins, Eugene O'Neill, Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Brontë, and many others have opened the door for me to different lives, views, and values that I would otherwise

never have access to. Now every time as I open an English novel, it brings back to those nights when I read alone in my dormitory under the moonlight and fell asleep with the book in hand.

Moreover, my English learning process has reshaped my views and values about the world and life and offered me a new voice. Raised in a society that emphasized uniformity, hierarchy, patriarchy, and political correctness, I was used to holding back my feelings and thoughts and submit to power as a young girl and "model" student. However, the English works that I had read, including the empowering theories of Foucault and Bourdieu (which I did not have access to in middle school and college), the inspiring sprits in Whitman's poems and Sandra Cisneros's novels, and the discussion on freedom and equity regarding culture, race, gender, and human rights, touched me deeply and opened my eyes to a new, liberal, and creative world. For the first time, I had the true feeling that I was living in world characterized by diversity rather than uniformity, and there were (and should be) multiple truths and voices instead of a single correct mind. The epistemology associated with English, although rather suppressing in some ways for speakers of other languages, does have emancipating power on me in this case. The language offers me an additional tool or lens to reflect on my "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1991) and interpret the world where I live. Hence, reading and speaking English not only teaches me how to apply the language but also introduces me to values that lead me closer to my ideal identity: an independent, intelligent, and courageous woman who feel free to voice her thoughts.

Reflecting on my experience with English, I think it can be labeled "contradiction". On one hand, proficiency in English provided me with access to educational opportunities (higher education in top universities) as well as knowledge and perspective from another culture. It also helped me discover my new voice and develop an international and multilingual identity. On the other hand, it led me into a "neoimperial, U.S.-dominated world" (as cited in Skutnabb- Kangas et al., 2009, p. 9) where everything and everyone that is non-English can be devalued, marginalized, and excluded. This "contradiction" in my experience has forced me to think about the symbolic power of language and social inequity. I ask myself: As a member of the dominant group in my home country, what responsibility do I have for noticing and preventing injustice that is *accidental*, that is, a result of carelessness? What is the responsibility for us, who have more economic and cultural capital and more unearned privilege, in the fight against inequality? Importantly, as Motha (2014) argues, some accidents are not truly accidents but reflect individual and social priorities that are conscious to the owner.

Specifically, if we are not the direct recipients of discrimination or even to some extent benefit from the inequity, we may tend to ignore it or at least feel less motivated to fight for social justice. It is a shame that this might well describe my situation in China, where I was proficient in every language that had the symbolic power in the community where I was a member. At that time, because of my own privilege and lack of sensitivity to (or ignoring of) power relations, I did not take any actions in response to the linguistic and social inequity. But now, it is the time for me to reflect on my views and practices and think about what I can do to help people get access to the linguistic resources they need and draw public attention to the power relations between the language of the dominating and that of the dominated.

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Extended Unexpected Effects and Autoethnographic Embodied Texts and Performances

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Abstract
I explore autoethnography, poetry, mask and performance at the unique intersection and interconnection of my growing up with chronic hearing loss. As a dual practice-led researcher and arts and cultural development worker, committed to exploring the silences, I undertook an inquiry intersecting narrative inquiry combined with experimental forms of ethnography and arts-based research. Engaging in an embodied inquiry, I responded by hand-making masks and performing in them as (auto)ethnographic performances. The process illuminates how each mask does not always conceal, rather, the mask making, mask wearing and performances can be a way to reveal what formerly was concealed. This is explored through a living creative inquiry, as current works in development.

Keywords
autoethnographic performance, mask, narrative

"It was a dance of masks and every mask was perfect because every mask was a real face and every face a real mask….."
– Leonard Cohen*, Beautiful Losers* (2011, p.137)

"In mask
I peel back
The layers
Of the skin
I once wore to fit in"
– author's autoethnographic journal
January 2022

In this paper, I explore autoethnography, poetry, mask and performance at the unique intersection and interconnection of my growing up with chronic hearing loss. Further, I share some current and new (auto)ethnographic performance works in development. I begin with the dance of masks insight by Cohen (2011, p.137), as a doorway into opening this deeper conversation on my autoethnographic reflections as a researcher undertaking this research, and touching on how this led to new revelations and transformations that were unanticipated. While the context Cohen writes in is different to the context of my research. I apply a deeper resonance here; to reflect a significant and transformational encounter I had in the research

journey. This is alluded to in the excerpt from my autoethnographic journal that follows: "I peel back the layers of the skin I once wore to fit in'. Deeper truths were revealed through the making and wearing of masks (see figure 1 below), and further reflection upon them, that is to say, not only in the 'removal' of the mask but in their revelation. The mask making and performances interwoven with poetry began to touch on new and intersecting threads in the research inquiry, far beyond the threshold of conventional inquiry. This revealed my positionality in relation to the research, and how my commitment to social justice from a lived perspective informs my research..This has been a rich layer that I have continued to unravel in my postdoctoral inquiry, and brings forward the influence of the non-hearing and speaking world from my formative years as it bumps against the research through my lens as the researcher. Consequently, in this paper, I explore how my work in creating, making, wearing, and performing in masks combined with visual and text-based poetry, enabled me to touch deeper layers intersecting the research that are ordinarily beyond the threshold of visibility. Layers that were invisible yet undeniably present.
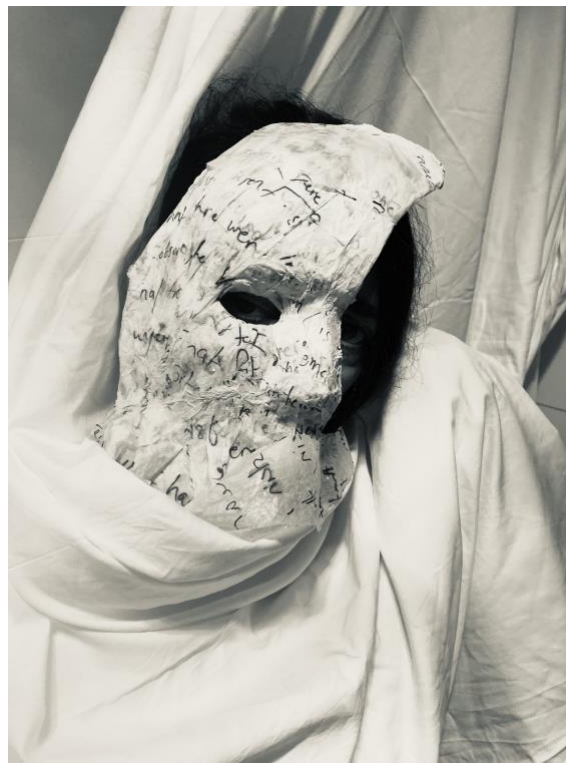
Figure 1: Portrait of the author, wearing a handmade mask layered with tissue paper and poetry to represent the hidden layers of my experience in my formative years growing up with little 'd' deafness. This is revealed as a vital lens that I bring as a researcher to the research.
Photo by R. Prince 15 November 2022

Background & context

This work builds on and extends a qualitative inquiry I undertook as a practice-led researcher and doctoral student, researching my professional practice as an arts and cultural development worker in Western Sydney, Australia. In this body of work, my research enquired into the transformations resulting from interdisciplinary creative collaborations

between three or more actors. In forging a new methodological approach, I intersected narrative inquiry with experimental forms of ethnography and arts-based research. By experimental ethnography I refer to the intersection of autoethnography, ethnographically based poetry, sensory ethnography and performance ethnography.[1] In this inquiry I was committed to exploring the silences as well as less visible, apparent or often hidden narratives. A key discovery revealed the transformations occurring in the relationships between collaborators, individuals and interconnected communities.

However, as an applied researcher, I was both an insider and outsider, and I had my own personal discoveries and epiphanies that reconnect to the research. Including unexpectedly encountering gatekeepers (in the form of powerful institutions) to the research. Beneath appearances, I had discovered a hidden war between dominant powers and oppressed communities. As part of the research inquiry, in the place where I had worked as part of my doctoral research I found a 'dangerous' and disturbing collective story from artists working within communities - about a contaminated land site in what is now a highly populated area. Their stories were not evident in the institutional narratives. Ethnographic poetry, narrative, mask-making and autoethnographic performances generated in response began to reweave these largely hidden stories, through my body as the researcher, into the centre. This is further discussed in a dedicated section later in this paper, titled '*The first poetic images and ethnographic performances*'.

Further combining and weaving new iterations of masks, autoethnographic writings, poetry and performance, I explore how this has become a way to bring into view what was not accepted otherwise in the field, nor safe to bring forward in the context of the dominant narrative/s and culture I am embedded in. As I came to learn what I now know, I experienced a deep personal transformation on multiple levels, including in my own practice. A most unexpected discovery revealed my own hidden story, that interconnects my experiences of growing up with chronic hearing loss or little 'd' deafness, as a vital lens that I bring as a researcher to the research. This process involved facing and revealing my own hidden story, and in a sense finding my own voice. This primarily was uncovered through my continuing experiments in writing autoethnography. In doing so I make "explicit personal – cultural connections" (Adams & Manning 2015, p.352) and begin to "critique cultural issues" (p.352), in this case attitudes of the hearing world to deafness and disability (although they are not one and the same and at different times, I have identified with both).

My approach in working with autoethnography is creative, where research questions and findings have continued in an iterative and non-linear way to "…emerge through the creative process" (Adams, & Manning 2015, p.353). Yet, as much as writing autoethnography may have 'saved' me, it also has deeply disturbed me, partly because of the gravity of the unexpected research findings from my doctoral research, explicitly the participant narratives that radically confronted and transformed my perceptions of working in this place. That said, autoethnography has also brought more of *me* forward and into the world. It has taken until this moment to find the courage to step into that space and to reveal what was hidden. This requires leaning into my vulnerability and making aspects of my own positionality more visible as the practitioner-researcher. In doing so, I reveal more about the interconnection points between my lived experience and larger issues in culture and society, as well as the spaces between them. Or to paraphrase Norman Denzin who (transmitting the teachings of

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[1] This new innovation in methodological approach I called 'Sensory Poetic Relationship Mapping' (SPRM) is discussed in Prince (2022), see https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004211014611

C.Wright Mills)[2] urges us to consider how we can find and inquire into where our private struggles connect with the universal struggles faced by humanity, to write from that place, and to consider how we can reveal these narratives. To do so, we need to make the reflexive turn. This is the call, and it is critical work.

The first poetic images and (auto)ethnographic performances

My continuing experiments open future threads of inquiry into how mask making, poetry and autoethnographic performances can enact a vehicle of deeper perception, and subsequent transformations (both individually and collectively). To provide further background, the first poetic and (auto)ethnographic performance works are summarised, then segue to the new poems in the latter section of this paper. The story of the first poem begins with uncovering key research findings in my doctoral studies journey, that I retold through my body as the researcher. This process culminated in thirteen interconnecting poems (Prince, 2018) which I will refer to here on in as *Bone Poems*. This was later also performed as a podcast.[3] The works emerged as site-specific and multimodal autoethnographic performances. Iterations of these continue in development, the latest one is titled *Bone Trilogy* (as a current work in development) and is available on YouTube.[4] These were also developed into image reels. In summary these are a series of interlinking site-specific (auto)ethnographic performances: *Bone Poems* (2021) and *Bone Trilogy* (2022), performed in the place that interconnects research participant stories and my own as the researcher (see figures 2-4). As I reflect on this process, As I reflect on this process each iteration has been a generative seed that continues to birth new autoethnographic and poetic performance works to the present day.

Figure 2: from *Bone Poems*
February 2021
Photo by R. Prince

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[2] Communication by Norman Denzin presented at The 18th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (QI2022), 18-22 May 2022.
[3] *Bone Poems* podcast link available at https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/wildazurebutterfly/episodes/2021-01-23T02_19_33-08_00
[4] *Bone Trilogy* available at https://youtu.be/RIT0gJhIKZg

Figure 3: from *Bone Trilogy*
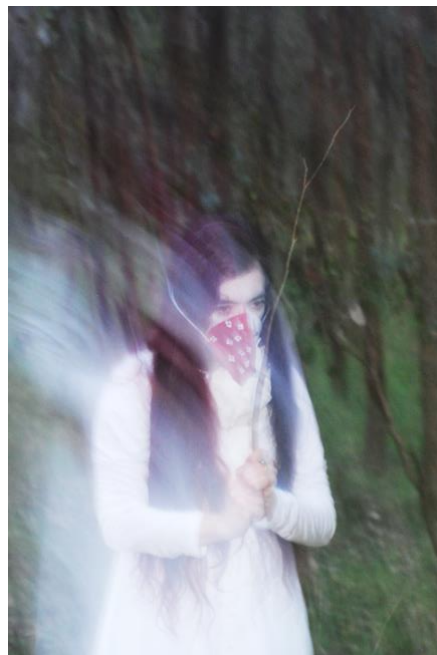14 November 2021
Photo by R. Prince

Figure 4: from *Bone Trilogy*
15 May 2022
Photo by R. Prince

In one light, these works can be viewed as the first sequence of experiments, or as the seed. This segues to my presentation of my new poems, currently in development, that I am working into (auto)ethnographic performance works.

New works

"I don't think I found autoethnography; I think autoethnography found me. In fact I think it saved me"
- Bartleet (in Bartleet and Ellis, 2009, p.1)

"In writing through our body, the act of writing becomes the enactment of an embodied voice."
- D. Soyini Madison (2019, p.197)

In the making of each mask,
a spirit is revealed in each mask....
– Author's autoethnographic reflections 15 Nov 2022

Fast forward from 'Bone Poems' to the present day, my new works delve into my experience of little 'd' deafness and how I bring this lens to the research inquiry. Moreover, how this formative experience has influenced a foundational level of my being, and simultaneously how autoethnographic processes have prompted me to look more deeply into the heart of the matter, specifically my embodied experience beyond the written or spoken word alone. As Madison (2019) teaches, this undertaking of personal and reflexive writing in an embodied way enacts my embodied voice, and ~~in doing so~~ becomes a practice of freedom. In synergy, as Bartleet expresses, autoethnography saved her (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009, p.1) and in turn-autoethnography combining poetry and other creative approaches not only saved me, it defined me as a researcher and the trajectory that my research would take.

To unpack this further, I draw on the insights of writer Robert Bringhurst (cited in Popova, 2023, para. 6) who illuminates how "…[t]he survival of poetry depends on the failure of language." He elaborates that "The reason language exists, it seems to me, that poetry – the resonance of being – needs it" (Bringhurst cited in Popova, 2023, para.6). That is to say, the way Bringhurst has positioned poetry is at the centre of all things. He conveys it as essential and at the very essence of our being-ness. In resonance, in my experience, poetry may be cloaked in language, but that poetry also co-exists in a space beneath the threshold of visibility. Likewise, our lives and experiences, including the research inquiries we undertake, are messy tapestries of rich lived experience, and in these interconnections that exist beyond the threshold of visibility, in our lives and even in our bodies, can be revealed deeper truths about our positionality in relation to the research. This in turn may generate a new seed for future inquiry, such as I have begun to explore here. Further, the poetic can take form in a myriad of poetic actions spanning poetic text, but also poetic imagery, poetic movements, masks and performances.

In the following sequence I present my new poems, as they are, in their unfinished state, currently in development and being interwoven with new poetic imagery (see figures 5-6). This is an iterative process and a recursive one. First, I present the poems then layer and combine them with the poetic imagery as they emerge into -performance concepts and preliminary or work-in development (auto)ethnographic performance works.

In the development of this new performance autoethnography, I touch on my lifelong hearing loss and how this impacts how I see the world around me. In one sense it is an experience, of being an outsider, to different degrees, and at different times. I also developed a keen eye on

the poetry of what the body says, beyond words alone. Therefore, I made a mask without ears or a mouth. The image was shot behind glass to represent the isolation I felt in what I describe as the 'glass tower of hearing loss'.

Figure 5: author portrait
15 November 2022
Photo by R. Prince

Peel

In mask
I peel back
the layers
of the skin
I once wore to fit in.

- Author's autoethnographic journal, 13 Jan 2022

High Pitched Scream

Living with chronic pain
is a high pitched scream
that no-one else can hear.

- Author's autoethnographic journal, 2019 (date unknown)

There are things that remain

There are things
that remain
in us

SILENT

At the age of 5
I had learned
there were certain things
not to speak

Growing up 'd'eaf
I observed the body
and that which remained
UNSPOKEN

My professional practice
and research
is no different.

- Author's autoethnographic journal, April 2020

Figure 6: author portrait
15 November 2022
Photo by R. Prince

~~The process of~~ making this autoethnographic turn to revealing and telling my own story calls on deep courage to bring into view what has not previously been visible. This moment of courage is equally an act of vulnerability, as well as potentially bringing us face to face with our edges of discomfort. While this requires a more extended discussion on vulnerability, discomfort and relational ethics that go beyond the scope of this paper, including how de-identification becomes problematic when writing autoethnography on one's early life (Adams & Manning, 2015, p.361), for the time being I want to come back the importance of being willing to be vulnerable. As Madison (2019) says, as a researcher we need to be open to our own "vulnerability". This ability to stay with unknowing and vulnerability opens "...an ethic of discomfort [that] avoids binary thinking…" (Akpovo, Neessen, Nganga & Sorrells, 2021,

p.6). Further, as Lugones (1987) says, having this sense of world travelling with loving perception into lives beyond our own is something ethnographic and narrative work opens us to. Autoethnography allows others to travel into our world, and yet also for me to travel into aspects of my world that I have not yet explored fully.

Closing the dance

"It was a dance of masks, and every mask was perfect because every mask was a real face and every face was a real mask so there was no mask and there was no face for there was but one dance in which there was but one mask but one true face which was the same and which was a thing without a name which changed and changed into itself over and over."
- Leonard Cohen*, Beautiful Losers* (2011, p.137).

I return to the insight that began this conversation, by Cohen (2011), however, this time with a fuller exploration of the text. Cohen's poetry speaks to me, even from beyond. Cohen's poetry teaches me, indeed moves me, in this time, even when his physical presence has left us. Cohen's poetry guides me to understand how all the faces and all the masks and the movement between them represent something true, and that they are interconnected. Or as I say in my own autoethnographic reflections, the process has illuminated, that each mask does not necessarily conceal. Rather, the mask-making, mask wearing and performances have become a way to reveal what was concealed. Further, to dare to be vulnerable and enacting that process leads me to new trajectories and a greater unknown. The revealing of deeper truths, including researcher positionality, is a journey that calls for vulnerability and courage, opening the gateway to deeper personal and collective transformations.

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Being Proud of My Accent:
Overcoming the Tension Between the Ideology of Native-speakerism and My Professional Identity in ELT

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Abstract
This autoethnography explores how Non-native English-speaking Teachers' (NNESTs) accents experience tension in their professional identity development under the influence of the ideology of Native-speakerism. My autoethnography illustrates specific experiences I have encountered in ELT as a way to explore new ways for NNESTs to think about being proud of one's unique accent and, therefore, legitimize one as a valuable actor in ELT since we convey the power of language and the confidence of English learners.

Keywords
NNESTs, accent, Native-speakerism, ELT

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This auto-ethnography delves into how Non-native English-speaking Teachers' (NNESTs) accents encounter difficulty in their process of forming a professional identity due to the prevalence of the Native-Speakerism ideology. While English teaching respects the various forms of the language spoken by multilinguals, some cultures prioritize certain dialects over others due to their association with the concept of Native Speakerism (Holliday, 2006). This ideology privileges native English speakers as teachers of English, presenting them as the most ideal models of English proficiency and western voice (Wang & Lin, 2013). This belief has shaped hierarchical structures of English proficiency in English teaching (Huang, 2019), which offers native English speakers more prestige and authority than NNESTs (Motha, 2014). This leads NNESTs to doubt their professional identity and prompts them to question if they can match up to NESTs in terms of their teaching capabilities. Through my auto-ethnography, I want to show the specific experiences of English Language Teaching (ELT) that I have gone through, as a way to suggest to NNESTs new ideas on how to be proud of their unique accents and make themselves legitimate members of the ELT community.

As a Non-Native English-Speaking Teacher, I have noticed that potential employers put more weight on my accent than my qualifications or experience. In job interviews, my spoken English was always under scrutiny, and this made me question my abilities as an English teacher. Did I have the skills to do the job despite not having a native-like accent?

As an NNEST, I have also felt devalued by students since they do not trust my teaching abilities as much as they trust a native speaker's. Like me, my students are not native speakers. Despite this, they tend to ask natives for language advice rather than coming to me, and sometimes even use my accent as an excuse for why they cannot answer a question or offer incorrect corrections to my pronunciation.

Over time, however, my belief of feeling devalued by my lack of perfect English pronunciation has changed to a feeling of pride in my accent. My students have often expressed

that my accent brings them closer to me as a non-native speaker and makes them feel safer expressing their honest thoughts. They typically wonder how I can talk with such fluency in English and use me as an example, saying, "if she can do it, so can I". These experiences have led me to realize that the accent I worried about can be a means of shortening the distance between students and encouraging them to learn English.

The truth is, individuals do not comprehend that Non-Native English Speakers Teachers cannot communicate with the same fluency as those whose first language is English, but that does not have to be a problem. The way we talk—including our tone, pitch, and accent— is intrinsically connected to who we are and can be difficult to alter. Our accent is essential in teaching students that English is not a homogeneous language (Wang & Lin, 2013). NNESTs are those that have mastered multiple languages and recognize the benefit of multlingual lanaguage. Given that this group imparts their comprehension of cultural and social values via the instruction of language (Trent, 2016), their methods for teaching and the various expressions of English that they utilize will help students to develop more comprehensive English ideologies (Canagarajah, 2002). Through my teaching, I've come to realize that having a perfect accent isn't as important as being able to deliver the message properly in a second language. Our accents should be viewed with pride; they demonstrate our language skills and the courage of English learners.

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Just Because You Can't See It, Doesn't Mean It Isn't There:
Using Non-representational Ethnography to Animate the Experience of the Grandmother Family Sojourn

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Abstract

My contributor grandmothers and I show enthusiasm for visiting close kin across the world. We (they) are keen to become, at least for a time, a family member not a guest. However, staying longer because of the distance, can impinge on the experience, physically and psychologically.

Close family can seem changed, when seen infrequently and this leads to areas of disharmony. In my field work these predicaments have been reported obliquely, through stock phrases such as 'well family is family' or 'I didn't like to say anything'.

To better understand what these stresses might be about, disguised in the overall positive experience, I wrote autobiographical vignettes close to my own sojourning experiences. They were written while I could still feel the bodily perturbations caused by the proximity of family. These helped to animate and reveal the complexity of my experience, and by extension give insight into the anomaly of evasive or partly hidden tensions within my cohort.

Keywords

Grandmothers, distant family, sojourning, stock phrases, evasion, somatic vignettes, insight.

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Extended abstract

The remarkable demographic changes over the past seventy years have altered the grandmother experience according to Szinovacz writing in 1998. Grandmothers of the 'Baby Boomer' generation can for the first time keep in touch with their geographically separated families online, as well as visiting them in person, from time to time (GUS: Growing up in Scotland 2012).

The overall scope of my thesis is to ask how grandmothers, recognised as being the main kin keepers of the family, pass on informal family folklore at a distance. (Duke, Fivush:2006). If, as is argued by (Duke, Fivush et al:2004) (Kirshenblatt-Gimlett:1989) (Reese:2013) that knowledge of the wider family supports the building of mental resilience in teenagers, this will be particularly significant, especially when noting the recent rise of suicide in young adults (O'Conner and Robb: 2020).

One difference between socialising with family close by and those further away, is the necessity for longer stays. These periods of time have a similarity to the biblical 'sojourn', defined as: 'a traveller to another culture who has to rely upon the community there for

continued support'. (King James Bible). This presentation aims to identify ethnographic complexity within this prolonged time a grandmother spends with distant family. Through interviews and emails my contributors reported back on their sojourning experiences.Their replies revealed not only intense joy on being reunited, but also underlying tension. These pressures manifested in the transcripts as ambiguous but commonly used phrases I called 'pet' or 'pat', such as:

- Why didn't they just say?'
- 'I'm sorry it isn't much.'
- They always say: 'Take us as you find us', but I'm not sure they mean it.

It became clear there was a gap between their overall reporting of a positive experience and the underlying tensions causing discord. To scrutinise this sojourning anomaly, I used an autoethnographic methodology, writing about my own family experiences. This was to avoid 'data collection, neatly packaged' (Pink:2009). Autoethnography has progressed over the last two decades to include subsets such as the non-representational ethnography of Phillip Vannini. (Vannini 2014). Vannini suggests writing 'vignettes' as near to the event as possible. 'They can animate the encounter', he says, 'beginning from the researcher's body'. This embodied approach was also explored by Jonas Larsen who recorded his bodily responses running across an unfamiliar landscape (Larsen:2019). I suggest this somatic approach could have relevance for a grandmother who, in the process of a family sojourn, experiences a journey through unfamiliar physical domestic landscape. The subsequent personal sojourning vignettes, deliberately contained strong images of the physicality I felt about the experience for example:

> *'We feel as if we are being sent off without goodwill or a packed lunch. Our son-in-law is using the bathroom where we need to pee and brush our teeth'.*

They were evocative, without the tidying or smoothing that occurs with editing or time passing. There will be future questions to ask, but the use of small pieces of autoethnographic writing helped to animate and reveal how I and my contributors engage and negotiate with the happy, sometimes fractious, experience of sojourning.

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The role of the grandmother has changed greatly for those of us from the 'Baby Boomer' generation. In particular when our children live far away. My cohort and I grew up in the post second world war years in the Anglo countries. We took advantage of changed demographics which allowed us to relocate for work, and travel for pleasure. As they grew up our children did the same, but they went even further.

My children live on three different continents,

 and for the past twenty years. I have had to travel long distances to see them.

My grandmother contributors are aged between sixty and eighty years old, and they, like me, have been actively engaging as travelling grandmothers for some time. If we look at the grandmother figure in a historic context: we see that in nineteen fifty

six when my cohort and I were children, the strict matriarchal figurewho was often part of the business of the household, was evolving… into a less formal kindly grandmother, living some distance away. (Apple:1956) She had become free, as Timonen and Arber describe in their Grandparenting Practices Around the World, to 'shape her own role within the family's changing economic and social contexts'. (Timonen and Arber:2018 p.1)

Now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, although grandmothers of distant family, are not able to see our grandchildren often, we have had the advantages of technology. However it is still a dislocated, different relationship or role that we have had to shape for ourselves. We have been a granddaughter, daughter, and mother, but even so, on becoming a grandmother, we find there are particular complications and quandaries that don't conform to the cultural stereotypes and archetypes, (caricatures even) we see around us.

Over the years in conversations with my peer group, I had begun to recognise a dissonance within the overall positive image of being a grandmother. There were common trip hazards. Why might this be? One issue might be that the socially constructed boundaries of the grandmother in our Global North or Anglo countries are not well defined.

This is clearly explained in the research of Rachel Zhou (Zhou: p. 122)

When active grandparents moved from China to look after their grandchildren in Canada they summed up their role in 'the three nots'.

- They were **not** masters because they had to defer to the parents..
- They were **not** servants because they didn't get paid.
- They were **not** guests because they did the housework.

If the role of the contemporary grandmother is more complex than the images we are used to seeing, then examining the life experiences within a wider cohort could lead to a better appreciation of how it actually feels.

How could this line of thinking be pursued?

In her 2019 book, Reciprocal Ethnography, Elaine Lawless, says 'deep listening', 'as equal participants, reveals the promise of a different kind of knowledge, based on long term ethnography'. A deeper understanding of the distant grandmother experience could have relevance for the younger generation too. The research of Marshal Duke and Robyn Fivush shows that knowing more about the ups and downs

of past family, can build self-worth and mental resilience in young people, and that grandmothers are the main 'kin keepers'.
This will have far reaching implications with the rise of suicide in young adults reported by O'Conner and Robb in 2020 [1].

I began conducting semi-structured interviews in the three places I visit on a regular basis, New Zealand, America and the UK. I engaged comfortably on a one to one equal level with my contributors, in their home surroundings. I listened carefully. I noted that one of the differences between my cohort, and grandmothers who live within reach of their families, was the longer stay in their children's homes. I began to call these stays 'Sojourns' because of their similarity to the biblical 'sojourn', defined as:

Sojorning: King James Bible Numbers Chapter 15.

'A traveller to another culture who has to rely upon the community there for continued support'. (King James Bible).

During my interviews, I asked my grandmother contributors about these sojourning experiences. I usually began by sharing a personal cultural 'trip hazard' with my American grandchildren.

Me: *(In an American supermarket car park with my two grandsons, having just been in New Zealand for the winter):*
Go get a trundler would you?

Grandson: *(nine-years-old and unhelpful at the best of times),* **The what?**

Me: *Jet lagged, but remembering there are different names for the grocery transporting equipment.*
You know… the trolley.

Grandson: *(Louder, with added ridicule)* **The what?**

Me: *Eventually remembering the American word:* **Would you fetch the <u>shopping-cart please?</u>**

Grandson: OK...but you're weird sometimes Grandma.

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[1] O'Connor R.C., Robb K.A. Identifying Suicide risk factors in children is essential for developing effective prevention interventions. 7 (4) Lancet Psychiatry pp. 292-293 (2020).

I suggest we grandmothers want to create a good 'fit' within our family, not appear 'weird', or be reliant. It's only then we can get on with 'being grandma'.
However it is a challenge when some sojourning aspects of family life can make us feel insecure, as if we are hanging, as the Scottish dialect phrase describes: 'on a shoogly peg'.

My contributors' varied replies built a picture of how sojourning experiences are managed. It also became clear that pressures they felt during the long stays, manifested in the interviews as ambiguous but commonly used 'pet' or 'pat' phrases such as: 'Why didn't they just say something?' or 'least said soonest mended', that indicated the glossing over of awkwardness. Jan White reported:

'A child turning on the TV in the morning straight out of bed is like 'a red rag to a bull' for us, especially commercial TV. Apart from this we get on pretty well'.

'When I see their table manners', says my contributor Cathy Sharman,
'I can feel my father on my shoulder'.

What exactly did these phrases mean? Contributor Denise Bunn made it clear there are links to the past we find hard to shake off.

'I have to make sure my husband stays in his office at breakfast, so he doesn't see the grandchildren waste food', said Denise Bunn. *'It makes him angry because he remembers rationing after the war'.*

Reflecting on these responses, it appeared contributors were using a common shorthand, 'way markers' to their unspoken difficulties they assumed that I, also a grandmother would understand. There are obvious cultural biases in their replies, life contexts that Pierre Bourdieu calls 'Habitus'. These are he says: 'a legacy from the past, rooted in early life experiences'[2].

I wondered how I could get closer to the underlying issues that were being partially hidden in the interviews. Over the past decades there has been an expansion of the autoethnographic approach that promotes deeper understanding. Sensory, creative, reflexive, symbiotic autoethnographies all work towards adding ethnographic depth. I began by looking at sensory autoethnography to avoid, 'data collection, neatly packaged' (Pink:2009) and moved on to Philip Vannini's work on 'non-representational ethnography'[3] which he says: 'animates the non-discursive, by looking at ways to interrogate the emotional, the fleeting…the background of everyday life.' (Vannini:2014 Page 4, para. 3) There is no reason he says 'why traditional methods cannot be made to dance a little' (page 4, para.1)

Using this method could help me explain why, as they had previously complained about their family '...**they also** 'didn't just **say** something'.

Vannini suggests writing 'vignettes', as near to the event as possible. 'These small pieces of expressive writing, he says, can 'animate the encounter', 'beginning from the researcher's body'. (page 6, para. 2) This somatic approach is also explored by Jonas Larsen who recorded his physical responses running across an unfamiliar landscape[4]. I suggest this embodied approach has a congruence with the grandmother who, during a family sojourn, experiences a physical journey too, albeit, through an unfamiliar domestic landscape.

I began to write short pieces, after an intense family sojourn. Deliberately avoiding the general, I included images that exposed the more complex everyday moments.

First morning: Waking up.

The squeaking and flushing of unfamiliar plumbing wakes me. Jackdaws are cawing and jostling on the roof. I become aware I am wearing my respectable pyjamas, not my soft old tee

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[2] Bourdieu Pierre, *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford University Press (1980).

[3] Vannini P, *Non-Representational ethnography: new ways of animating lifeworlds*. Research Article First published Cultural Geographies, October 20, 2014.

[4] Larsen Jonas, *Running on Sandcastles: energising the rhythmanalyst through non-representational ethnology of a running event*. Mobilities, Vol.14, Issue 5, (2019).

shirt. My nose is close against a plaster wall, and I listen ... tuning in, as I adjust old bones on an uncomfortable sofa bed. The door is politely pushed open, and our daughter greets us with a kindly good morning and mugs of tea. The day begins.

The next day: Making bookshelves.

> *My job is measuring and sawing the wooden shelves out in the garden, while my husband grandpa, is inside drilling into difficult old Yorkshire walls on the first floor. Countless times, I plod up the stairs to offer cut shelves up for gruff approval. After a while I am tired, and my back is hurting. I call up the stairs for something to be tossed down, 'Don't be lazy grandma,' calls grandson from the sofa and computer game. I am not cross; I know he is mimicking the usual call from parents to himself. He is taking on the higher, 'I live here status' ...the 'I am the insider ,you are the outsider', moral high ground. But I feel disheartened all the same.*

Last Morning: A rushed breakfast.

> *We are packed but are offered half-finished odds and ends from the fridge that could be considered ours. We don't need an opened packet of 'our' butter for the journey. Son-in-law is using the bathroom ... lengthily, and we need to pee and brush our teeth'., We smile and grit our dirty teeth, knowing we can stop somewhere on the motorway.*

In conclusion:

There are future anomalies to be investigated, and questions to be asked. Questions around the joy and difficulties of the distant grandmother and her important, part-time role within a distant family. Why there is a reluctance to describe common difficulties? It could also be that my cohort of grandmothers are trying but failing to conform to the 'perfect grandma' stereotype we are seeing in picture books or it could be that the issues are mysterious, only partially understood by all the participants. However, by listening carefully, and creating small pieces of closely felt autoethnographic writing, I have moved closer to how I and my contributors engage with, and negotiate the happy, sometimes fractious, sojourning family encounters.

Thank you for Listening

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Family Management of An Aging Parent:
A Scaffolding Approach

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Abstract

One thing is certain in life: we are born to die. While we have a lifetime to prepare for how we would like to spend our final days, with whom, doing what, and where; many citizens of the world refuse to discuss this reality; some don't confront this reality and then some plan every detail down to the clothing they will wear to be cremated or buried. This autoethnographic study focuses on the transition a family experienced while participating in the decision making and problem-solving dialogues regarding a parent's articulation, and lack thereof, of living and dying preferences. Family systems theory supports family dynamics are complex and there's no one size fits all recipe for successful communication. However, through research, in-depth interviews, and personal experience, I have adapted components of family systems theory and the scaffolding approach that may assist to promote functional families through the aging process and position an aging parent to take an active leadership role and communicate while siblings/caregivers must do the same.

Keywords

scaffolding, conflict resolution, family communication, leadership

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Introduction

According to Deborah Wince Smith, writing for the February 22, 2022 Forbes article, *Bracing for the Silver Tsunami*,

> "Today, they are a demographic group 73 million people strong, with the oldest boomers just turning 75. Since 2010, about 10,000 of them have turned 65 per day, and they all will cross that age threshold by 2030. Once again, this — now aging — population will have a significant impact on everyday life, the economy and society" (para one).

I will soon join the silver tsunami team. My 97-year old mother, who lived in assisted living, and passed in Hospice, at the same facility, prompted my interest in best practices for communicating preferences about care and living as an older American. The term "Silver Tsunami" is often associated with age wave. This term was coined several years ago to describe the impact of the boomers on practically everything when they hit age 65.

> Using silver tsunami to describe population aging was intentional as a shorthand description of the burden that will befall the country when millions of people grow old, get sick and need care. It is an economic term, based in calculations of increasing cost on the nation's balance sheet, the great silver tsunami rests squarely in the liability column. This drain on financing is coming. Be aware. Be warned. Plan ahead" (Greenlee, 2020) https://generations.asaging.org/silver-tsunami-older-adults-demographics-aging

Modern medicine, health awareness and physical exercise are some factors contributing to the increase in life expectancy. The middle-aged generation is expected to assist their children and grandchildren as well as aging parents. Zelezna (2016) refers to this phenomenon in Europe as the "pivot generation" (p.974) while the United States term "sandwich generation" (Ward & Spitze, 1988) describes middle-agers tending to the care of grandparents and children. For generations, families were geographically close and rites and rituals drove accepted care practices for all age groups. While the terminology has increased as has the pacing of life, there are effective ways and ineffective ways to manage the care of an aging adult and transfer the baton to other care-providers as they may have identified or avoided discussing. At the time my mother needed to enter an independent living facility, four of the five children were employed full-time and one sibling worked part-time. The care was predominately divided across four siblings.

This autoethnography contextualizes the family communication patterns (FCP) of many families, and narrows to my lived experiences in my family while preparing for parental end-of-life care through dialogue with my mother and my four siblings. A meta-analysis of research on how communication practices may be managed as a family was conducted and inform my reflections as well as in-depth interviews conducted with two of my siblings and twelve-aging parent primary caregivers. Based on my reflections and those of the participants in this study, I attempt to provide communication and leadership practices to be followed by parents and the family group through the aging process.

Literature Review

There are myriad definitions of family: family is a living system, Sharma (2013) redefined family as "people related by marriage, birth, consanguinity or legal adoption, who share a common kitchen and financial resources on a regular basis" (p.307). Researchers (Hamon & Blieszer, 1990; Turner & West, 1998) forward the belief that the strength of the family, rooted in the patriarch and matriarch, center the family rituals, celebrations and history of caring for one another. A parent often role models responsibility and commitment during good and bad times over the lifespan. Three of our grandparents passed when we were young; we were estranged from the living grandfather and many family members due to a family conflict.

Family as a social reality and a social construction of rites, rituals and shared meanings best defines my family. We're a system of inter-related parts. The members of the family differentiate from the parents and should respect unique differences within the group. The actions of one member in the system impact other members in the system. Thus, it's important to understand how fragile the system is at any point in time. Our family system wasn't supportive of difference. Our parents were judgmental, critical and felt their way was the right way in the early years. "Children were to be seen and not heard" was the mantra that defined our existence until years later. We struggled with having a voice, listening to diverse perspectives, and learned how to shut down dialogue or another human being that was a mismatch with our orientation. Being unique wasn't something my siblings and I learned to embrace until after we left our family home. In the early phase of my mother's mental and physical demise, we talked as a group and attempted to be democratic in decision-making. However, our mother wouldn't articulate what she wanted and when she did, she didn't include all of us in discussions. Using General Systems Theory from Biology, Bowen (1966) adapted the components to create Bowen Family Systems Theory (FST), which identifies the family as an emotional unit, interdependent

on one another, and the behaviors associated with each member of the family in different contexts. Bowen also posits that life's stressed and competing needs and expectations generate chronic anxiety which are absorbed in different parts of the family. Family structure, family interactions, family functions, and the family life cycle influence inputs (information, behaviors, and contexts to be processed as throughputs) and outputs or the changes or stress associated with the processing of the information on the throughput process. As my mother's health became more problematic, each family member reverted to the childhood role we owned in family dialogue as children: timid, logical, reserved, aggressive, or power oriented. Over time, each sibling began to shift their stance and become more adamant about what needed to be done with our mother. We learned that the more we pushed, the less likely we would learn about information until the assignment of Power of Attorney and Executor of the Estate. The information door shut and we found ourselves on the outside of the parental caregiving door. We were not told anything, even if we asked.

Leahey & Wright (1984) developed the Calgary Family Assessment and Intervention Models (CFAM/CFIM) for nurse practitioners in their 1984 textbook, Nurses & Families: A Guide to Family Assessment & Intervention. These clinical models aid nurses learning that illness is a family affair, and how to conduct a 15-minute Family Interview to influence care decisions, crafting of interventions and development of solutions to identify and prioritize problems. The authors coin the term "preferment" in their 2016 article on reflections of the reciprocity between personal and professional.

> Preferment was coined by David Epston and adopted by Lorraine Wright to focus on the choice aspect of retirement. A satisfying and fulfilling preferment is doing what you prefer, when you prefer, with the people that you most prefer to be with. the choice aspect of retirement … understanding of preferment aligns with research findings that preferment/retirement is a process and involves transitioning to a new identity often encompassing new roles, interests, and even social networks. It is not like jumping off a diving board; it takes time and can be self-empowering, self-reinventing and self-reflective. (p.454)

My parents didn't get to have preferment. Shortly after my father retired, he was diagnosed with cancer. Mom endured the emotional pain and suffering of watching a devoted spouse battle cancer for five years before succumbing. Our family appeared functional and competent with managing dying and death during our father's slow demise. We all visited frequently, brought Dad's favorite treats, and sat with him to reminisce about our individual or family collective experiences. We understood death was imminent. Throughout this process, our mother shielded our father in a cloak of secrecy and guarded his privacy regarding finances, medical care, her feelings about his illness, and a future without him. My siblings, mom and I never talked about dying, death, and life after his death or our mother's future without her soul mate. Our mother often said she was exhausted from giving care to our father and would think about our questions later when probed about what she might like to do. Because health information about our father was provided on a need-to-know basis only, we observed his physical deterioration and called each other speculating about how much time remained in his life. I learned some families plan for the dying process and the parental figures of the family actually take control of their final days by completing legal documents like wills, power of attorney, and the list goes on. Some parents prepare formal letters, videos, personalized content

for each child; others simply say they loved the child as they are dying. Others communicated love for the family throughout their lives and don't do much more at the bedside.

My experience coping with my mother's health demise, watching her through the hospice experience, and planning her burial services has been frustrating and painful. The frustration stems from our family culture where some members share very different definitions and expectations of care and shared care, providing appropriate care, and respecting differences in orientation to the care process. Additionally, this situation has put me, a mother of three children, on notice that I must take ownership of my life and provide a framework for the death and dying process for my children, who will likely have to manage my personal and health affairs if I am no longer able to be independent. I am divorced. I want to role model leadership and address my fear of losing autonomy when making decisions regarding my aging and ultimately end-of-life care and final residence, if and when necessary. Reflection suggests this process is multi-faceted with the assignment of a project manager to differentiate between personal and prudential needs (Wu et al., 2016). There is literature that supports families have the potential to learn to adapt to the significant changes aging brings using a technique called scaffolding that will be described shortly.

Mom selected a retirement home offering a continuum of care. However, my mother had chosen not to enculturate; she believed her children should take care of her, as they had already done. We cleaned out the family home of 53 years by coordinating schedules and four of five children working cooperatively. Despite this, decisions were made behind closed doors, feelings were hurt, and family communication was almost nonexistent. Our sister, who has been an excellent advocate and caregiver, also oversaw all transitions with our mother moving from her home to independent living to assisted living very professionally. We've attempted to speak to her individually, and as a family, regarding communication through this process. Texts, e-mails and any other form of communication went unanswered. We are a family coping with the transition of our mother from her home where she lived independently to a retirement community where she lived in independent living and assisted living to her final death. Each move was necessitated by health-related incidents. Each child offered to have mom come and live at their residence, but mom chose to go in a different direction despite wanting to be with one of her children. "I don't want anyone to have to worry about me. You all live busy lives."

We experienced a slow erosion of our family culture and cohesion of the unit as our youngest sibling became the gatekeeper of all information on every aspect of our mother. We know that after our mother passes, the family she raised and enjoyed for most of her 97 years of life will not be the same without her and because of her. Koerner & Fitzpatrick (2002) developed family communications theory (FCT), which uses conversation (how freely family members express ideas) and conformity (homogeneity of beliefs and attitudes held within the family) orientations to identify four family types: consensual (high conversation and conformity), laissez-faire (low conversation and conformity), protective (low conversation and high conformity) and pluralistic (high conversation and low conformity) families. Watts and Hovick (2021) published research on the persuasive impacts of message appeals on the direct and indirect effects of family communication patterns or individual decisions to disclose health information to families regarding family health history (FHH).

"I'd like to get everyone together for a family meeting to determine what to do with mom and how to get mom's house cleaned out." My mother had a broken leg and was staying with my

sister. My sister maintained her property, my mother's property a mile down the road and was running constantly. We agreed to meet at 5:30 at a sibling's house. Mom wished to die in her home of 50 years where she felt comfortable, raised five children and shared a life with her husband. However, she didn't plan on the physical disabilities inflicted on the aging nor would she willingly address them when they became obvious. We all attempted to engage in conversations about her wishes if she moved from the house. "Where do you think you'd like to live as you get older Mom?" Her response was always, "I don't know. I don't have time to think about that right now." I would explain that her future should be a priority. She would respond, "I'll think about that tomorrow." The conversation went on for years until a broken leg and then a broken pipe in her home necessitated a different solution. Our mother practiced avoidance most often. However, if we use FCP quadrants to guide identification, she would have been laissez-faire and most of us would have been pluralistic. Darling et al. (2006) attribute avoidance behavior to the need to assert autonomy. "I'm not going to think about that today" would be mom's response when we tried to discuss finding a care facility or selling the house or potentially altering our homes to accommodate her living with one of us. "I'm not ready to die and frankly when I am gone, you can all figure it out."

As I reflect on my father's demise, I had almost 60 months to prepare what I wanted him to know and what I wanted from him before his permanent departure. As the end drew near, I was six months pregnant with my second child and I lived in fear that every day was his last day. I swore that I would have a plan so my children understood what was happening every second of my decline. My father had clearly differentiated himself as a person, partner and parent. However, signs emerged that the strong-willed, dominant matriarch was fragile, vulnerable and without an individual identify and direction after dad passed.

"I'm going to stay in the house," she insisted when we questioned the number of steps she ascended to sleep at night, or management of external maintenance, financial issues, and being alone in a large space with hearing deficiencies. "I have good children. My children will take care of me, like you've always done." Six years later, we understand that avoidance is not uncommon for the elderly at this time in life (Toyokawa et al., 2021). My siblings and I never had to confront any issues with the care of our father; our mother tended to his needs. We wouldn't find out until much later that we didn't agree on how to take care of Dad or even how to reach agreement about serious matters pertaining to our parent's end-of-life care and experiences. Conflict identification, resolution and team building are critical skills for family members and aging parents.

More importantly, our matriarch refused to enter into discussions regarding end-of-life needs and wants in an attempt to assert control and power. My siblings and I are unique individuals with different political, religious, economic and social ideologies. Our microcosm of society functioned relatively well at family gatherings and social events. We would do the proverbial jabs and teasing about our differences and ask for justifications about our political candidates' actions. We were respectful and respecting of our differences. More recently, our discussions focused on caring for our mother and attempting to contribute as family members to a complex situation created, in some part, due to avoidance/denial. My observations of the situation suggest there is struggling with power, conflict resolution, family dynamics, roles, expectations and each other as the gnawing pain of a family culture in transition intensifies. There doesn't appear to be democratic discussion about our mother's care anymore. After 10 years of no dialogue with a sibling, our mothers health necessitated I visit her home to see Mom.

We never really discussed what happened, but we started talking and enjoying a relationship. We are back to no relationship again despite repeated requests to have a discussion. We obtain information on an as-needed basis by text. We are informed about how things will transpire without consultation and we comply. When something needs to be done, we receive a text with the activity and expectation. One of us is typically able to assist. Sometimes the texts are nasty and "shame and blame" us for not remembering our mother can't have something like candy. We respond by asking if we can have a specific place to position information for easy retrieval rather than surfing through sent texts in different text streams to be reminded of what is and isn't on the consumption list. The solution isn't adopted or even considered. We ask to have an electronic calendar. The suggestion goes unnoticed.

Method

Going through this process has been painful. I have come to understand our mother role modeled silence, secrecy and little communication through my father's dying. My sister has shifted to the same behavior. I want my siblings and I to be united and supportive. I want our family to understand how other family members felt. I invited four of my five siblings to participate in an in-depth interview. Two of my siblings participated. I invited 12 aging parent-primary caregivers to participate in the interviews. A semi-structured in-depth interview protocol was designed and featured five main questions: (1) Parental involvement in death and dying discussions; How did they prepare the child and what was communicated; (2) Describe family communication processes and procedures; (3) How were decisions reached, tasks assigned and general reaction to the process; (4) Did the manner in which parents addressed death and dying impact your desire to do it differently; (5) What are recommendations for dealing with death, dying and children moving forward. Many of my feelings, thoughts and emotions were confirmed and a suggested way to approach family management of death and dying is important. I reviewed literature to attempt to identify how to better manage family dynamics with aging parents. The specifics are now discussed.

Scaffolding

Vygotsky (1978) developed the metaphor of scaffolding. Scaffolding supports 1) continued functioning and the learning of new skills by simplifying tasks so that the person being supported can succeed; 2) encouraging problem-solving dialogue between helper and the person being supported; 3) supporting learning and practicing new skills; and 4) promoting self-talk and problem solving when the support person acts independently.

Scaffolding is used in education and also used with families and communities supporting dementia patients (McCabe, et al 2018). I choose this approach because effective communication is complex and each individual is at different levels of acumen. Thus, I promote that learning how to effectively communicate about death and dying is a process that can be enhanced and improved with a coach or a person who understands and possesses skills to support the learning child/adult, which is the essence of scaffolding. According to Vygotsky (1978) :

> "…the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86)

Scaffolding is a process through which helpers support learners' functioning, allowing them to do more with aid than they can do on their own. Sensitive scaffolding provides just enough support for learners to use and extend their current abilities. In my family situation, learning about the transitioning process to a retirement community requires preparation and attention. Here's how scaffolding may have worked for my family: my siblings and I could have devised a list of questions, determined who would research what content, and prepare written responses for all to read and study. This information could have then been shared with our mother who would have the opportunity to discuss what we learned and identify her preferences or generate more questions. My mother needed to take ownership of some of the decision-making processes but was always timid that she would make a mistake. We could have helped her by all being a part of the process. Recognizing that we were all learning valuable information that would be helpful to our mother, and to ourselves would have been role modeling, and supportive of her and of each other.

Results

Communication

Another component of aging preparation and transitioning from private residence to a facility is rooted in communication. It is extremely important to initiate dialogue about dying when children are young. This action provides a forum to express feelings of uncertainty, personal needs and identification of problems to solve and decisions to make. In-depth interviews were conducted with two siblings and 12 adult parent caregivers. The transcripts were analyzed for meaning units leading to themes. The themes covered two areas: parent and sibling. Table 1 summarizes the themes from the five question semi-structured in-depth interview protocol.

Table 1: *Parent Responsibilities: Communication and Leadership*

1. Live in Reality: Age-related functional limitations are a reality – from tiring earlier and needing more sleep to physical ailments like high blood pressure, loss of vision, to financially related realities when fixed incomes are the norm.
2. Lead the Family: Leadership activities include creating a will, a care directive, appointing someone to have power of attorney and serve as executor of the estate. Converse with the family to identify who may want a specific responsibility.
3. Be Organized: Collect and have the documentation for each component of the will prepared.
4. Talk is Priceless: Life is unpredictable. Prepare those who surround you that anytime, anywhere a person may leave the earth. Discuss with all family members together and separately what you would like for them to do to prolong your life, if desired, and to celebrate your life.
5. Clarify Expectations: Identify and define your expectations regarding aging and end of life so everyone understands what you need and want and can discuss with you before your passing.
6. Life Goes On: Discuss with family and explain what you would want them to do after your death with your personal possessions not identified in the will, such as family photo albums, jewelry, gifts received by the parent from children, etc..

Table 2 summarizes the themes related to tasks, activities and concerns siblings communicated about dealing with death and dying.

Table 2: *Sibling Responsibilities: Leadership and Communication*

1. Talk! Promote dialogue with parent. Discuss dying, death, rituals to be honored. If they won't share, discuss what you want.
2. Diversity: Embrace that all family members may not feel the same about a parent and thus, may not be willing to do what you want them to do.
3. Share. Most people will do something; give them options. Explain what needs to be done; ask for volunteers.
4. Respect difference. Some family members may be more inclined to help you than help a parent; consider what is important: having help or doing it yourself.
5. Generate potential solutions to problems. Everyone can complain; the hard and critical work is in proposing and selling a solution to other family members.
6. Need a go-to location for information collection and dissemination. Share information often. As point person, other care givers need to be on same page.
7. Inclusive. Work together as a family – small group in a nonjudgmental manner that strives to reach consensus where possible.
8. Knowledge is power. Understanding impact of health decline on mental, physical, emotional, social and economic spheres is important, and must be discussed and shared in detail so that personal and professional care for the aging parent is appropriate.

Conclusion

Functional families are few. Effective communicators, problem solvers and decision makers may demonstrate competence in professional settings and be painfully under-skilled in a personal setting. Observing the process of my father dying made me realize that it didn't have to be the way I experienced. I didn't need to feel fear and pain. Communicating when the end was coming and potentially how he would die would have empowered me to plan accordingly and given me time to understand my feelings. There's no question effective communication can be a challenge, given the four family types coupled with individual styles. The research results presented in this paper provide a pathway to more effective communication about death, dying, and caregiving. It is a starting point. Scaffolding pairs the learner with a competent person.

I don't know if my family will be intact much longer now that our mother has died. I do know that each of my siblings can change the path we are on if we all wish to do so. Scaffolding isn't difficult or complex. You are in essence learning by doing, with a little bit of help from someone who knows more. Communicating about what needs to happen and how to make it happen is important. I have learned that as a mother, I must discuss dying, death and life after my death. I talk about my wishes and I have asked my children who would like to take care of my finances, property and serve as my power of attorney and executor. The outcomes have been growth on all our parts as well as engaging dialogue with each sibling. There are counselors, social workers and others who "teach" basic skills to families going through dying scenarios. It may be the best money the family spends to learn how to navigate situations were skills aren't displayed and communication avoidance is the norm based on family history. Learning how to discuss death and dying is important to successful family preservation, succession, family culture, and execution of wishes.

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Learning to Become Politically Incorrect:
A Non-indigenous 'Asian' Australian Teacher's AsianCrit Autoethnographic Account

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Abstract

Drawing on the notion of the 'uneasy relationship' between politics and education, this paper interrogates the connection between politics and education by extending existing conversations around exclusion and marginalisation based on race/ethnicity in schools. In presenting a series of autoethnographic stories that showcase varied racial performativities and critical praxis within the "overwhelming… Whiteness" of Australian classrooms, I aim to highlight the absolute necessity of being political incorrect or, in other words – the absolute urgency of school teachers engaging in "radical democratic politics committed to creating space for dialogue and debate that instigates and shapes social change".

Keywords
autoethnography, AsianCrit, Australian education, critical pedagogy

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Drawing on the notion of the 'uneasy relationship' between politics and education (D'Orio, 2012), this paper, which is set in the Australian context, interrogates the connection between politics and education by extending existing conversations around exclusion and marginalisation based on race/ethnicity in schools (Zion & Blanchett, 2017).

Questions of "domination and oppression, …power and privilege" (Zion & Blanchett, 2017, p.71) are explored from a non-Indigenous 'Asian' Australian high school teacher's perspective alongside the notion of 'political correctness' – understood here as advocating for an avoidance of / exit from political matters (Sanadjian, 2016).

It was week eight of a ten-week term. Assessments, emails and new administrative tasks were flooding in like the deluge of rain that battered the tin roofs of the school buildings earlier that day. The feeling of overwhelming stress hanging over the school for both students and teachers alike was as tangible as the post-rain humidity that clung to one's skin like an unwelcome parasite.

I was at my desk in the staff room, simultaneously cursing the fact that the school administration refused to install air-conditioning in the staff rooms for uncomfortably hot and humid days like these, while struggling to swallow my lunch whole in a bid to create more time for the other tasks I was aiming to complete that day. While this was happening, I also took the opportunity to start looking through my trail of unread emails.

Just as I shovelled a large chunk of steaming zucchini and chicken breast into my mouth, I let out a small yelp as I read the subject line of an email that had come through less than ten minutes ago: "PERIOD 3 SUPERVISION – PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT".

Alas! My plans to get work done during my usual spare in the next period had been foiled – one of my colleagues had to make an emergency trip to the doctor and so, as fate would have it, *I* was the last-minute option to supervise her senior maths class. As I stared at the ample folder of Family Law essays taunting me as they waited to be marked, I cursed my luck – there could not have been a worse time for me to lose a spare. I grumbled under my breath and continued attacking my lunch, determined more than ever to be able to complete *some* marking during this lunchbreak.

As the end-of-lunch bell rang, I begrudgingly grabbed my equipment as well as some marking – I normally had to do a fair bit of direct teaching and behaviour management for the maths supervision classes I had in the past, but since it was a senior class I was supervising next, perhaps I would be lucky enough to have students who could work on an assigned task independently?

I groaned as I stepped away from the slightly cooler vortex of air above my desk, hopeful that the discomfort I was feeling from the humidity would not be exacerbated by an unusually long trek to the designated classroom.

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I let out a huge sigh as I finally reached the classroom – I knew that my feet might have blistered and that the back of the dress shirt I was wearing would be saturated if I had been forced to walk any further. It seemed like my luck was taking a turn for the better, as I quickly realised that this was one of the five air-conditioned classrooms in a school of approximately 1200 students.

I celebrated this little victory as I adjusted the thermostat to the lowest possible temperature while setting my laptop up.

"Thanks for taking this class at the last minute. My pre-service teacher, John Lee, will be going through revision for the upcoming exam."

I threw a couple of celebratory punches in the air as I read (and re-read) the supervision instructions – maybe the day wouldn't be so bad after all.

As I sauntered towards the entrance of the classroom to let the students in, John bursts in with sweat glistening from his brow and both arms wrapped around his laptop and a mountain of math worksheets.

"Hi, hi… Sorry, so sorry… I only find out I was taking this class just before lunch and I need to get the lesson plan written and revision worksheets printed… Sorry I'm late…"

"Hey mate, don't worry about it… You're just on time, and it's all good – I reckon I found out about this supervision around the same time you did, so I know how last minute it must all feel. Have you taught these guys before?"

"Err, no, not really. I've just been observing Mrs Kable. This will be my first time with this class."

"Ah, okay, well, it's only a revision lesson, so take a deep breath – I'm sure you'll be just fine. Do you need me to sign off on anything?"

"Uhm, I don't think so – sorry, I forget to check what the university policy is if it's not your mentor teacher…"

"Alright, don't worry about it. I'm going to focus on my marking and will just give you a heads-up if anything jumps out at me. Does that sound okay?"

Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) Premise #1: Asianisation (Museus & Iftikar, 2013)

- Ubiquitous in society and discriminates against Asian Americans (and I contend Asians in Western societies at large) in distinctive ways
- Also known as nativistic racism - "an intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign connections" (Chang, 1993, p.1253)
- Sheer diversity of intragroup characteristics due to manifold ethnic, class, and migration experiences disregarded (Yu, 2006)
- **Frequently clumped into a single 'cultural' entity based on stereotypes** of yellow perils to be feared or overachieving model minorities to be disdained (Yu, 2006)
- Consequently, **subjected to a unique form of *perpetual foreignness*** (Chang, 1993)

John agrees and proceeds to write the learning goals up on the whiteboard as I let the students in.

Once John greets the students and they've taken their seats, I quickly find myself a suitable vantage point in the classroom – close enough that I can keep an eye on John and all the students; far enough that they can't see the grades I'm allocating. I thank my lucky stars again for the opportunity to get my work done.

I start reading the Family Law essays in front of me as the nervous humdrum of John's instructions fades into the background.

After a few minutes, I have breezed through the essay's Knowledge component and am now on to the Analysis. Everything in front of me seems to be going reasonably well… until John asks the class if they have any questions with his instructions.

"No questions about the task, but like whoa, your English is really good for an Asian, sir – where are you from?"

The question forcefully snaps me out of my what I had been concentrating on, causing me to look up immediately. I see the sheer uncertainty on John's face as he processes the question; I see the panic emerge as he realises the racist undertones of the question. I have a quick flashback to the first time a white person paid me a similar "compliment" when I first migrated to Australia – a fleeting visit to the sheer panic and uncertainty *I* felt at that point in time.

Here I was, witnessing the very same thing happening to someone else. This certainly wasn't my first run-in with racism, nor was it my first rodeo as a supervising or mentor teacher; but here *it* was – the same old micro-aggression paired with a teaching micro-decision in a completely different context. What should I do? Do I address the obviously inappropriate question? Do I ignore it and go back to marking? Do I pull the student up in a punitive fashion and unwittingly impinge on John's already-precarious position as a pre-

service teacher? Was there really a compromise between any of these extremes? I had mere milliseconds to decide before the moment passed.

Politics & the high school classroom

- political stance towards reality (Freire, 1997)
- the "discussion of education falls squarely within the domain of politics" (Cremin, 1990, p.103)
- the place of **politics is intrinsically inseparable from the classroom** (Fine, 1993)

Instead of launching straight into what happens next, I break the fourth wall here and ask you to reflect on what *you* might have done in this particular scenario. For me, this incident is just one of many examples of racial marginalisation which illustrate why a political stance towards reality (Freire, 1997), and politics in general, is inseparable from the classroom (Fine, 1993). What did I do at that point in time? I'll get to that shortly.
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I had since moved on from the state system to an independent school in one of the more affluent suburbs in Brisbane. Every room was well-furnished and air-conditioned (yes, the staffroom too), so despite the requirement for male staff to don full business attire, I was victorious on most days against the unbearable humidity that was characteristic of the brutal Queensland summer.
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"Alright, for the last ten minutes of class today, let's move on to something else. With our exam coming up in the next fortnight, I just want to be <u>really</u> sure that we're all on the same page when it comes to the cognitions that you'll be assessed on in this subject. We've spent a fair bit of time previously talking about what we need to do for Comprehending as well as Analysing, so I'm hoping to talk a bit more about Evaluating in this lesson. I've looked over some of the Evaluate responses that we submitted for homework from the previous fortnight, and I think there's definitely still some room for improvement. Now, what is the synonym that *should* come to mind when we see the word 'evaluate'?"

A number of hands in my predominantly white Year 11 Legal Studies class shoot straight up.

"Lachlan, tell us!"

"Judgement, sir – when we evaluate, we need to make a judgement about something."

"Spot on – thank you, Lachlan. Specifically, we need to determine the merit of a particular situation, policy or piece of legislation, after which we need to discuss alternatives to reach a recommendation. Are we all comfortable with this process so far?"

The wave of nodding heads across the classroom tells me that they are.

"Right, well, who can tell me what we base our judgements on or against?"

No luck with the hands this time, so I default to the old teaching trick of counting to ten (full) seconds in my head while gliding around the classroom – perhaps the introverts needed time to formulate their thoughts.

The ten seconds elapse, and no one seemed any closer to offering a response – it was time to follow-up.

"Jimmy, what do you think? Do we just make arbitrary decisions, or do we use something as a benchmark?"

Jimmy ponders for a split second, and in the following split second, I see the lightbulb light up the back of his eyes.

"Ohhh, criteria! We evaluate against criteria!"

"Well done, Jimmy! Yes, when we evaluate, we need to do so against criteria. Now, some of your homework responses started addressing that. I think some of you talked about how fair or just something was. That's a good starting point. For the exam, and the rest of this course really, I'm going to give you an acrostic to help you remember what types of criteria we can evaluate against. You ready?"

The ayes have it.

"Okay, I hope we like our fruit, because the acrostic is PEARS, which stands for Protection of individual rights, Enforceability, Accessibility, Resource efficiency and Society's needs. Did we all catch that? So basically, when we make a judgement about something, we need to refer to at least one or two of these criteria."

Once everyone has finished jotting down the information, I continue.

"Alright, looks like we're good with this in principle. Let's have a go at some practice. I want you to spend two minutes discussing with your elbow partner how well you think the Queensland criminal justice system works. Because you're *evaluating* it, I want you to ensure you use at least one of the PEARS criteria when you make your decision. If you have no questions, your two minutes starts… now."

I start the timer on my watch and the class immediately flies into the discussion.

"30 seconds to go!"

"10 seconds…"

"and 5, 4, 3, 2, 1… Time's up! Please wrap up and face me when you're ready!"

"So, what did we come up with? Yes, Jimmy?"

"So, sir, Sam and I used the S in the PEARS acrostic, and we said that the criminal justice system works because it meets society's needs in the sense that it protects society from criminals. I mean, since criminals have done bad things, they deserve to be locked up, and from what we know, everyone who is meant to be locked up is locked up, so that keeps society safe, which we is why we feel it meets society's needs."

"So, Jimmy and Sam, when you say everyone who is meant to be locked up, you're referring to…?"

"Oh, murderers, thieves, domestic abusers, Aboriginals... That sort of thing."

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Politics & the high school classroom

- **few (Australian) teachers seem prepared, or even know where to start, in dealing with racism**, often avoiding or discounting such inequities as uncomfortable social realities (Rizvi, 1990)
- consequently, the reproduction of inequality in relation to those from Indigenous and minority backgrounds are only ever superficially considered, and the potential for true structural reformation nullified (Matthews, 2013) in a racialised "cycle of inequity that plays out in our school systems" (Zion & Blanchett, 2017, p.78)

My eye twitches when I hear the last qualifier. Having encountered scholarship on Social Justice Pedagogies recently, I was impelled to deal with the racialized situation differently *this* time – I knew I had to do more than just stay silent like I did with John. In that moment, my head takes a while to catch up with my heart as I organised my thoughts in deciding how to address the comment.

"Okay, let's hold that thought for a second. Have any of you been following what's been happening in America with the Black Lives Matter protests?"

Most of the class shake or shrug their heads – should I *really* be surprised that these teenagers hadn't been following the news?

Thankfully, after a few seconds, a hand emerges tentatively.

"I haven't read much, but from what I understand, it's because of the police brutality that African Americans regularly face? I think what sparked it all was the death of George Floyd, which was caused by police brutality, and that really upset people."

"Absolutely, Anne – he literally had a police officer's knee squeeze the life out of him, which is bloody horrible. That's one part of the situation for sure, but… do we think that there would be such largescale protests if this was an isolated incident?"

The shakes and shrugs are a little more welcome this time.

"Exactly – this is something that has been going on for ages. And why do we think that it's targeted mainly at Black Americans?"

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4… James pipes up.

"Well, sir, I know this might be quite taboo, but probably because they're discriminated against?"

A personal-political-pedagogical crisis

- Haraway (2016) reminds us that we have a response-ability – based on our own ethical sensitivities and abilities to respond – to act as a matter of urgency in situations involving varying forms of marginalisation
- **Unethical to adopt a politically correct consciousness that avoids, or sidesteps, political matters** (Sanadjian, 2016)
- This response-ability is *particularly* crucial for teachers – **not addressing the political nature of modern citizenship has the effect of 'sanitising' the political**, which results in (an Australian) youth that "are not adequately prepared to engage with these complexities" (Haigh, Murcia & Norris, 2014, p.599)
- **If teachers choose to ignore individual political agency, education ends up instilling a "politically 'cleansed' version of contemporary citizenship"** (Haigh et al., 2014, p.602) in (Australian) students that prevents engagement with democratic action and ways of being
- "how racism is to be recognised; how schooling might contribute to its formation and reproduction; and how it can be confronted and combated are issues that no teacher can afford to overlook" (Rizvi, 1990, p.169) – **incumbent on teachers to champion a transformative politics in education** (Harris, Holman Jones & Pruyn, 2017)

"You're on fire today, guys! Yes, there's a terrible history of racial discrimination against Black Americans, and that sadly continues in the form of police brutality, in institutions, as well as more subtle ways. Do you guys know that there have been Psychology studies done regarding the reaction bias in police officers when viewing pictures of white versus non-white individuals? In essence, these studies have shown that there's a knee-jerk response to assume that a Person of Colour is engaged in criminal activity when they may not be, and that People of Colour are more likely to be assumed to be criminals than white people are – it's pretty insane. And naturally, these biases filter into who ends up being incarcerated, and how long they're incarcerated for etc, which is another element of the protests. It all boils down to racism in its different forms, really. Do we think what's happening there is relevant to what happens in Australia, or are we too far removed?"

"Hmm… I guess we have a pretty horrible history with Indigenous Australians, and I would imagine that our incarceration patterns might be somewhat similar?"

Just as I was about to praise Anne's contribution and continue the discussion, the bell aggressively interjects.

"Drats. We're going to have to continue this next lesson. Can I please get you to do two things before I see you Wednesday? Firstly, do some quick research on the incarceration rates of Indigenous Australians. Secondly, think about how this situation links back to our PEARS acrostic. If you've been following along, you're probably already starting to see how it might link to the Protection of individual rights, particularly for individuals who have been wrongly or unfairly imprisoned. Think about the specific rights that are at stake here as well – I think it'll make for some really awesome discussion on Wednesday as to how well our justice system *really* works. Alright, well, if you have no questions, I'll see you guys then!"
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Thank you very much for your engagement – I would love to receive any questions, comments or feedback via email.

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"Dance for Yourself":
A Narrative Inquiry of a Dancer Who Longs for Her Parents' Love

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Abstract

This research recollects how, during her childhood, Hsiang-ling (the first author) tried to obtain the approval of adults by making herself practice dance very hard even though she did not enjoy it. Later, the efforts of a dance teacher, "Miss Karen", guided her to improve technique and regain her joy of dance. In graduate school, Dr. Yi-jung Wu encouraged her to narrate her life experience through narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This narrative tries to reveal her understanding of patriarchy, parental love, and dance education.

Keywords

Dance learning, Missed love, Narrative, Patriarchy, Royal Academy of Dance

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[This paper will present in the dialogical format similar to the on-line presentation that Hsiang-ling Cho and her Master's thesis advisor, Dr. Yi-jung Wu, did during the 2023 ISAN.]

Introduction

Hsiang-Ling:

Some people say that the middle child is the most easily overlooked one by parents. However, the situation of a "middle child" can be even worse if the child is a girl living in a patriarchal family. This is the situation that I have been facing.

As far as I can remember, I have been a well-behaved child since I was born. While I was growing up, I would stay quiet whenever necessary and never rebelled against my parents. This was largely because being a middle-born girl in a patriarchal family, I wanted to garner my parents' praise and attention. Only later when I graduated from college did I begin to understand that I did not need to win my parents' attention in this manner. My transformation took place after I met my mentor, Miss Karen, a registered ballet teacher from the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) in the UK.

In her class, I found the key to unlock my heart; I rediscovered myself and fell in love with dance.

Yi-Jung:

Indeed, the first time I saw you revel in dancing was during your senior year. At that time, you had just finished my dance education class. When the students left the classroom, you practiced a few ballet poses in front of the mirror. I particularly noticed the way you looked at yourself in the mirror while doing your movements. Needless to say, apart from your skills—you lifted your leg in a very high pose -- what drew my attention the most was

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your look, your soft smile, and your immersion in another world. It didn't take long for you to tell me that you wanted to apply for a Master's program in dance, and that the subject of the proposed research project was about the teaching system of the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD). If you had not written this narrative inquiry, I would have had the impression that you had always loved dancing. I guess you had already met Miss Karen at that time? Now that I think about it carefully, it is true that before your senior year, you were very serious and responsible, but I had never seen you particularly display a particular love for dancing. I am glad that you are willing to tell your story.

Research Method

Hsiang-Ling:

I am overjoyed that I received admission to the master's program and had the opportunity to learn the research method of narrative inquiry in your class. I agree with what Connelly & Clandinin (1990) said, "People by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of who lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect, and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (p.2). I use narrative inquiry to revisit my life experience as a middle-born girl, growing up in a patriarchal family, and how these aspects of gender and birth order had affected my learning process in professional dance education. Narrative inquiry helped me not only construct knowledge but also recognize the human kindness in myself and people around me. In today's presentation, I will share my story about being a middle child growing up in a traditional family, and how I rediscovered my self-worth through dance.

Yi-Jung:

Great. Let's listen to your story.

Preface

Hsiang-Ling:

My mother, hoping to correct my poor posture, wanted me to attend dance classes. Following my teacher's advice, I improved quickly and was admitted to dance programs for talented students in elementary, junior, and senior high school before joining a university dance department. However, throughout this entire time, my heart was distant from my learning as I had never wanted to attend formal dance training programs in school or at college. I continued to dance only because my parents wanted me to. To earn the love of my parents, I would do whatever they asked.

I feel this way because my grandparents are very patriarchal, and paid extra attention to the birth of boys in the family. As a result, my brother could get whatever he wanted. For example, when we went to grandma's house for dinner, she would serve a chicken leg from the electric cooker only to my brother. At that time, every child wanted to eat chicken legs, and so I could only envy my brother. When we got older, my brother studied in a distant city, and came home only once in a while. But each time I visited my grandparents, my grandpa would always ask, "When will your brother come back? This house will be given to him in the future, and no one can take it away!" To me, it seemed as though I did not exist, that I was transparent or invisible when standing in front of grandpa. I could only stifle my feelings, smile and say, "Wow! My brother must be very happy!" Patriarchal preference has deep roots, and cannot be changed immediately. It not only leads to gender inequality, but may also cause psychological harm to girls.

Yi-Jung:

Although the traditional concept of patriarchal preference seems to be slowly disappearing in contemporary society, gender inequality continues to occur worldwide. As long as there is

gender inequality, the concept of patriarchy cannot completely disappear. Particularly in South and East Asia, male offspring have been considered responsible for worshiping ancestors for the family in order to ensure the ancestors' welfare of afterlife（Das Gupta et al., 2003).

While problems of gender inequity are fairly ubiquitous worldwide, in Asian countries, where traditional concepts dictate that only men can support their families and parents, and inherit the family name, the patriarchal problem is further strengthened (Liu & Luoh, 2008).

Hsiang-Ling:

In my family, I not only faced problems regarding the family's preference for male children, but also attitudes regarding birth order. My younger sister was the baby of the family and received more attention. I tried to play the role of a good student and daughter, but the academic pressure in school was quite heavy. On weekends and holidays, my parents always took my brother and sister out to play; only I was sent to the dance studio to continue practicing. Although I envied my brother and sister, I still accepted my fate to attend dance classes, because I wanted to be the best child in my parents' eyes.

However, I became tired of dancing every day, even on holidays. I was also tired of having to stand on a weigh scale every day and eat only guava and sugar-free soy milk to maintain my weight. Bruises on my legs and wounds on my toes serve as "shiny medals" of my achievements in dance. Every time I came home from school, I would lay on the floor of my room and cry silently. Even so, I dared not tell my parents that I wanted to quit dancing, for the fear that I would become a "bad child" in their eyes.

I had been admitted to my dream high school! But……

When I graduated from junior high school, I was admitted to my dream high school where I could study foreign languages. Tired of dancing, I plucked enough courage to ask my dad if I could attend this school. Dad, who was watching TV, immediately frowned and turned his head to me. His eyes seemed to say, "You dare give up dancing?" I quickly put this thought away, went back to my room, picked up my registration form, and reported to the high school with dance talent programs.

Since then, I continued dancing but did not know why. I followed the instructions of school teachers by studying, dancing, and losing weight. Every evening when I finished the last dance class at nine o'clock, I dragged my tired body back to my desk and always dozed off while studying. I hated this kind of life, but I tried hard to catch up because I longed for a compliment from my parents.

"Are you a robot?"

One day, during a dance class at school, the teacher scolded me loudly, "Your movements are rigid. Are you a robot?" The teacher's words made me feel extremely dejected. I repeatedly doubted my dance abilities. Indeed, I danced without any emotions or thought because I did not enjoy dancing. As modern dance pioneer Martha Graham (1894-1991) once claimed in 1974, "...movement never lies" (cited in Barreto, 1999). This certainly was true in my case– my body revealed my reluctance to dance, even though I could accurately perform whatever the teacher said, no more no less. This, however, was not enough because, as dance scholar Yang (2010) pointed out, because dance is an artistic landscape that is composed of both physical technique and psychological state, dancers' bodily expressions often reflect their inner feelings and thoughts.

At that time, I did not know how I was supposed to feel about my life. What is my opinion? Do I have to be more daring, rebellious, or edgy to make my dance more appealing? Perhaps it was better for me NOT to have any opinion.

The benefactor in my life

As I was about to graduate from university, I still had no plans regarding my future career. In Taiwan, it is difficult to make a living through art. Most dance companies are unable to provide enough salary for dancers. Because of low birth-rates in Taiwan, few students attended dance classes, and even after graduation from a dance program, job opportunities are rare. Hence, I began considering whether working in a government office would provide greater security than a career in dance. Dad frowned again when he heard my idea of changing careers. Although he never said anything, his expression was enough to scare me. Therefore, I listened to my dance teacher's advice to prepare for the exam to become a registered teacher of the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD). That is where I met Miss Karen, who transformed my life from hating dance for 20 years to deeply enjoying it.

At first, I was doubtful of Miss Karen because she is a registered teacher from Malaysia, and her teaching method is completely different from that of most Taiwanese teachers. In the past, when I was in school, I used to move from the bar to the grand allegro. We would sweat a lot, and thought that this was "dancing". In hindsight, I can see it was just "running through the routines." While dance is composed of a series of movements, a series of movements is not necessarily a dance (Arnold, 1979). In Miss Karen's ballet classes, using the RAD approach, she provided a variety of images, methods, and teaching aids to help us address a single issue during each session. The class was always rich, profound, and fun, with a clear goal. She totally changed my understanding of ballet, and helped me eliminate many unnoticed bad habits, and make drastic improvements. Always seeing through me, she would tell me, "Don't put so much pressure on yourself…don't dance for others. Dance for yourself." I tried to talk to myself and find who I want to be. Gradually, I felt my body become as soft as a baby's, as fluid as flowing water, as light as dancing on clouds, and through these transformations, was able to enter a state of total selflessness. Day after day, I kept trying to explore my own thoughts about dance. I no longer pursued the physical appearance of movements, but listened to my heart to feel myself. Slowly, I was able to raise my chin and danced with confidence. I discovered, finally, that this was the feeling of dancing! Miss Karen's words had empowered me. I found my own value. Dancing is not for others, but for oneself. Since then, dance became enjoyable. I now know that I do not need to prove anything to anybody.

Yi-Jung:

Thank you for sharing, Hsiang-Ling. Your story was really touching. Every child hopes to get the affirmation and attention of their parents, to be valued, and to gain a sense of achievement. It seems quite common that the oldest and the youngest children get more attention, while the middle child often feels ignored. Research by a number of scholars has suggested that middle children often try to get their parents' attention, which makes their personality weaker and less opinionated (Adler, 1964). Another researcher's work suggests that the middle child tends to be sensitive to mistreatment or unfairness because they are afraid that they will miss out on their share (Shulman, & Mosak, 1977).

Hsiang-Ling:

In Miss Karen's ballet classes, I rediscovered the joy of dancing and learned to acknowledge myself. I learned to breathe with the music and how to make my body feel as light as a feather. I can let go of my restraints and dance freely. Now, dancing is not only my profession, but also a way to relieve stress. By facing the traditional patriarchal shackles that held me back, I began to treat myself kindly and with respect, realizing my own value.

Looking back, I realize that I come from a warm family and have always been loved by my parents. I recall that one day I needed a flashlight when going on a field trip in junior high

school. My father bought me the best flashlight for nearly 300 NT dollars, when a run-of-the-mill flashlight normally cost around 30 NT dollars. He did that for me even though he knew my mother would blame him for wasting money. I also recall that whenever I was sick, my dad always took care of me in all possible ways. He would come to my room to check my temperature at two in the morning, afraid that I might still have a fever. My parents would set aside everything to attend every one of my performances and were never absent.

As I look back, I realize that my parents were not as patriarchal as my grandparents' generation. In fact, they believed that both boys and girls needed to work hard to cultivate skills. They didn't let me give up dancing easily, because they saw that among their three children, only I had the talent and toughness to receive professional dance training. But somehow, for many years, I ignored my parents' kindness and always thought they were partial and didn't care about me. Not until I felt understood by Miss Karen and reconnected with my body through her guidance did I open my heart that had been locked for so many years, and realize that I had always been adored and loved by my parents.

Yi-jung:

Wow, what a surprise! It turned out that your parents really had insight into your talent and supported you during your journey of professional dance training. It was your grandparents whose patriarchal attitudes caused you to feel mistreated. Being the middle child also probably contributed to your misunderstanding as your parents probably paid more attention to the oldest and youngest children. Being a dance educator, I am moved and inspired to hear about the educational benefits of dance for you. As your story reflects, well-designed dance education and pedagogy helped you reconnect with your body and heart. This, in turn, made you realize that you can dance for yourself, and this self-realization might be a key to different perceptions of oneself, others, and the world. A good dance teacher needs to be equipped with sufficient teaching methods in order to customize the learning activities that are suitable for individual students. I am very glad that you have decided to become a dance teacher and I hope that everything goes well with your registration exam. I believe you will become an inspiring teacher for your students in the same way that Miss Karen was for you.

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Autoethnographic Living Inquiry:
Piano Teaching & Learning Stories[1]

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Abstract
In this multimodal paper, I integrate my stories, digitally edited photographs, and piano improvisations to evoke possibilities for conceptualizing autoethnography as a reflexive practice of *living inquiry* (Aoki, 1993/2004; Meyer, 2010). By re/presenting and examining how I am learning to practice autoethnographic living inquiry, I explore the importance and value of teachers' autoethnographies in discovering new insights, understandings, and creative ways of thinking about the self (*auto*) and self-in-relation with others (*ethno*), as well as a relational approach to researching and writing about my lived and living experiences of exploring music and piano playing with young children (*graphy*).

Keywords
Autoethnography, living inquiry, reflexivity, improvisation, piano pedagogy

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Story #1: *Little butterflies* - YouTube Link: https://youtu.be/Qywj8sQAQIQ

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[1] To view the full virtual presentation at ISAN 2023, please see YouTube link: https://youtu.be/sKFrEa47OTg

Autoethnographic Stories

In my autoethnographic stories, I share my embodied and lived experiences as a piano teacher (*auto*), the conversations and interactions with students (*ethno*), and the ways in which they inform my teaching call for a relational approach to thinking, researching, and writing about piano curriculum and pedagogy (*graphy*).

I write about my personal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal experiences of piano teaching and learning by using open-ended, interpretive storytelling. To describe the events and situations in our lesson that moved me, I am inspired to write in a style of *small stories* (Nutbrown, 2011) and *tales* (van Maanen, 1988/2011) that draw attention to the meaningful moments and experiences in our lessons. Like a *bricoleur* (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), I creatively mix a variety of art forms—with stories, digitally edited photos, and piano improvisations—to convey my life experiences of exploring music and piano playing with young children.

For me, writing stories about improvising music with students enables me to rethink epiphany as *epiphony* (Gouzouasis, 2013). The suffix, *phony* means sound, and musicians can make important discoveries about the self and others through the acoustic and musical experiences (Gouzouasis, 2013). In my case, writing *epiphanies* (through creative storytelling) and *epiphonies* (through piano playing), autoethnography has become a creative practice of *living inquiry* (Aoki, 1993/2004; Meyer, 2010) as I continue to re/examine what it means to lead a meaningful life of piano teaching, and to develop my praxis toward being/becoming a more reflective, reflexive piano teacher.
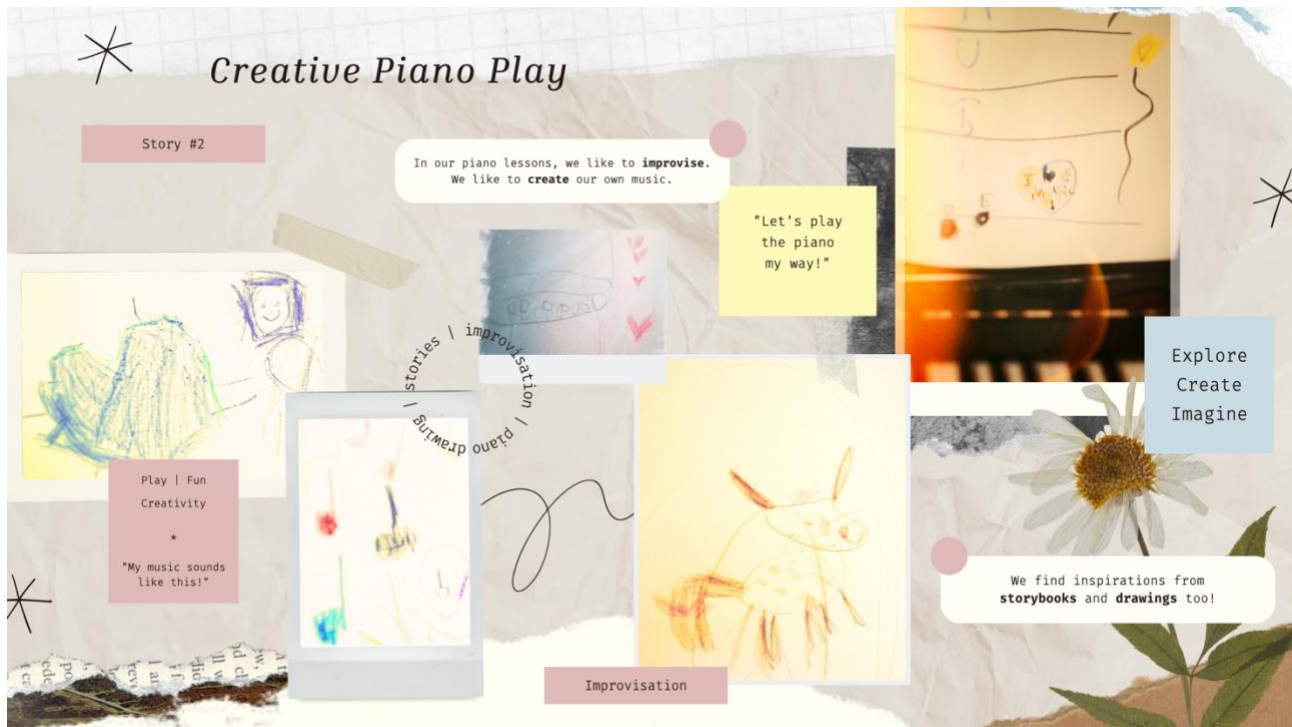
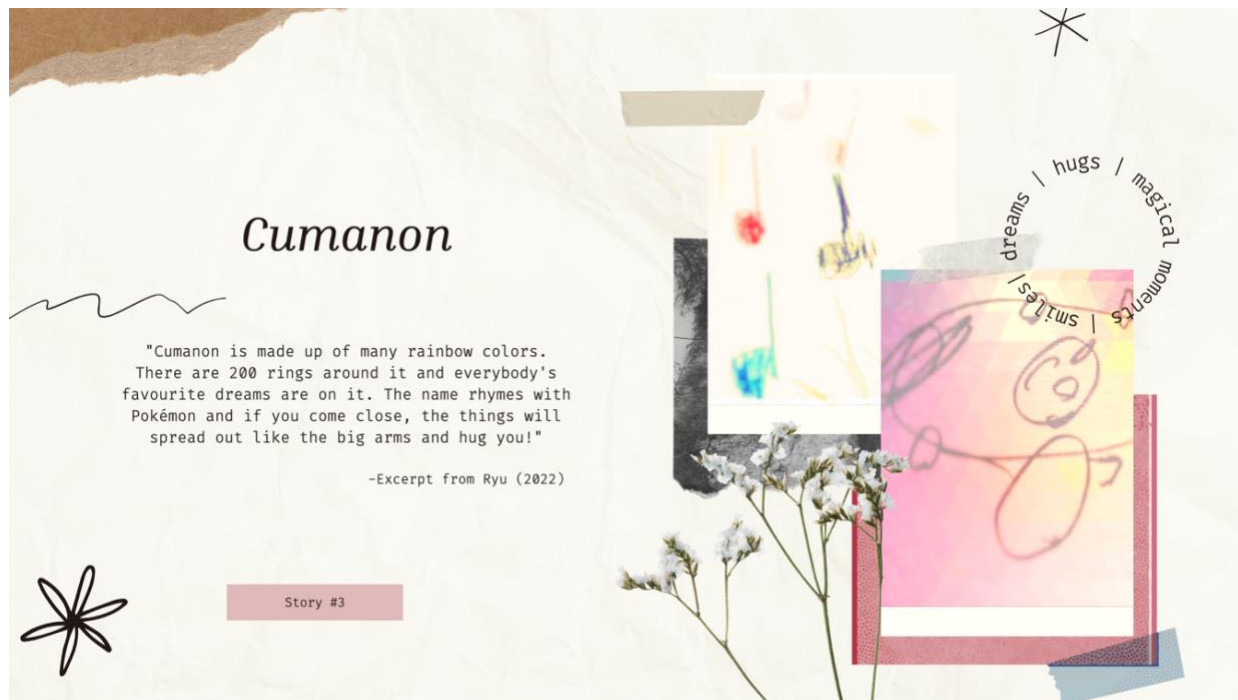Story #2: *Creative piano play* - YouTube Link: https://youtu.be/EI9myv34hyc

Writing my life stories of piano teaching and learning creates openness, curiosity, and possibilities for all things that students wish to share with me. The re/creative process of writing about my life as a piano teacher encourages me to live meaningful moments. In writing creatively, I am inspired to think of more joyful ways of inviting young children to participate in their own musical learning.

Storying (Leggo, 1995/2019) my everydayness as a piano teacher reminds me to cultivate awareness with what it means to be a piano teacher. It brings me closer to what Ted T. Aoki described as the "presence of the beingness of teaching" (Aoki, 1992/2004, p. 191). For me, the *beingness* of teaching—the mindful attention to the lived and living experiences of children—is an ongoing pedagogical process of discovery.

Writing autoethnographic stories is pedagogical (Banks & Banks, 2000; Gouzouasis & Ryu, 2015) because engaging in the reflexive process of writing and *rewriting* about the *coactive experiences* (Gouzouasis & Wiley, 2023 forthcoming) of the self and the self-in-relation with others teaches me about the students, as well as about myself as a piano teacher. It invites me to draw my attention to the shared meaningful moments with students. It calls upon me to be mindful of my own piano teaching praxis. It encourages me to question, reflect upon, and seek more artful, creative ways of piano teaching and learning with/for young children.

For those reasons, I wish to encourage and support teachers in discovering their own *life stories* (Leggo, 1995/2019) with their students, and contribute to re/creating more autoethnographic journeys with communities of educational teacher-researchers. In sharing stories about my everydayness as a piano teacher, it is my hope to bring new possibilities for embracing autoethnography as an ever-present living practice, a joyful part of our shared teaching and learning journeys.

Cumanon

"Cumanon is made up of many rainbow colors. There are 200 rings around it and everybody's favourite dreams are on it. The name rhymes with Pokémon and if you come close, the things will spread out like the big arms and hug you!"

-Excerpt from Ryu (2022)

Story #3

dreams / hugs / magical moments / smiles /

Story #3: *Cumanon* - YouTube Link: https://youtu.be/eR-OGgNfAds

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Visual Autoethnography, Narrative, and the Photographic Image: Putting Everything into a Methodological Context

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Abstract

In the frame of visual autoethnography, this manuscript will focus on the critical use of photographic renderings in autoethnographic research. Further, it will seek to demonstrate the creative ways they could benefit from either an archival visual deposit or original and ethnographically alternative photographic documentation while conducting fieldwork. By employing a critical visual standpoint, it will argue that photographs can produce supplementary narratives that help us decode our culture but also hidden aspects of ourselves.

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I. As a qualitative research method and writing practice, autoethnography, either analytical or evocative, is predominantly interrelated to narrative and storytelling as they all "give meaning to identities, relationships, and experiences" (Ellis, Holman Jones & Adams, 2016, p.23). Both autoethnographic narrative and storytelling tend to create a bond between the researchers and the participants, build a bridge linking the old and the new, and shape new meanings of how researchers interact with different audiences. Equally important is how these exciting stories are constructed and presented to the readers. Despite various allegiances that situate autoethnography on the margin of social research methods, one cannot argue for its innate expressive richness.

Autoethnography in various forms of representation can produce several narratives in different disciplines (e.g., Popular Cultural Studies, see Manning & Adams, 2016). In light of Van Maanen's (2011) classifying proposal, Ellis, Holman Jones & Adams (2016) adopt a concrete classification of autoethnographic representational forms, in which storytelling and interpretation are treated as two separate domains in realist autoethnographies. Still, the communication between the abovementioned fields could evolve into more elaborate and overall approaches: impressionist, expressionist, and conceptualist autoethnographies promote cultural understanding with a more experimental, collaborative, and self-reflexive spirit, merging narrative and analysis. This understanding could be further enriched by image-based modalities (i.e., film, video, and photographs).

When discussing such representational strategies and how they portray ourselves and our culture, many connotations and questions concerning representation and how it can be related to research arise. This happens as "some autoethnographers create work that does not rely solely on text, but instead uses other forms of representation and research output, including performance, music, dance, video and film, and photography" (Ellis, Holman Jones & Adams, 2016, p.43). In

the frame of visual autoethnography, this paper will focus on the critical use of photographic renderings in autoethnographic research. Further, it will seek to demonstrate the creative ways they could benefit from either an archival visual deposit (e.g. family photo albums) or original and ethnographically alternative photographic documentation while conducting fieldwork. It will argue that photographs can produce supplementary narratives that help us decode our culture but also hidden aspects of ourselves.

II. Let me begin with a far more than commonplace observation: we see images of various sources and origins everywhere. Banks expands this argument by highlighting the importance of their incorporation into social analysis and ethnographic fieldwork. When scrutinizing images, they can "reveal some sociological insight that is not accessible by any other means" (Banks, 2007, p.4) and advance cultural perception. There is not enough space here to address the merits and the ramifications of the use of photography as a visual medium in interpreting reality as thoroughly analyzed by various theorists, practitioners, and scholars (see Bourdieu, 2003; Sontag, 1990; Collier & Collier, 1986, pp.5-13 to name a few); Nevertheless, we should take into account that constructing the visual is most often neither neutral nor objective. In that sense, when employed, visual research methods are not held as "purely visual"; instead, they "pay particular attention to visual aspects of culture" (Pink, 2007, p.21). Most importantly, they exist through conversation with other methods or, as Pink argues, "neither a purely visual ethnography nor an exclusively visual approach to culture exist" (ibid, p.21).

In the meantime, arts-based narratives, and the turn to a more reflexive and subjective voice in academia have brought a series of outstanding personal accounts where the subjective merges with the academic, further supported by the visual or vice-versa. Some early examples involving the combination of harrowing personal experience and image documentation include the moving photographic autobiographical work of British photographer Jo Spence. Despite not being purely academic or exclusively autoethnographic, her book "Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography" (1986) was an alternative narrative on illness with photographic images that visually rendered Spence's battle with cancer; this could be seen as an early approach to autoethnography "in reverse": Spence's photographs provided a visual account of her everyday struggle with autoethnographic hints. Another interesting instance is Jon Prosser's article "Visual mediation of critical illness: an autobiographical account of nearly dying and nearly living" (2007), which describes the scholar's battle with stroke. It includes various visual documents, photographs, digital imaging, and drawings that give an essential insight into Prosser's feelings and thoughts.

The earlier cases show how photography expands its visual functions by producing an alternative and reflexive narrative in the vein of more intimate storytelling. Nevertheless, how may photographic imagery be employed when conducting autoethnography? How can photography's meanings be enmeshed in the narrativization of the self?

III. Our autoethnographic accounts, being both "a physical and visual representation that mirrors our experiences, images, and bodies" (Ellis, Holman Jones & Adams, 2016, p.75), already offer incorporated images of the self and even deploy artistic terms to describe different representational techniques. Images are seen as products of the mind; however, they could be adopted as products of the senses. Besides writing conventions and styling, autoethnography can also engage visual documentation combined with words and experiment with non-traditional forms of writing (ibid, p.37, 43).

In recent years there has been an increasing interest in using visual material in autoethnographic texts. In most cases and not always being systematic as an approach, it has a

name: *visual autoethnography*. This shift became apparent earlier in a special issue of *Visual Culture & Gender Journal* (see the editorial by Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyd, 2007, pp.1-5) on autoethnography and arts-based research. It has further been evident in the latest edition of *Handbook of Autoethnography* (2021) (Coleman, 2021) and in the most recent IAANI Proceedings (see, for instance, Cope, 2022; Reynolds, 2022; Spinazola, 2022). Such a transition demonstrates the significance of visual technologies, like photography, as a storytelling instrument that captures personal experiences. Besides,one should not forget that "visual narratives are particularly well suited to autoethnographic approaches as the focalisation of the narrative is more open, more flexible than that of a linguistic text" (Hunter, 2020, p.314). Thus, the emergence and further application of visual autoethnography "as a fusion of observation and first-hand experience that is subsequently shared via photographs (or indeed potentially through film)" (Scarles, 2000, p.909) seems to point to exciting new directions in conducting autoethnography.

Visual autoethnography demands the active and rather critical engagement of the researchers. Moreover, it begins and operates within a self-reflexive standpoint through an explorative visual framework. It is not limited solely to the verbal, and to the texts. Instead, it focuses on "textual representations that in turn are (re)read and (re)interpreted by others" (ibid, p.910). Bearing this in mind, visual autoethnography could be seen as an "image-based" methodology, which is critical (see Ownby, 2011; 2013; Rose, 2007) when applied in a contemporary qualitative research context (Prosser, 1996, p.25).

One of the most important and widely available visual technologies that visual autoethnography can deploy is photography, even when photographic pictures are not included in the autoethnographic account; For instance, in her article "Seeking my brother's voice: Holding onto long-term grief through photographs, stories, and reflections" (2014), Carolyn Ellis evokes memories of her dead brother, which become an intimate narrative that stems from watching archival photographs of him. Although photographs do not accompany the printed text (and sometimes they may not due to any copyright restrictions), the vivacity of her thick description and the broader cultural context in which they both lived revisualize both Ellis and her brother, evoking grief and offering a healing perspective.

IV. So far, an exclusive or universally applied methodology for using images in visual autoethnography has yet to emerge, considering the different theoretical starting points and an explicitly keen interest in arts-based research. Still, the relevant literature has so far suggested that (analog or digital) photographic images can accompany our autoethnographic accounts in two ways: First, we could engage in home-mode representation, or "Kodak Culture" (Chalfen, 1987) (see image 1). Our family photo albums or, in a broader sense, our photographic archive can provide visual material upon which we can comment and further enrich our autoethnographic narratives (e.g., Suominen Guyas, 2007). Of course, one should not stop by the casual details of a photographic document (what is actually depicted) but should seek more elaborate readings, e.g., involving who took the picture (production) and for whom (audience), in which (surrounding) circumstances. By doing memory work simultaneously, we tell "our own story," and "in each re-enactment, each re-staging of this family drama, details get added and dropped, the story fleshes out, new connections are made, emotional tones -puzzlement, anger, sadness- fluctuate" (Kuhn, 2002, p.17).

Second, when it comes to fieldwork, we can create visual materials ex nihilo: e.g., in parallel to our ethnographic audiovisual documentation (if, for instance, we come from a sociology, folklore, or anthropology background), we can produce photographs that support our

perceptions of cultural phenomena and build a narrative that links our experience with a broader context. Our pictures may deviate from an orthodox documentation standpoint, but they could reveal hidden links to our bonds with place and family. Let me offer an example from my previous research experience: During folklore fieldwork I had been conducting a few years ago, I produced photographic images on the margins of ethnographic conventionality.

Image 1. Interpreting photographic images from our family photo albums can exceed Barthes's casual *studium*/*punctum* distinction. Critical readings in autoethnography may also include the particular instance a photo was shot, its producer, and the purpose of this rendering. Elements of visual culture could also add more information on our autoethnographic accounts (Photo from my parents' family photo album).
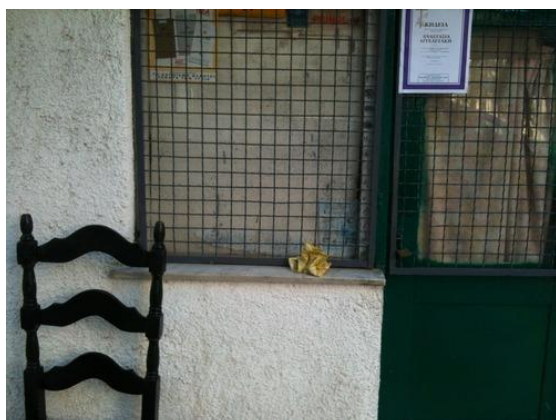
Images 2-6. When casual photography becomes more personal. Near the enclosed Cephissus river many neighborhoods lie, where older perceptions of social and cultural life remain - simple enough to bring one close to tears. I captured the visual conventions that identified me. That was my *auto-iconography*. Images retrieved from my *Life after Folklife?* Tumblr account, where I documented my visual autoethnography (https://lifeafterfolklife.tumblr.com/).

I documented the place, the people, and the now enclosed under tones of cement Cephissus, with an old iPhone (images 2-6). I focused on taking pictures of the mundane details crucial to my understanding and acceptance of who I was (Kassaveti, 2022; 2019). These photographic images constituted my *auto-iconography*. I borrowed the term *iconography* from Ervin Panofsky's critical work *Studies in iconology* (1939), which refers to identifying, describing, and interpreting the image's content. Still, *auto-iconography* exceeds Panofsky's classification of visual conventions and their meaning. It is where (audio)visual imagery acts as a symbol to signify particular situations or attribute specific meanings within ourselves. They are the intimate (and not socially or culturally constructed) visual conventions we acknowledge each time we interact with our (social or cultural) environment. Though confined more to personal space, these photographic images help us visualize our feelings by triggering connections

between the past and present. In that sense, our photographs "can elicit extended personal narratives which illuminate viewers' lives and experiences" (Schwarz, 1989, p.122) and shed more light on us, as individuals, within the cultural realm. *Auto-iconography* is finally a "process of narrative and visual coding" (Schatz, 1981, p.22) that turns to yourself to track these repeating visual patterns; they are patterns to fill the gaps in your story and psyche.

V. This paper presented a methodological framework on which photographic images could be employed in conducting visual autoethnography. As an archival or an original visual document, they tend to produce novel narratives whose readings and explanations could be valuable in academic research. Notwithstanding photography's inherent limitations in rendering and interpreting reality, its narrative potential could provide an outlet for an engaging, critical, and self-reflexive reading of ourselves and the culture in which we live and breathe.

As Denzin argues in *Interpretive Ethnography*, "the modernist ethnographic text must be read as a photograph. It offers up fixed representations of things that have happened in a stable, external world. As with the photograph, such texts have multiple uses. They can be looked at and read, over and over again, each looking or reading being a new encounter with the text" (Denzin, 1997, p. 44); just imagine this text along with photographs. It would be more powerful, more illustrative, and more insightful. In this light, autoethnography could surely benefit from embracing visual media in autoethnographic storytelling, as it can be read as "personal and cultural text" (Ellis, Holman Jones & Adams, 2016, p.49). The production of creative photographic images in the context of 'expressive photography' instead of 'realist' (i.e., solely produced for the sake of fieldwork) ones have, according to Edwards (1997, p.57), a parallel use with diaries and more intimate aspects of the narrative. A photograph is a record, but a record to describe our place and feelings in the world and to promote interpretation, and predominantly, the interpretation of the ethnographic I.

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Personal Narrative Analysis
in Research Trainee Educational Project Design

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Abstract

The design of an integrated unity of inquiry in Secondary School served as a shortcut to trigger my professional teacher/researcher development in the fields of English as a Second Language and Literature in English via narrative inquiry and its analysis. Digital technology and gamification were integrated into the pedagogical design. Poetic, digital, audio and written discourses facilitated metacognition.

Keywords

Teacher/Researcher identity. Secondary School Educational design. English as a Second Language/ Literature in English/Digital Technology integrated unity of enquiry.

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Introduction

This study began in 2019 during a Master of Education Teacher Development Program in Montevideo, as part of an assignment for the curricular course Innovation Trends in Education. The analysis stage finalized in 2022, as a retrospective exercise of researcher identity.

Firstly, the personal need within which it arose was my lack of coordination spaces with colleagues in which to design a project of Formative Feedback for thirteen-year-old teen learners of English as Second Language (ESL) that integrated gamification, augmented reality, digital narrative, and Literature in English. The personal narrative of identity construction as an in-service teacher of ESL (English as a Second Language) was triggered by a sense of precarity. It proved a vehicle for the search of professional development and awakened thinking shortcuts. Walsh (2019, p. 460) outlines and defines precarity in connection to work and social features. He lays bare the existent descriptive gap on the internal processing of precarity undergone by workers. My aim was to collaborate to address this gap. In doing so, my originality consisted in moving away from political or critical action. I focused on individual difficulties I had to overcome, which I identify as resilient growth sourced in precarity, transferrable to similar ones other teachers may experience in their practice. These difficulties, though seemingly petty, constitute teachers' primary source of precarity. The methodology of Action Research, with its continuous trial and error, offered flexibility for both the pedagogical design for my students and my personal self-exploration as researcher trainee. It provided a vehicle for self-improvement and satisfaction to erase precarity´s insecurities.

Secondly, there was the need to introduce digital technology into the classroom in the context of an educational community that had not invested in technology as part of the promotion of its infrastructure. The project designed for the students was meant to revise before the Midterm Test, reduce pretest anxiety, activate previous knowledge and create a collaborative product. As researcher trainee, I targeted to obtain self-knowledge for the improvement of my

teaching practices. The constructionist teaching design was inspired in the ideas of Papert (Papert & Harel, 1991) and Resnick (2018). My mentor suggested I should keep a recorded research diary of the planning stage that lasted 62 minutes in eight instances plus reflective memos, numbering a total of forty-four. Both became the data of my reflective analysis. To overcome issues with data produced within my own experience as action researcher and move beyond my comfort zone and assumptions, I resorted to the support of a colleague that acted as a professional supervisor/critical friend in the analysis of the memos and submitted the qualitative coding of the audio transcriptions to another researcher. Thus, I have grown metacognitively, drawn conclusions on my reflective style, and comprehended some effects of using audio and written recording means. The act of verbalizing through the audios enabled my internalization of the concepts which I firstly grouped through poetic images in the qualitative coding, to subsequently understand and rationalize them more deeply. This reflective practice was inspired in the use of ´narrative as a mediational tool´ (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 489) and is aligned with my professional development in the sense that I must cater for learners of English as a Second Language who study Literature in English, Literature per se. The latter authors point out the revitalizing effect of narrative on teacher education from a sociocultural perspective in that it externalizes unsaid thoughts, and aids self-regulation through verbalization. The construction of situated knowledge inspires later action (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, pp. 490–493).

Literature Review

John Guichard (2005, p. 1) states that 'personal and career development interventions (counselling or education) can be summed up as follows: "How can individuals be helped to direct their own lives within their own social context?" '. Responding to that, my tutor´s modelling awakened in me a sense of agency to create the project. Back in 2019, the phenomena emanated so intensely that I found myself in need to record thinking and mental states in a very explicit way which at times seemed mechanical to me in the sense that I could not reflect retrospectively on them with the adequate extent of time to find their cohesion. In this effort of joint discursive, teaching and trainee autobiography I could not mature sufficient awareness of how I was shaping myself and how the response I was attempting to give to the needs of my educational and work environment was modelling my self-expressed-identity. The perspective of four years between the planning of the project in 2019 and the actual 2022 analysis of the narrative inquiry following it, provides objectivity and a distancing perspective, as well as having resorted to a colleague and a tutor for their validation of my interpretation.

Tenni, Smyth & Boucher (2003) oriented my exploration regarding the more convenient Action Research methods of inquiry for my own practice in the form of 'field notes [my planning memos]' (2003, p.1) and their 'autobiographical [nature] being both a subject (or the subject) and a researcher' (2003, p.1). Regarding the reflexivity ´when one is working with one´s own data' (2003,p.1), it was addressed through 'collaborative analysis, forms of grounded theory [here I resorted to qualitative coding] and alternative forms of representation such as poetry, art and drama' (Tenni Smyth & Boucher , 2003, p. 1). In the case of poetry, I spontaneously titled my grounded theory categories with the metaphor by St. John of the Cross: 'la noche oscura del alma' (San Juan de la Cruz, 2010, p. 160) ['dark night', my translation] with all its implications, moving from the creative and communicative power of imagination within the mystical intimate sphere of the soul to the practice of education, which proves how much of the personal sphere of teachers also engages in the externalization of the practice and the fears and battles it awakens. And then ´noche luminosa del alma´ in the spirit of liberation of Saint Theresa of Lisieux (1992,

pp. 46–48) ['luminous night of the soul', my translation]. I find that those poetic forms which together provide an oxymoron, helped me illustrate many of the emotions I felt during the process.

On the other hand, the fact I was carrying out Teacher Action Research, so it was me as researcher-participant and my students as participants, was an issue which voiced what I assumed first person/ third person. Barresi and Juckes (Barresi & Juckes, 1997, p. 693) illuminate this point: 'Researchers use first person narratives as source material and third person narratives in interpreting and describing lives because the temporal nature of experience makes it difficult for human beings not to attribute order, direction, and purpose to experience.' This attribution was well explained by Ricoeur (1996, p. 635), I would say the first person configures a narration of the teacher action research, and the third person refigures it with its interpretation of the events. Ricoeur legitimizes that the effort of narrative as a refiguration of temporal experience occurring in various fields of study, or as an empirical quest to discover cultural and literary influences operating on daily life, self-knowledge and of the other, related to individual and collective action, is an action that resorts to its tools (Ricoeur, 1996, pp. 635–636), as those, in my opinion, Tenni et al. (Tenni et al., 2003) referred to further above. Ricoeur himself acknowledges himself ignorant in the manipulation of those tools, resorting to a philosophical route starting in St. Augustine's reflection on time and aporetic in nature. In the present study, I have resorted to metaphor in the coding since it is consistent with the nature of the literary nature of the student project planned and because the dark/luminous oxymoron summarizes the antagonistic precarious/hopeful feelings I experienced through the process of incarnating the novel researcher/experienced in-service teacher. The tension existent within me- between the first and third person, a hybrid first person teacher/researcher, and a third person researcher who in the moment of initial planning, resorted to the opinions of her students and to the counsel of her peer Master student colleagues- results from Reflective Practice as a never-ending generator of questions. The aporia of the irresolvable nature of synchronous thinking demanded from teacher/researcher, and the tension it awakens, could be addressed effectively through the flexibility I felt, sourced in the fact that the shape of the thought demanded from me as teacher designer and researcher traversed analogous recursivity.

I would not call my study ethnographic in the pure sense of the term since it lacks comprehensive description of contextual detail given I focused on my internal process. However, along Ellis´s lines, it shares with ' ethnography that (…) fusion between social science and literature […] ethnography that include the heart, the autobiographical, and the artistic text' (Ellis, 1999, p. 669). The 'artistic text' applied in the poetic naming of my two main qualitative coding categories.

When Spry points out that '[p]erforming autoethnography has encouraged [him] to dialogically look back upon [himself] as other, generating critical agency, as the polyglot facets of self and other engage, interrogage, and embrace.'(2001, p. 708), the empathic acceptance of my own efforts awakened a sense of wellbeing that made up for past precarity.

Bruner invited to 'extend the ideas about narrative to the analysis of stories we tell about our lives: our "autobiographies" ' (2004, p. 691).This constructivist approach communed with that of the University course on Innovation I was taking, as ' "world making" is the principal function of mind' (Bruner, 2004, p. 691).

Methods of Data Collection

On the one hand, firstly, the opinions of my teen students were recorded in the memos. Secondly, my Master student colleagues gave me feedback in the form of side comments in a shared document where I wrote my planning memos. In the third moment, I recorded audios for my Master student colleagues to develop reflexivity during the refiguring phase. The first narrative through the planning memos provided text that included the students' previous configurations of their own experiences, based on their refigurations of earlier learning experiences.

The pedagogical implementation, the object of my design reflection, was inspired in Resnick´s suggestion of maintaining life-long kindergarten curiosity as a source to inspire creativity (Resnick, 2018). The project focused on gamification in a very preliminary phase. It was an extended activity based on the previous reading of The Speckled Band (Conan Doyle, 1892). The B2 Learners of ESL had a choice among these options:

a) Design of a Treasure Hunt targeted for Upper Primary Students.
b) Character Portrait Exhibition transforming them into Auras Image Trivia with no longer existent HP Reveal. Participants activate an overlay with internal monologue of character composed and designed by students.
c) Comic narrative using app. Starboard.

Description of Findings and Analysis

Audio 1 Dark Nights
I received peer colleague feedback on 360° pictures. As there were technical design difficulties with photo ratio, I discarded no longer existent Creator Tour from Google.
The issue on how to record the progress made was overcome by the cellphone voice recorder which was a technology easily available for my in-the-instant reflections. On the other hand, the samples of student feedback, the peer feedback from my Master Study colleagues and the technical details for the augmented reality were recorded in slides.

Audio 2 Luminous nights
Recognition of my digital immigrant identity and incipient learnings was made explicit. Achievements were audibly identifiable in the audio recordings with a rising tone of emotion in the voice. Identification of the differing toolbar features for slides and Word documents was recognized. Given the difficulty of typing directly into the narrow slides imposed by the faculty teacher as recording tool, I resorted to write in Word and then cut and paste into the text box of slides. Maximizing and minimizing more windows was exercised. Shooting screen shots was learnt. Filing and dragging images was put into practice. And Starboard app. studied.

Audio 3
Prior knowledge activation took place. Personal Learning Environments via Symbaloo´s webmixes absorbed. Coevaluation from peer study colleagues provided as comments to the slides. Metacognition and evidence collection was instrumented and reciprocal teaching carried out to adjust the timing. There was a advance in understanding how planning the calendar in advance allows to reflect on past mistakes in order to provide for them not to be repeated.

Audio 4
Exploration of augmented reality (HP reveal) and Storyboard potential and a realistic reflection on the students' and teacher's possibilities of actually mastering them.

There is a difficulty of student access to technology since free trials of apps are short in terms of what is actually required for learning processes. And it makes it difficult to reuse the app and ease transference to other subjects.

In relation to leveraging digital, there is an admitted need to integrate technology to serve the learning and not comply with the companies that generate them. Prioritise a holistic approach to students´ needs and not add technology per se. Students demanded to integrate social networks with an attractive design.

Audio 5
Considering whether technological addition suggestions from peers enhances or not the project´s objectives was made explicit. I decided to approach the students telling them about my own frustrations on the topic; added to pointing out the opportunity they would have to display their artistic skills in the challenge of recreating a Victorian environment with the integration of History as a content subject as an asset. Hybridization of Literature and having contact with this postmodern concept in a fun way, in the integration of the arts was emphasized. The transformation of literary monologues into soliloquies provides flexibility in thinking. The possibility of creating augmented reality and effective visual and oral communication, plus the stimulation of critical skills are advantageous affordances. However, the relevance on focusing primarily on the learning and not using digital technology per se was prioritised.

Audio 6
Here reflection was directed to diagnostic assessment on technology. It was concluded that students had an immature use of murals and email. As well there arose the ethical issue of how to safeguard the group´s privacy and whether the students were mature enough to agree on a class contract of team interaction. There was an enthusiastic response on behalf of students when posed with the need of autonomous study.

Audio 7
Dedicated to researcher internal self-process of knowledge building and how to document it. The less intimidating use of audios was preferred to video since observation of self-image could be disrupting.

Audio 8
Decision making and calendar planning was commented on. The personal learning environment would be used to guide the students in the consecutive steps and options they would have to carry out. Rubrics, working documents and tutorials would be pinned on it.

Qualitative Coding findings
The frequency of quotes in the different subcategories of the findings reveal that the narrative recording was transformative since there is a prevalence of 'luminous night' coding over the 'dark night'. In the quotes of the subcategories of luminous night, there is a trail of thought enhancing agency, positive emotions and planning; while in the 'dark night ones a recalling of negative mental overload and external difficulties.
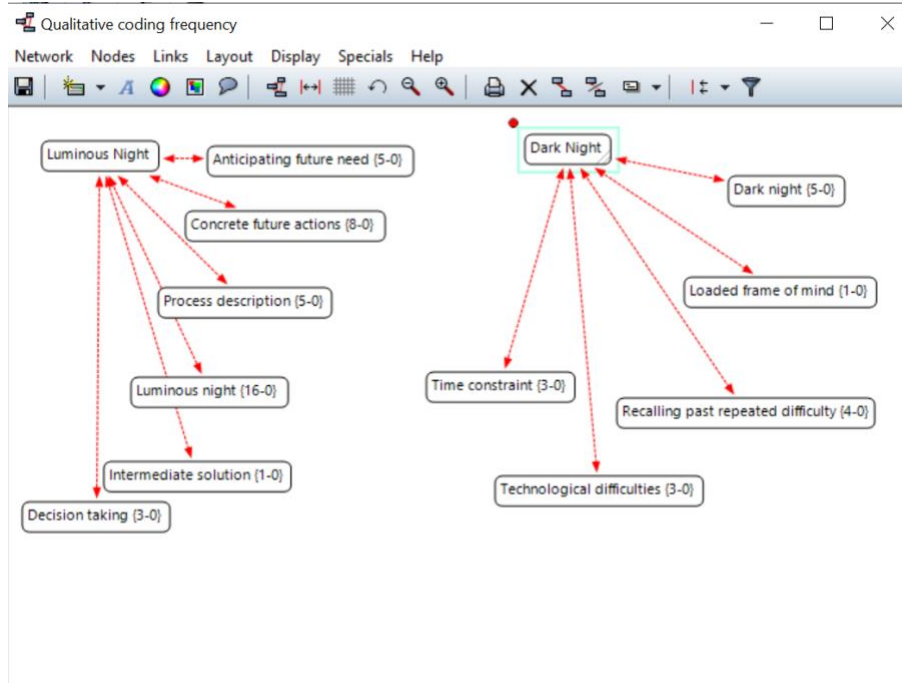
(Capture screen of Atlas-Ti coding program)

Conclusion

Poetic terminology in the coding allowed for an economical way of presenting emotional states and multiple difficulties/hindrances in a succint way without the need to be so specific in the use of affective terminology to describe them which escaped the subject field of this exploration, and my expertise. My personal discursive style developed after the narrative effort. The audios triggered a relaxed form of metacognitive exploration. It was possible for me as a researcher to distance myself from peer colleague feedback and identify what was applicable and not of their feedback suggestions. During the process, many factual learnings that were identified at a basic digital level strengthened the positive flow of the experience, allowing an integration of knowledge at the metacognitive level regarding the recognition of the discursive style, the shortcuts to prevent hindrances and the discernment of meaningful future action.

On the other hand, narrative inquiry enabled the exchange of student and colleague peer feedback with me, raising the consideration of the affective maturity of students and promoting them to preserve the privacy of learning interactions and their possibilities of familiarization with the technological aspects involved in the design of the pedagogical implementation.

On the overall, the analysis of personal narrative inquiry reveals an improved sense of well-being provided by the satisfaction of reflective practice integrating understanding of personal identity and educational design thinking.

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Interrogating Use/ful/less/ness:
Using "Narrative Loops" in Inquiring Alone and Together

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Abstract
We co-inquire as two female action researchers at transition points in our lives, no longer adhering to – or wishing to perform – standards of typicality. In refusing to be valued in advance of our coming-to-be (Manning, 2020), we interrogate, challenge and transfigure social, political, cultural and personal narratives of use/ful/less/ness.

Pauline Sameshima developed a "pedagogy of parallax" to encourage dialogic, collaboratively "constructed and rhizomatic" understandings and a "catechization process" that is reflexive and systematic in analyzing the resulting renderings (Sameshima, 2006, Sameshima & Vandermause, 2008). Her 'parallaxic' approach to research aligns with the spirit and approach of co-inquiry loops in action research and informs our approach to reflexivity.

Our work converges personal, relational, and inherited narratives, traversing time, space, territories, and language. Through converging multiple and artful autoethnographic and narrative inquiry practices, our reflexive inquiries loop, multiply and layer.

Keywords
Action research, Artful inquiry, Narrative loops, Reflexivity

A note on the text: For the 2023 symposium, we created a video that attempts to *show* our narrative looping process. This video is on YouTube (link in Appendix One) and if you wish to view it, we hope this will enhance your reading of this paper. At the same time, through dialogue during the review process, we came to feel the paper should work as a standalone document. We hope this account of our inquiry will encourage other inquiry experiments.

Overview of our inquiries, individually and together:

- By Joan Lau, brush pen on paper, Chinese cursive script calligraphy (see Endnote).

I used to assume my picture was never on display when I visited because it was taken when I was in one of my periodic fat phases, then recently I've thought maybe it was because I looked too happy on my own in front of the honey-brick library or because I have an annoying face and I wonder whether it's possible to recover that cloudless mindset after so many years of bumping into the edges of things…

- By Paula Aamli, prose poem extract (see Appendix Two).

We co-inquire as two female action researchers at transition points in our lives, no longer adhering to – or wishing to perform – standards of typicality.

In refusing to be valued in advance of our coming-to-be (Manning, 2020), we interrogate, challenge and transfigure social, political, cultural and personal narratives of use/ful/less/ness. Pauline Sameshima developed a "pedagogy of parallax" to encourage dialogic, collaboratively "constructed and rhizomatic" understandings and a "catechization process" that is reflexive and systematic in analyzing the resulting renderings (Sameshima, 2006, Sameshima & Vandermause, 2008). Her "parallaxic" approach to research aligns with the spirit and approach of co-inquiry loops in action research and informs our approach to reflexivity.

Our work converges personal, relational and inherited narratives, traversing time, space, territories and language. Through converging multiple and artful autoethnographic and narrative inquiry practices, our reflexive inquiries loop, multiply and layer. We resonate with Sameshima's inspiration from the word *parallax*, of which "stems from the Greek word *parallagé* which means alteration and from *parallessein*, 'to change'" (2007, p.3), emphasizing changes in perspectives from changes in viewer's position.

As arts-based researchers and practice-based inquirers, we craft and story from the material of our own experiences and heritages, continuously making and remaking ourselves,

alongside and in relation. Paula uses walking and poetic inquiry to explore climate grief, childlessness, and aging; Joan inquires through Chinese calligraphy, proverbs and English poetry into healing ways of expressing and re-embodying her emotional and relational self in between languages, cultures and generations.

Within the context of our respective lives, these various activities have supported us to resist and/or interrogate our cultural assumptions and conditioning. In particular, we inquire around and in response to questions of what it means to live "useful" lives and if/when we may want or need or even feel unable to challenge framings of "uselessness" (being older – being childless - not in permanent employment - physically infirm - experiencing mental strain) and "usefulness" (being the "good" wife, daughter and sister - the "gainfully employed" citizen – doing useful research). Gearty & Marshall caution that "in our experience many people find the notion of self-reflexivity challenging, however much it might be advocated in research paradigm and methodology literatures" (2020, p.2). Our work, individually and together, seeks to contribute to the growing stock of exemplars and practice accounts by showing how we, as action researchers, artfully and rigorously engage with the complex, atypical narratives of our lives, how we seek to ground ourselves without being fixed, and how through losing (and finding?) our footing, we create new ground, finding home in the processual.

Contextualising our ISAN presentation:
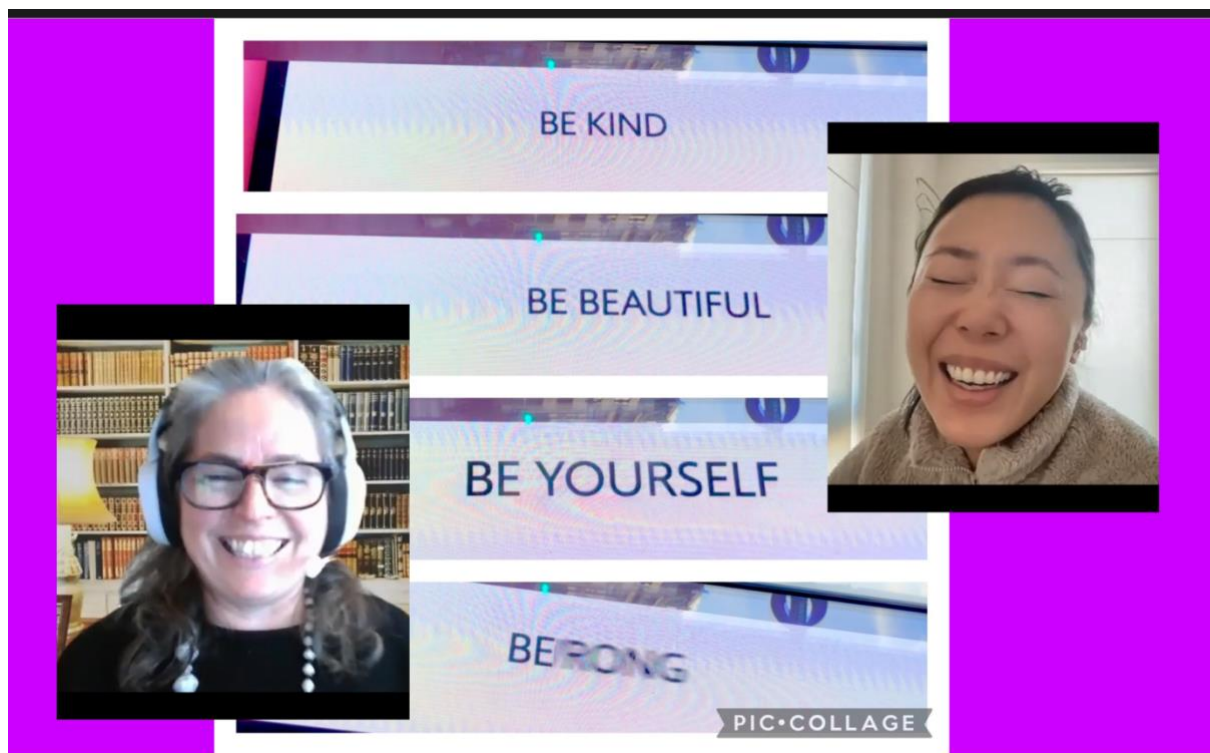
We are peer-participants from Hult Ashridge Executive Education's Executive Doctorate in Organisational Change, respectively, a doctoral candidate (Joan) researching how to attune to, express and connect healing needs in/with/through disparate language systems and opposing cultural realities, and a recent graduate of the programme (Paula), whose thesis considered the role and potentialities of poetic inquiry in processing individual and institutional ramifications of climate-crisis grief (Aamli, 2021). Our proposal for ISAN arose

from our shared and overlapping interests in inquiring into a set of social, cultural and inter-relational phenomena that we broadly grouped together as instances of assessing ourselves, or understanding ourselves as being assessed by others, against a perceived spectrum of use/ful/less/ness.

The image above is a screengrab from the front panel of our co-presentation at ISAN 2023. In our video presentation for the conference, we attempted to *show* instances of our narrative looping (for a link to the co-presentation, see Appendix One).

What the video *doesn't show* – although we commented on it in session – was the looping and revisiting in making the video, which became a vessel for inquiry as much as the conversations and walks and artistic attempts that constitute the video's content. We made the video in 4-5 minute increments. We paused. We emailed. We emailed comments on our email comments. The pages display a tangle of different coloured texts and form of conveying texts, reflecting our attempts to convey a rising excitement or a slow-breath of uncertainty. We worried away at the expectations, internal and external, that we felt both in personal and professional domains, chafed at the sense that in seeking to escape one set of narrative norms, we tripped over into another: from driven professionalism to confining domesticity; from dutiful family member to disappointment; from engaged in active inquiry to resigned and/or comfortable.

These topics still hold our attention, in both our individual inquiries and the long looping co-inquiry conversations explored whenever we were together. However, for our co-presentation, we wished to prioritise our process-of-inquiry over the content of our discussions. We chose to connect with our viewers by showing our experience/s as inquirers rather than offering polished propositional conclusions. In discussion with our ISAN panel, we found ourselves stating that this represented a shared epistemological commitment – to knowledge as contingent, as in-process-of-coming-into-being. We realised that we had actively sought to resist certainty, especially when we noticed moments of internal pressure to judge and classify the spectrum of feelings that came up for us when we transgressed dominant standards that pre-determine expectations of "women" in our cultures, that overtly or covertly pre-value "use" and thus worth and appropriateness of a "woman".

An entry-point into inquiry:
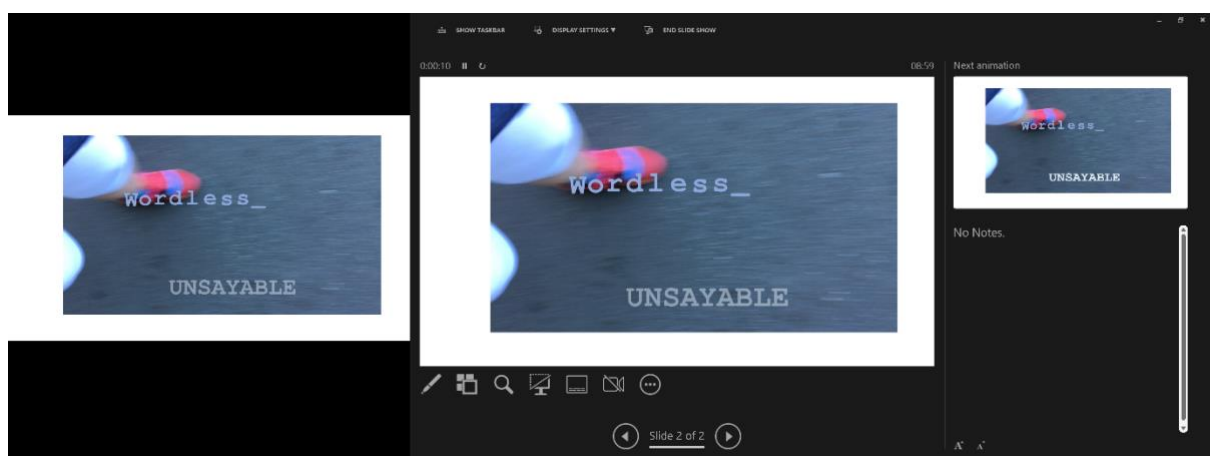
We have inquired together for a little over two years, initially over zoom, then meeting to walk. In both contexts, we let our conversation loop, sag, and start again. We circle the things we want or don't want to say, that perhaps we don't know how to say.

This is how we opened the ISAN video, representing ourselves arriving for an inquiry conversation, first visually, with Paula walking and our un-narrated/un-voiced inquiries into wordlessness, as shown in the image above, before the viewer hears our voices as we sat together, trying to start:

> PA:
> So, can we just try and check in just to see what it's like to – to be here. I mean, we're sitting in the main concourse of Paddington Station which we're doing because we were going to go and walk in the park, but we were interrupted by an autumn shower. Yes, it definitely feels… I can feel the changing of the, uh, seasons, you know. It feels like the last time we were together felt a lot like summer…

> JL:
> I was sort of staying quiet for you to get us started. Even right now I'm noticing my lips being drier. This is not the usual way I feel when speaking to you. There is something performative, as if there is something my muscle memory or brain remembered – any uh gesture of recording or button-pressing means – *perform!* I connect that with the concept of data, that sense of reporting and finality of data…the feeling I have now as I am writing a thesis…what is data, do I have data?

Looping through a process of discussion and sense-making:
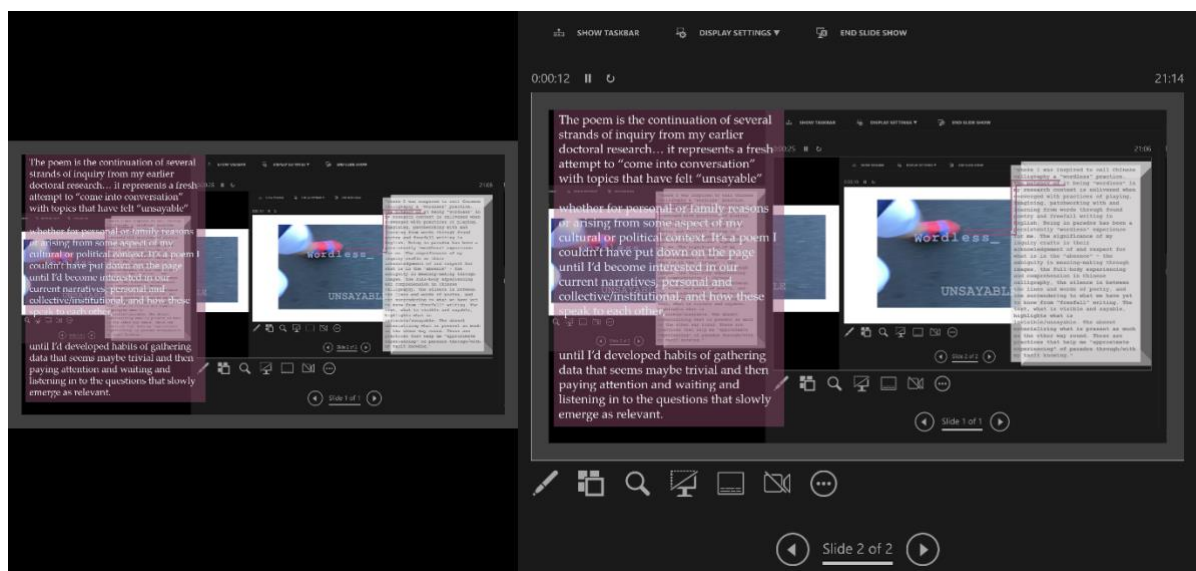
Throughout the video, our voices overlay images and texts we shared with each other in our co-inquiry loops. We chose and edited images that correspond to what viewers hear us saying from our co-inquiring conversations, showing the different ways we express "unsayables", silently and in conversation. We also wanted to show our enactment of a "parallaxic" approach to reflexive action research, that helps us keep an engaging, deliberate and systematic practice to sustain our creative and critical attention, as we entwine with the messiness, challenges and discomforts of reflexive inquiry and research. An artful and joyful

practice we both trusted and found generative in offering space for our coming-to-be while not losing sight of our intentions as action researchers – to critically analyze data through action-reflection cycles in order to create new knowing or ways of knowing that could be of value to others.

At ISAN, our co-presentation focused on the process/es involved in inquiry, and the purposeful /apparently purposeless meandering routes we took into co-inquiry. There was less emphasis on the content of our inquiries, the questions we held and hold about use/ful/less/ness, about how to approach the unsayable, how even to recognise what we treat as impossible-to-say.
We take advantage of the shift in medium in this document to expand on these topics here.
JL:
In the context of my inquiry, *unsayable* knowing has fluxed and flowed from what happens when I experience illiteracy in my native tongue, insecurity in my second native tongue and disconnectedness in my multi-cultural realities. The resulting turmoil in never feeling fully and wholesomely expressive renders the use of words lifeless no matter how eloquent I may seem to others. Through converging Chinese calligraphy and English poetry, both found and original, as I show in the video, I create an artful and bilingual way of reflexive inquiry. Both crafts help me create spaciousness in the betweens of *shoulds* and *oughts*, where I feel free to let familiar rules go, in order to encounter moments of a different sort of unsayable knowing – a tacit and deeply felt sense of underlying ease with unpredictable change that is living, and its beauty that do not call for any words. My sense of in betweenness shifts from a space of discomfort and tension to a space for creative vitality. My relationship with words changes and I show my inquiry creations in the video poem.

There were words/themes that "hooked" Paula and I in our shared inquiry interests of which helped me write into the gaps that I found difficult to articulate in my own inquiry, feeling lost in-between the paradoxes of languages and cultures. We pronounced these themes in our ISAN 2023 co-presentation through interweaving what was co-created from co-inquiry and creations from our individual artful inquiries. We use the same themes as headlines to guide our writing in this document.

So I can move closer to heritage and to change
To love and loved ones

Not to choose between worlds
Nor explain them

間

"to be found by the living worlds"
"a simple wish to find a way"

Discomfort: In the video poem I share, I showed my calligraphy and poetry "in action". Embedded within are words I borrowed from other writers/poets to help me find the language I needed when I felt tongue-tied. For example, as shown in the image above, I overlayed my calligraphy of the Chinese character for in-between, 間, with lines from a cento poem I created with David Whyte's lyrical essays, *Close* and *Crisis* (2019, p. 26 & 35) – "to be found by the living world" and "a simple wish to find a way" to show my aspirations for in-betweenness as a place I wish to inhabit, where I can rest, where I don't feel forced to choose nor to explain my way of being. Through poetic inquiry, I found expression for my "simple" desires I had long neglected, to feel closer to my Chinese heritage, which would also change the way I engage with my loved ones who predominantly speak in Chinese.

My desires for creative vitality, relational healing and change through connectedness come to the foreground as I nurtured artful ways to embody my emotional and sensitive ways of being more vividly and to use such artful practices as methods of inquiry.

Research poetry is significant for my research in terms of its intentions of foregrounding a researcher's voice, research ethics and rigour in reflexive action research, communicating to readers the critical reflective process and efficacy of reflective "self-studying" in research. In my research poetry, I foreground my bilingual voice and knowing through inquiring with English found poetry, Chinese proverbs I grew up learning and the ideographic make up of Chinese characters. Together, they express my personal stances, values, belief systems and meanings I assign to my experiencing.

For example, I speak to my intense experiences of panic in the beginning of my video poem, of which is layered with my voice as I was trying to tell Paula in our co-inquiry about the paradoxes I inquire into/with/through in my own inquiry. My intense visceral encounters with panic, experiences of discomfort, distress and bafflement, are portals in my inquiry into the way my body gives me feedback on how tensions of in-betweenness can feel.

Such feedback is data in my research. I depict in my poem my resistance and refusal to use pathological language as explanations for my experience of panic as an "attack" or "disorder", just as I resist and subvert the *should*s and *ought*s in cultural expectations. Instead, I honour my knowing, that is often tacit and subtle, as yet to find meaningful language for expression, in-process-of-coming-to-be. Through poetic inquiry, using found and original poetry, I came to articulate the initial overarching discomfort that brought me to my inquiry as a soul never at ease, ineffably aching. I re-worded this sentiment at the end of the video poem for our co-presentation as, "anticipatory loss and tiresome doubt", which suited the flow of my video poem more as I tell the story of how panic, anxiety, tensions, and doubt feel for me.

In the creation of the video poem, I found words from J. Drew Lanham's essay on joy as the justice we give ourselves (2022) that brought me back to my sense of "a soul never at ease" of which I used to end my video poem to convey the aspirations of my research – "a soul stirred and gaze snagged on wonder". In creating the video poem, I was able to understand and *feel* more clearly what I couldn't find the words for in describing why my research felt so important to me. I yearn for shifting my narrative of an aching soul in un-ease, I wanted to do research that would stir my soul and hold my gaze on wonder in order to create spaciousness for a coming-to-be in the betweens.

In using "found" and original words in my own poetic inquiry and in collaboration with Paula, I am reminded of our species as continuously co-creating social creatures, with all of

the living world/s. Converging different ways of expressing, borrowing ways of phrasing from other writers/poets and experimenting with my own bilingual ways, I am invited to continuously make and remake my narratives and concepts of self-in-relation. I learn of a way to conceive growth, healing and, thus, change, not as a neatly predictable, linear, hierarchal concept but rather an unruly, way-finding/creating process – continuous and living that comes through joining or connecting without feeling the pressures of conforming. I find comfort in discomfort.

A way of healing on the fringe...

PA:
One of the things I have most appreciated in this ongoing, looping, tracking-back-to-move-on co-inquiry has been how conversations about making space slide into the activity of space-making and that kaleidoscopes into the experience of inhabiting spacious places for inquiry. Talking about "the work" becomes "doing work" and then steps back again to attempting to notice and/or analyse and/or reflect on what we think we are coming to know about "the work".

Preparing the video became a way of knowing differently – would I have seen my poem-performances with fresh eyes if I wasn't sharing them with a keen-eyed viewer, if Joan wasn't pausing me to ask what was going on, what it meant to me, how it felt, how the feeling shifted?

The concept of working with a 'parallaxic' approach to reflexivity was brought into the co-inquiry through Joan's work, provoking an 'ah!' of recognition in me as we paused on what this was intended to mean, what it aimed to bring. In conversation with Joan, I am reminded of a running buddy, back when my tendons could deal with running, who told me he used parallax to know when it was safe for us to run across a road with traffic on. We smile about the "usefulness" of art in this context, as a view of reality manifested into an object so that we can walk around it, see it from all angles, try to see its beauties and flaws, learn to course-correct.

In my own inquiry practice, I tried to "learn to see differently" by developing a simple repeating cycle of action-and-reflection which I termed poetic charting (Aamli, 2022).

Poetic charting was a deliberate and deliberately repetitive bringing together of movement, journaling, and creative dwelling-in and revisiting-of source material and my notetaking, layered across time. Over a period of several months, I walked daily, turning my routes into coloured blocks on an excel chart, and describing them in journal fragments. Periodically, generally once a week once the rhythm was established, I would revisit these journal fragments to create sense-impression poems. Some months later, I would revise the poems again.

Discomfort: Although I trust the poetic process – although I trust poetry's knowledge-generating potential, I'm sitting with a considerable discomfort, provoked by the work I did to flesh out our co-presentation for ISAN 2023. I think that's a good thing, even if I'm not enjoying the feeling very much. I think the kind of work we're advocating for and trying, no doubt imperfectly, to model, cultivates – requires – a certain kind of (self) scepticism.

Self-doubt: Is it self-doubt? Not in the way that term is used, culturally, in the context I was brought up in, anyway. For instance, I'm not wondering, "What's the point of this kind of inquiry?" I think one of the most admirable and potentially valuable of human instincts is the desire to dig under the surface of things, to ask WHY, to refuse to be satisfied with taking a received story about the world as given – and I've deliberately phrased that in a way that seeks to emphasise the common ground between "hard" scientists and social scientists. But of course, social scientists and qualitative researchers apply ourselves to different questions and pay attention to different kinds of data. And I'm not apologising or in doubt about that, either.

JL:
Blank spaces: Through my artful bilingual inquiry loops, I confronted "blank spaces", gaps in stories I wished to inquire into but found ineffable, a knowing beyond verbal comprehension. I began inquiring into the notion of writing to remember and the tensions and inhibitions that accompany such an inquiry, materializing the presence of/in absence.

I find blank spaces important aspects of my inquiry, as what is absent or silent are often mistaken or overlooked as empty, negligible or un-useful.

In the context of my action research question, I am asking - could artful bilingual inquiry help me re-embody my emotional and relational self? Of which has been silenced and denied. So that I can attune to, express and meet my needs for healing, change and connectedness.

Two of the Chinese characters presented in the video poem have helped me deepen my inquiry of writing and "brushing" into "blank spaces". They sound identical in Romanized pinyin and subtly different in Mandarin and Cantonese – 望 (wàng/mong) and 忘 (wàng/mong). It made for an interesting juxtaposition and reminder of the subtleties I attune to in being bilingual.

The first character means to hope and the second means to forget or neglect. Converged together, I ask more deeply - do I write in hope to remember (望), to not forget (忘) or do I intuitively feel there is something forgotten or neglected (忘) that needs to materialize?

Linguistic and semantics scholar, Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa proposes that we become "prisoners of ancient orientations imbedded in the languages we have inherited…every language, like the language of a thermometer, leaves work undone for other languages to do," in his discussion of *The Revision of Vision* in György Kepes' book, *The Language of Vision* (Kepes, 1944, p.8).

I take Hayakawa's attitude towards languages and aspire to craft openings and spaciousness in my enactment of artful bilingual inquiry, trusting the partnership of the languages I live and breathe day-to-day. My desires to find and be found by living worlds, a way of being in betweenness, is a simultaneous desire to breath, respond and be relationally active in the exchanges of my paradoxical language and cultural realities. That corresponds to the interpretation of the concept of change I take for my action research, as ongoing, processual and ever-present, analogous to "living betweens". Culture and language are interpreted as ever-changing activities, living patterns in continuous relational co-creation. This framing alleviates the rigid sense of pre-valued or pre-determined goal-oriented processes en/ac/deculturing phenomena implies for me, *rules* on how to be, live and act.

I transfigure my fear to radical hope in the complexities of inquiring with unknowns and tacit

knowing, with uncertainty in the betweens, through artfully puncturing the explanatory power of pre-determined and pre-valued labels/categories. What is considered useful or useless is turned on its head, flipped upside down, inside out, becoming simultaneously paradoxical. My bilingual knowing and sense-making then goes beyond verbal literacy, attuning to my embodied aesthetic knowing through sensing and artfulness.

PA:
Ambiguity: As soon as I started to notice the human tendency not just to make up stories about how the world functions, but to invest these stories with certainty, and yet how wrong our stories can be without our noticing or being willing to change them, from that point, I saw the value in looking closely at our narratives, looking for complexity, ambiguity, contradiction, trying to see the sleights of hand, the moments of self-delusion. Moments that are "in-between" constructions of reality; moments that might tend to be tidied up or disappeared. This is where the discomfort starts to appear – because of course I must also doubt myself. Which is hard to sustain over any period of inquiry – I guess our desire to soothe ourselves with certainty is extremely deep-wired. Mine is, at least, and I suspect I'm not special in this.
Resistance: So, this effort to resist being soothed, when it works, when I succeed in maintaining my doubt about the narrative I'm telling myself or that I'm told by the employees of a firm, or members of a particular community, or by our leaders and politicians – well, the result is that I lose my comforting sense that I understand how things work. Which is comforting even if I don't like what I'm seeing, because that gives me something to push against.

JL:
Not enough: My journal entries from the first three years of my research showed me the recurring themes of scarcity, inadequacy and lack, narratives of not being or doing enough. Being told I am over-sensitive, that I over-think, over-worry was never helpful. The paradox of being told I am too much while always feeling I am not enough is disorienting and constricting. These narratives motived my inquiry into interrogating ideologies of use/ful/less/ness.

What struck me was the metaphors and analogies recorded in my journals. To name a few - imaginary motions such as "putting down" emotions, "catching" each other when we fall; dichotomous framings such as "out there and in here" and "public and private" separation; combative framings of strength and resilience through "fighting" and heroic "protecting"; ways of framing 'self' as a mechanical object that can break down, shut off or be a rock, a glass half empty or full, a mould or made of resources that can be drawn/drained or empty/emptied. I realize I was accustomed to my referring to my "self" as disembodied.

I return to the concept of the work one language leaves undone for other languages to do, to artfully nurture and craft my bilingual knowing in order to imagine language differently, of which includes changing dichotomous and unhelpful frameworks that disembody my emotionally sensing self.

Wordless: I show my calligraphy in practice briefly in our ISAN co-presentation. I call my inquiry with Chinese calligraphy a "wordless" practice as an acknowledgement of the invisible and unsayable tensions in my experience of paradox, blank spaces and in-betweenness. It also emphasizes the ideographic potentials and potency of Chinese characters and the quiet ("wordless") practice of Chinese calligraphy in the context of my inquiry of

feeling uncomfortable and unfamiliar in my native language. I apply the same sense of play, imagination and liberation with English words through poetry and 'freefall' journaling.

Chinese calligraphy and poetic inquiry teach me how to acknowledge and respect the presence of absence. The ambiguity in meaning-making through images, the full-body experiencing and comprehension in Chinese calligraphy, the silence in between the lines and words of poetry, and the surrendering to what we have yet to know from freefall writing. The text, what is visible and sayable, highlights what is invisible/unsayable. The absent materializing what is present as much as the other way round.

From a sense of lack and inadequacy, I feel abundance and possibilities with these practices of attuning, embodying and surrendering. Components that featured in the way Paula and I co-inquired and co-created our ISAN presentation.

PA:
Becoming dis-illusioned: While sometimes it's exhilarating and freeing – when we can reject stories that have harmed or constrained us – my personal experience is that it can also be very disappointing. Being dis-illusioned also involves having to let go of illusions I was fond of and was using for insulation. The essay on writing as narrative inquiry by Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St-Pierre has been very influential for me, as I'm sure it has been for many of the attendees at ISAN. Here, Laurel Richardson pinpoints another source of my doubt and discomfort, the flip of what I've described already –

> Postmodernism claims that writing is always partial, local, and situational and that our selves are always present no matter how hard we try to suppress them – but only partially present because in our writing we suppress parts of ourselves as well. (Richardson & St Pierre, 2018, p.820)

Being wrong: There's a pain involved in coming to realise that sincere though I may be in putting forward a particular analysis, it's extremely likely that at least part of that analysis is – simply *wrong* – and I cannot be aware of it because I'm still at least partly deluded and in denial. That's pretty depressing! But Richardson also has the insight that cheers me up again –

> Working from that premise frees us to write material in a variety of ways – to tell and retell. There is no such thing as "getting it right", only "getting it" differently contoured and nuanced. When using creative analytical practices, ethnographers learn about the topics and about themselves that which was unknowable and unimaginable using conventional analytical procedures, metaphors and writing formats. (Richardson & St Pierre, 2018, p.820 – these remarks being found in Richardson's part of the essay.)

JL:
Breathing time: My research feels urgent and inefficient at the same time, of which brings to bear questions of how "useful" my research is in cultures that prizes and prioritizes efficiency and productivity. However, I do not wish to respond to my sense of urgency and impatience through my inquiry with measurable results. My research is not intended to offer answers, explanations, bite-sized summaries or a quick how-to guide. I wish to experience the construct of time differently in my inquiry in a way that feels expansive, creating room for me to breathe in/through my inquiry.

Urgency, inefficiency, impatience and worries of uselessness remind me of my body's expressions of fight, flight or freeze. I inquire with these paradoxical urges constantly throughout my research, as I move, resist or stay with my inhibitions, tensions and openings with an active practice of radical hope. I include my calligraphy of the Chinese character for courage in my video poem, 勇. It symbolizes my embodiment of courage in my inquiry and research writings, as I brush, write, breathe, sense and meaning make and re-make with/through/in tension.

I practice calligraphy with hindrances of feeling not sufficiently literate in the language, doubting my eligibility for even beginning this deeply revered traditional craft, without a proper teacher or skilled master and formal instruction. I vex over my desire to respect tradition and my desire to be closer to my heritage on/with my own terms, not through instruction, obedience and duty. I show and write into these sentiments through my video poem in our ISAN co-presentation.

With memories of being teased for my illiteracy and moments I desperately wanted to communicate better in Chinese with my family, each time I calligraph, as I hold and move with the brush, it is a gesture to allow and encourage myself to feel "eligible'" to practice this craft and call it my practice and method of inquiry. It is my way of moving closer to my familial and Chinese heritage, moving with my inhibitions, even if my elementary literacy may suggest otherwise to some.

When I calligraph cursive scripts of Chinese characters, where the aim is to keep the brush on the paper as much as possible while in motion, I relish in the spontaneity of where the brush goes and where it finally lifts off when the character is complete, letting the brush "fly". The tip of the brush that moves along the paper without ever fully lifting off it, becomes an extremity of my physical body. The streaks of white within Chinese calligraphy strokes indicate where the brush tip splits and are called "flying white", sometimes an intentional technique and sometimes not in my case. There is no editing or erasing, once my brush touches the paper, the act is fluid and free, embracing intention and spontaneity at once in how form takes shape. I am present with what materializes as I am moving with the materializing, meditating with movement.

How I attend to tensions in my body in calligraphy is similar to my other daily movement practices, focusing not on perfecting postures or how they look and not hurrying to get into the next posture when I am finishing the last. Knowing and trusting there is always an underlying ease in however I move my body, especially when I feel tense, is from a practice of trusting my breath. Regular diaphragmatic breathing exercises teach me how breath calms me, shifts my mood and tensions, and moves my body from one posture to another. When I deeply inhale, slowly drawing in air as I decrease the pressure in my lungs, my tummy gradually inflates in the same rhythm. My shoulders relax and I experience "a slowing of time". I then come to a natural pause where I hold my breath before I feel ready to completely deflate my entire upper body and exhale, listening to the sound of my breath from the back of my throat slowly releasing through my nose.

Breath, body and postures flowing in unison and relationship, I am coming to know better my body's languaging, finding and being found by living worlds, nurturing a re-embodying of my emotional and relational self.

PA:
Interrogating interpretations: In the work of working-towards our shared inquiry, I made three short video-poems – *Lighten Our Darkness, Discouragement,* and *Taking Stock in Mid-life.* These are all on YouTube (for links, see Appendix One). At the time of making them, I was quite satisfied with them and it's disconcerting to revisit them and see how my view has shifted.

I notice immediately that I'm not inclined to talk about the stress, shouting and drama involved in trying to get set up with even very basic video editing. These things become – unsayable.

Lighten Our Darkness is a reworking of experiences my partner had when he was sailing round the world and which he related in his blog, and has also talked about since his return, in various conversations spread across time. It's lightly fictionalised. I see it as a *narrative* but not – I'd suggest – as a narrative *inquiry*. I think there are ways in which these narratives could be fashioned into inquiry, but certainly it's not there yet. At best I would say this poem might be an early data input, an artefact available for future analysis. If the inquiry progresses. Why do I say this? In a chapter for the book, *Poetic Inquiry as Social Justice and Political Response*, co-edited with Abigail Cloud, Sandra Faulkner writes that "poetic inquiry can be an active response to social issues, a political commentary, and a call to action" and "a way (for the poet/researcher) to reflect on power inequities, to make their personal experience part of the critique, and to realise the potential power in poetry as political discourse" (Faulkner, writing in Faulkner & Cloud, 2019, p. xi & p. xiii).

In this poem, the speaker races into the night across an ocean. It's a fragment, an attempt to convey sensory experiences from an environment most of us won't experience. Extreme, remote, but not impossibly so. But, ultimately, this is not (yet) a poem that learns from or about the topic it describes. It's not research, although it could input into a future inquiry.

The poem was enjoyable to write. Other than a bit of frustration at my technical limitations, I'm happy with the result. This poem does not make me uncomfortable. But it could. Maybe it should. Although it plays around at the beginning, trying to trick the reader into thinking something "bad" is happening, once we're established as being "not in danger, just on a sailing boat", the poem asks no difficult questions.

Not about the reasonableness of putting a body, a group of bodies, through the strains of night racing. Not about the dangers encountered or how reasonable or sensible it was for the crew to expose themselves to these perils. Not about the families back home, although as a back-home-family-member, I mention this group of people in the dedication at the end. Not about the choices involved in using resources like this, instead of for something else. Not about the choices involved in putting satellites or space stations into the skies above us. Nothing about the environment at all.

JL:
Becoming: The Chinese character for in-between, 間, which I show myself calligraphing in my video poem, is made of the characters for 'door' or in earlier times, a gate or opening (門) and the character for 'sun/day/date' (日), which rests in the middle or within the gates/opening. When used in conjunction with other characters, it usually refers to a space or room framed by something, an idea of an interval space. The Japanese Kanji's interpretation of this character's meaning is also a philosophical concept of space and time referred to as *Ma*.

It refers to a sense of "emptiness" in space that is akin to a "pause" in time, perceived to be both essential for growth and life. An attitude of "in between inquiry" is a way for me to be "close" to the data without constraining it, leaving space for the becoming.

Along with other editors, Sameshima also highlights the ethos of *Ma* in their book, *Ma: Materiality in Teaching and Learning* (2019). I find a collection of kindred spirits with the desires to generate inquiry and practice-based learning environments that go beyond "socially and politically determined subject locations" and "subjugation to culturally imbued norms" (Weibe, 2019). The significance of *Ma* as a way of creative inquiry is the materialization of what is happening in that process of generating, practicing, learning, becoming and changing, materializing conceptual in-between spaces for further inquiry.

Found poetry, in particular, is a complementary practise for inquiring in "the betweens" of my bilingual being, emphasizing the joining and movement in wholeness, interconnectedness and synthesis as a reader and creative writer. Creating a found poem helps me attend with care where I am reading my story in someone else's essay and story, what memories and images the words and others' ways of writing evoke for me. I am resonating and challenged at the same time. I poetically inquire as an invitation to reflect and ponder, enabling me to wonder where one's languaging leaves work undone for other languages. In creating the found poems, I respect and honour the integrity of both stories so neither is subsumed into the other but instead intertwines through the activity of poetic language.

A similar process happens when I meditate on the inherited stories embedded in Chinese characters and proverbs, where my storying is intertwined with others' storying and I am resonating and challenged at the same time, wanting to respect and honour uniqueness *and* the influence of shared heritage. This practice of bilingual poetic inquiry for my research

offers openings for new interpretations like the Chinese character, 間, and concept of *Ma* suggest.

The artwork in the beginning of this document is an example of a creation of my poetic bilingual inquiry, using a familiar proverb of "feminine goodness" in Chinese to inquire into my inherited narratives of what a "good" woman should be and look like. The overlaying of a brushed *enso* circle is to portray the ever-evolving changes of inherited narratives, depending on contexts, circumstances, and relational encounters. In Buddhist traditions of the practice of calligraphy, the practice of brushing/drawing an *enso*, of which is usually done in one brushstroke, is a practice of surrendering and allowing for whatever may appear, letting our bodies and intuition guide us, letting go of ideas of perfection/imperfection while being in continual flow. I inquire into "feminine goodness" with/through inherited narratives *and* a sense of openness and challenge, creating room for a process-of-coming-to-be.

PA:
A necessary unsettling: *Taking Stock in Mid-Life* is an uncomfortable poem for me to revisit, but its themes are much more alive for me. I'm confident that this poem is pursuing a serious autoethnographic inquiry. There are elements in there about inter-generational competition, about what is considered "reasonable" or "failing" in terms of lifetime achievements. There are submerged questions about class and gender and about highly charged family relationships. This poem triangulates between self/society/story. It is an [autoethnographic] narrative inquiry.
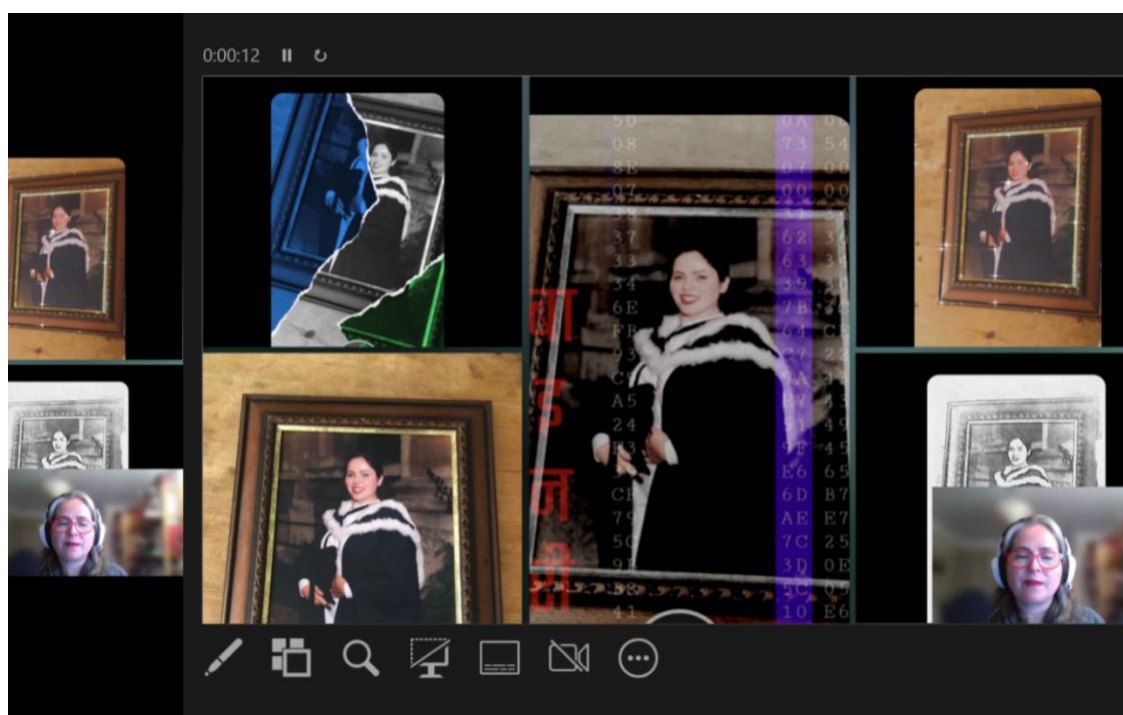
JL:
Binaries: I deliberately do not use the term bi-cultural in my research and life storying in response to how often such short-cuts in language have been used in response to my inquiry. My inquiry narrows and closes up through the binary lenses of East-West, English-Chinese or Canadian-Hong Kong cultural perspectives.

These frameworks are not only generalizing and reducing but restrictive in the context of my research because they reinforce divisive splits and polarization. Even if I were to trace heritage in terms of ancestry, a binary vantage point i.e., Chinese and English cultural heritage, would still miss the nuances I wish to inquire in my research. It is not to dismiss the prevalent East-West political narrative but its implications of pre-determined and fixed Eastern and/or Western "selves", leaves little room for "self" inquiry in an expansive way. My sense of in-between then feels constricting, a constant tug-of-war between polarized comparisons of ethnocentric cultural heritages, beliefs, norms, practices and language systems.

I was drawn to Sameshima's "parallaxic" approach as a useful structure for reflexive and arts- based action research because of its clear emphasis on multitudes and knowledge as continuously evolving (living) depending on perspectives, relationships, and contexts. Sameshima suggests practices of embodied aesthetic wholeness and wholeness-in-process as ways to nurture 'parallaxic', alternate and diverse ways of knowledge creation, through artful and creative scholarship. This speaks to my desires to clear spaces for expansive inquiry and curiosity in cultural and linguistic paradox. Binaries are challenged in a 'parallaxic' praxis.

PA:
Useful/less/ness: There's something in there *not addressed* about my relationship with age – and my own aging – as I regard this artefact of my youth. There's something about beauty, the idolisation of youthful potential, and my cultural worth or lack of worth as a female in an aging, middle-aged body, and specifically, this body that has not borne or nurtured or raised children.

Then closing the poem there's a brief section about usefulness and achievement (or lack, thereof), as I bounce between feeling shame at how I might measure against expectations and feeling defiance towards those expectations, a desire to "burn them down". The poem is the continuation of several strands of inquiry from my earlier doctoral research… it represents a fresh attempt to "come into conversation" with topics that have felt "unsayable", whether for personal or family reasons or arising from some aspect of my cultural or political context.

It's a poem I couldn't have put down on the page until I'd become interested in our current narratives, personal and collective/institutional, and how these speak to each other, until I'd developed habits of gathering data that seems maybe trivial and then paying attention and waiting and listening to the questions that slowly emerge as relevant.

The speaker in this poem feels sorry for herself because she hasn't made "more" of her life and because there's some strain in her relationship with her family of origin. The images heighten and exaggerate the amount of privilege involved but they don't invent it. Watching the video,
I struggle to imagine what possible reasons this speaker could have for her self-pity. This speaker in this poem, I conclude, is tone-deaf, over-privileged, and morally dubious at best. Unfortunately, the speaker in this poem is – in large part – me. That's pretty uncomfortable.

But it's real data, these questions are relevant and important. And in bringing together an artful form and a set of creative analytic techniques, I'm coming to know more than I knew before, possibly more than I wanted to know, and included in there, I'm encountering some things that were – from my starting point – unknowable. This poem is redolent with questions. This poem reminds me that the postmodern, autoethnographical researcher is not

"god-of-the-data" and is also not in any way isolated or shielded from the topic under examination. Part of the project of narrative inquiry, at least, according to what this kind of inquiry can do, that I value, is to give us a mechanism through which we can deconstruct the researcher hero-or-anti-hero binary.

JL:
Comfort: I compare and contrast enjoyment and comfort in my co-inquiry with Paula. When we feel pleased or satisfied, are we responding to joy or comfort or both? How does this influence how we conceive what we do in our inquiries and research as of use, useful or useless?

I asked Paula, "what was soothing and thus joyful for you when writing this poem? How are we determining what is reasonable i.e., the "right" thing to do in our inquiries and research? Especially when we write/inquire (or be/act/live) with/about family – who's joy and comfort are we attending to? How do we make choices on what risks are worth taking and who do we endanger? In the context of resisting conformity, how do we make choices in midst of societal or inherited standards of right/reasonable and where we decide to "sail off" and take risks?

Hearing myself ask Paula those questions, I ask myself the same as I inquire with and in between inherited narratives, disparate language systems and opposing cultural realities. I am curious on what creates/provides each of us a safe space or simply a sense of safety and trust to inquire on emotionally charged topics? What do I need in such spaces as I wish to attune to, express and connect diverse healing needs? In the context of research as an offering to others, how, when and where would our inquiries be useful for us and for others? I embark on arts-based reflexive action research in hope to practice creative and analytical processes to help me "get into", move closer and deeper into what matters to my "heart and soul", to understand my "self-in-relation" as part of my aspiration to create "useful" research. In co-inquiring with Paula, I have come to experience the co-creation of trusting and comfort-nurturing spaces that allow for discomfort, breathing spaces, blank spaces, uncertainty, complexity and multitudes. I feel able to trust a not-knowing and process of coming-into-being, in relationship. Such spaces prove *useful* in supporting my needed reflexive inquiries in solitude. I express these sentiments in the image (as shown below) to conclude my video poem, connecting my calligraphy of the Chinese character for courage, 勇, with a "visual poetry art" created with ink and textiles by Frédérique Gourdon (2022), to convey the entwining of multitudes - the co-creating of generative inquiry cycles, alone and together, through a co-inquiry kinship.

Artwork by Frederique Gourdon

"and gaze snagged on wonder"

Concluding thoughts:

This paper "lifts the veil" on the thinking, writing and discussion that went into and underpinned the twelve-minute video-performance that we co-created and presented at ISAN 2023. We hope that the paper works in its own right as an attempt to explore both our process of co-inquiring and also convey the present questions and energies we hold around our inquiry content. This paper is framed by two 'beginnings', the abstract that expressed our position at our initial proposal for ISAN 2023 and a summary of the scene and dialogue that opened our video. From these two points, we move into a long section that loops through questions that held our attention through the process of planning and making our co-presentation. Though these explorations scaffolded the content of our video, they did not feature directly but, we hope, soaked and infused how we presented ourselves, conducted ourselves; how we interacted.

These topics were constantly present in our minds, in our writings, emerging in the correspondence and planning calls between us. It has been a joy to be able to make them visible. We hope and trust that, both in approach and content, this work will serve as an encouragement to other scholars to insist on staying with and making visible our uncertainties, our wobbles, our repetitions. In our experience, the sometimes-frustrating, sometimes-bewildering, often out-of-step-culturally lostness of these times before-clarity, before-concluding, are rich places where our knowing can start to shift, where insight can brew and bubble and arise. We wish our fellow-inquirers joy-in-confusion, comfort-in-uncertainty, patience-with-the-process.

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Endnote:

Chinese character (Traditional)	Romanized *pinyin* (Mandarin | Cantonese)	Translation
賢	Xián | Yeen	Worthy / able
良	Liáng | Leung	Kind / gentle
淑	Shū | Suk	Pure / chaste
德	Dé | Duk	Virtue / morality

Appendix One: Video resources on YouTube

Our ISAN conference video is here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjHHWfKndrE
Other videos mentioned in our co-presentation and paper can be accessed via these links:

Joan Lau *Poetry/Calligraphy: Crafting Bilingual Knowing* https://youtu.be/JyVm6THKd5U

Paula Aamli *Lighten Our Darkness (Ocean Racing Poem)* https://youtu.be/-PxZZiZ3tCo
Paula Aamli *Discouragement (The Discouraged Sheep Poem)* https://youtu.be/r82r80bS7Qo
Paula Aamli *Taking Stock in Mid-L*ife https://youtu.be/6qobjQUZziI

Appendix Two: Taking stock in mid-life at the request of Mary Oliver (prose poem)

A year or so ago, my mother finally down-sized, not from my actual childhood home, but the one she moved to after my brother and I were gone and after the divorce, and she sent my brother round with a big musty-smelling box that had been stored in her draughty garage for maybe a decade and it sat on the sofa-bed in the spare room for a few weeks, leaving a mildew patch on the cushions and when I unpacked it one of the damp-flavoured mementos vomited onto the carpet was a wood-framed canvas portrait photograph from my graduation and I remember that astonishingly the whole family had been there, thanks to no small effort by my brother, and yet no-one else is standing beside me, and from the full-wattage smile on my face, doesn't seem this bothered me at the time, which I wonder about, now, a little, and I discover I used to assume the picture was never on display in her house when I visited because it was taken when I was in one of my periodic fat phases and more recently I thought maybe it was because I looked too happy on my own in front of the honey-brick library or maybe because I have an annoying face, and then I wonder whether it's possible to recover that cloudless mindset after so many years of bumping into the edges of things and wonder, too, if I could channel a portion of that self-assured serenity next time I'm tempted to google "college alumni of note" and scan down the list as if my name might somehow be included.

The Integration of Science and Faith:
One Man's Story

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Abstract
Research indicates that evolution acceptance is typically lower among conservative of biblically literal religions like Mormonism. Science educators often deal with this issue in their classrooms which lead me to conduct a life history with a scientist who accepts evolution and is a practicing Mormon. His stories indicated that his academic prowess is a source of strength, confidence and pride. Religion could not provide him with all of the answers but science offered him that. He also had a deep appreciation for his third wife and the love that they shared. The idea that he was still connected to his loved ones through his beliefs provided him with a great sense of comfort and this comfort allowed him to reconcile ideas that might trouble others.

Keywords
Narrative, Science education, Life History, Evolution Acceptance

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Introduction

There is a misconception that evolution is in some way ungodly and should therefore be rejected by people of faith. Ash (2002) described the myth of "evil evolution" as being in conflict with Mormonism, a myth which persists especially among those unfamiliar with the fact that the Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) is neutral on the issue of evolution. Baker, Rogers, and Moser (2018) asserted that despite this overt neutrality, there is tacit discouragement of accepting human evolution. In contrast, many mainstream religions accept evolution as true (e.g. Catholicism and reform Judaism) (Zimmerman, 2010). I was interested in developing a deeper understanding of the process by which those scientists who are also people of faith, come to their worldview and understanding of the diversity of life on the planet. My interest in this stems from the fact that I have witnessed my own students struggle with this very issue in my college level biology courses. From my experience in the classroom, it seems that those students who have been raised in a religion that rejects evolution have a more difficult time understanding the science behind the theory of evolution by natural selection and applying the idea to their own experiences.

This topic is currently relevant in education because there is disagreement in the United States of America regarding the educational treatment for explaining the diversity of life on the planet. On one side, supporters of evolution by natural selection (based on Darwin's theories) argue that this is the only theory that should be taught in science classrooms, whereas proponents of creationism (based on religious beliefs) suggest that it be taught alongside evolution as a scientific alternative (e.g., Wiles, 2011). In the past, individuals have tried unsuccessfully to argue that creationism should be taught in public schools (for a summary see Moore, 2007 and Wiles, 2011). The courts have struck down the teaching of creationism in the classroom, ruling it

unconstitutional as it violates the separation of church and state (Moore, 2007; Wiles, 2011). Teachers however, are still faced with questions, challenges, and arguments from students and parents regarding the validity of evolution by natural selection (Alters, 2005).

Given that there is very little controversy among scientists about the validity of the theory of evolution (e.g. Camp, 2004; Scott & Branch, 2003), the controversy of what to teach our students in science class is more cultural or societal than scientific. There seems to be a gap between what scientists know and what much of the public believes (Campbell & Daughtrey, 2006). Historically, more than 40% of adults in the USA reject the theory of evolution and believe that the earth was created in the way the Bible suggests (Miller et al.,, 2006; Pew Research Center, 2014). This trend is even more pronounced among Mormons where nearly 60% of those who identify as belonging to the LDS reject evolution as the explanation for human origins, and among those who do accept evolution, most believe it was guided by a supreme being (Miller, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2014). Research has demonstrated that evolution acceptance is negatively correlated with religiosity (e.g., Barnes et al. 2009; Lawson & Worsnop 1992; Manwaring et al., 2015; Meadows, et al., 2000; Moore, et al., 2011). This has also been observed among Mormon undergraduate students (Manwaring, et al., 2015). There is a definite need to address the lack of agreement between scientists and the public in the classroom.

My goal here is to address the question of how individuals who have seemingly integrated both a scientific and a faith-based perspective develop their worldview. I examine this issue from the angle of exploring how one scientist, who is also a member of a religion in which many believers reject evolution, understood this issue and the diversity of life on the planet. I hope to be able to understand how a man of science who was also a man of faith reconciles two seemingly different ways of viewing the world. Or, if he even reconciles them at all? I also explore how his understanding of the world has been influenced and shaped by his experiences.

Methods

The Life History of Reed: One Man of both Science and Faith

I chose my participant because he has the somewhat unique characteristics of being a practicing scientist who believes in evolution while also being a man of faith. Reed Howard (pseudonym) is a 75-year-old community college chemistry and physics professor with years of previous experience as a chemist in the commercial market. He is also a practicing, devout Mormon. He is Mormon and decided to become a chemist once he was in college and therefore has many years of experience integrating his thoughts and ideas about both.

Reed is Caucasian and grew up in Los Angeles with parents and two adopted siblings. Growing up, his family was relatively comfortable financially and he attended public school until college. As a young man, he most likely presented a strong figure as he excelled both physically and academically, leading him to have a strong sense of self confidence. When I met him, he was sweet and kind but clearly very aware of his accomplishments. He often spoke in a loud voice, which could be intimidating but was not meant to be so. He has two children and has been married three times and treasured his relationship with his current (at the time of research) wife, Deborah.

I chose to conduct a life history because it could provide insight into both a person's experiences and how those experiences allow them to construct knowledge, perceive the world, make decisions and interact with others (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Peacock & Holland, 1993). I felt this method was an effective way to get at the question of how Reed formed his worldview, and the processes and factors that shaped how and what he thinks about science and faith. This

method was also appropriate here because it required a significant rapport between the discussants, and Reed and I had that. We had worked closely together for three years and had shared many conversations about each other's lives as well as our religious and scientific views. This study offered us a chance to continue these conversations in more depth and to explore the roots of his views.

I decided to use an open narrative style in which I asked Reed occasional open-ended questions about his life and he responded, usually carrying the conversation. Aside from follow-up questions aimed at learning more details, Reed did most of the talking. We typically met in Reed's office at work. The office is connected to another office by a door that closes so it afforded audio if not visual privacy. His office was generally cluttered with teaching materials, chemistry and physics books, and various machine parts. We would sit across from each other, with no desk or table in between us (this is also how we often chat casually). Reed and I met specifically for the purposes of this study once each week for one to three hours over the course of one month and then less regularly over the course of the year; each of the meetings were recorded. The recordings were transcribed both by me and a professional transcriber, and then reviewed line by line for accuracy by me. I also had the opportunity to go with him to his church, where he gave me a tour and discussed his thoughts about the church and its practices. Because of our longstanding friendship, I felt comfortable asking follow-up questions and at times pointing out what I perceived to be inconsistencies? We frequently laughed and shared stories that went beyond the point of the study. Some of our meetings took place over a meal and when we had concluded these regular meetings, both of us shared that we missed having our long talks.

I used a grounded approach to analyze the data, focusing on the themes that emerged repeatedly throughout our conversations. Both the initial propositions and the codes came from the data. I utilized open holistic coding with the data (Maxwell, 2013) and centered on the stories and thoughts that related to his worldview and the integration of science and faith. Specifically, I coded the data for the importance of relationships the desire to be accepted for who he is, the importance of rationality/objectivity in his decision making, and times when he specifically addresses the issue of reconciling science (especially evolution) and faith.I have only included some of his thoughts and stories that he shared with me and have changed some of the names, dates and small details to protect his identity.

Reed's Experiences

Parental experiences that impacted the child

Parental relationships are important as parents often provide the first exposure that we have to religion. In fact, Reed shared with me that he has always been Mormon and when I asked how he figured that out, he just replied, "well, I just remember going to church," with his family. While some parents might have encouraged him towards orthodoxy within the church his parents encouraged him to question things, to apply rationality and objectivity to emotional situations:

> My mother and father sat down and told me that I shouldn't jump to
> conclusions, we didn't have all the information. You can't just take one little
> piece and run with it, you have got to look at the whole picture. This was a
> really important moment in my life.

Reed shared with me that he did question his faith with regard to contradictions between the creation story, the Genesis of the Bible, and what he was learning in school. He recalled his earliest memory of that being in 5th grade when he first began to learn about dinosaurs:

I can remember in elementary school learning about dinosaurs. The Genesis story says the earth was created in 6 days and no matter how you cut it, unless those are awfully long days, it doesn't make much room for dinosaurs. There are dinosaur bones. There are replicas of dinosaurs. There is evidence that dinosaurs were here, which made me place less credence in the Genesis story. The science made much more sense to me than the Genesis story.

When I asked him more about how he would have resolved that issue as a child, he told me that

I asked the school teacher. I probably asked my mother too and I probably asked my father. My mother would have been really easy. She would have gone in the library, picked out two or three books and said figure it out for yourself. My father would have said 'Do what your mother said.'.

Adult experiences that shaped the man

Reed recounted several instances from his childhood and time in college where he emphasized the importance of his educational experience. He clearly sees his intellectual abilities as a source of confidence and took pride in telling me the stories. At the same time Reed was exploring educational interests, he was also having his first experience with serious romantic relationships which contributed to a connection between his desire for a lasting relationship and his faith. After two divorces he began searching for a church community in which to involve himself. Here he recounted the acceptance he felt upon rejoining the church:

What I found was, this is what I wanted to get back to. These were people who just accepted me for being the weird guy that I am. It was just wonderful. I felt at home. It's that feeling that you're accepted…I'm accepted for who I am. It changed my whole view of everything. It was that acceptance, that they considered me a valuable part of their group, which I never felt in the other places except at the one ward that I belonged to when I was young and growing up and I was a part of that. This was really important.

This was a pivotal time in his life as it led him to his wife, Deborah, of 32 years (she passed away after this research was completed). Reed's love for Deborah is one of the driving forces of his life and is part of his faith. He explained to me that in Mormonism, a husband and wife are yoked to each other, equal partners, and if they are sealed (married) in a Mormon temple they will be together in eternity. This relationship and its significance in his life has become foundational in the resurgence of Reed's belief in the Mormon faith, further reinforced when she was diagnosed with cancer over a decade earlier . His faith offered him comfort regarding the illness and the future loss of his wife, and he became choked up as he explained the magnitude of his beliefs.

I just have to tell you, it's an incredibly powerful concept, because if you really love someone, you want to be with them forever. I just have to tell you that I'm just so thrilled that Deborah and I had that opportunity together. It's like no matter what happens we are still going to be ok. There is just a wonderful feeling that comes from that… Even if it never happens, the fact is that you believe it and it becomes part of your life and it makes the relationship all the sweeter.

One of the reasons faith is so important for him, is because of its role in preserving relationships that might otherwise be lost with death. The need for comfort, to know that everything will all work it out is strong within in Reed as he explained to me:

That's why faith and hope to me are important, because these are things that are very close to my heart. They are tender and they are important because these

connections that we make in life, whether they are with other humans or animals or whatever, those are really important. I mean if we were just all going to go into some mass of oneness and it was all over and there was nothing else it would probably change my view of things, but that isn't where my head is so I'm happy…That's what my faith does for me.

Given the significance of his spiritual beliefs with regard to relationship preservation, I wondered how he could reconcile those beliefs with his scientific understanding of the natural world. When I explicitly asked him about evolution and religion, he shared:

Religion is a feeling, emotional kind of thing that flies in the face of scientific inquiry. There is always this tension going on in my life between the faith part and the science part and there has to be because I could not be who I am if that tension didn't always be there. What I have found is that I've gotten older and I've learned more and I've gotten to be less dogmatic about a lot of things in terms of ways that I looked at the world earlier. Maybe it's because of Deborah's illness. I want her to live so much, I want us to be together. It's made me come to the conclusion that I can believe what I believe. I can have faith that things are going to be ok and that I have done the things that, according to my set of values and my beliefs, are correct that I'm doing the right thing.

Here, Reed explained how he feels about the way he lives his life and his beliefs. "My life as a scientist, as a Mormon, has a lot of cognitive dissonance in it and I can live with that. That's really what it boils down to. I can live with the dissonance because I don't have to have everything answered now."

Discussion

Being raised as an active Mormon, a religion that is pervasive throughout Reed's life, has helped him to form a worldview that recognizes God's role in the formation of the planet and the diversity of life on the planet. At the same time, Reed was also encouraged to view the world through a scientific lens from his parents who valued academics, and who encouraged him to seek answers to his questions. Interestingly, he has been able to bring together both science and faith--two seemingly contradictory perspectives--in his own worldview. I contend that his adherence to his religious faith is due to two things: his desire to be accepted and belong and his desire to maintain and hold onto relationships.

For Reed, the importance of relationships (parents, mentors, and women) and belonging cannot be overstated. Research has shown that beliefs are instrumental in promoting a sense of belonging at an individual and group level and individuals who align with more traditional beliefs are more likely to feel like they belong (Stroop 2011). Furthermore, having a sense of belonging can offer benefits including social ties and other cultural aspects of belonging to a traditional religion (Ten Kate et al., 2017). Belonging to a religious community can lead to increased life satisfaction by "fostering a sense of solidarity and commitment through a shared framework of meaning" and in some cases, life satisfaction can be higher in those with religious affiliation than without (Ten Kate, 2017).

Reed discussed extensively how important it is to him to be accepted by those he works with and the members of his faith that he interacts with. He repeatedly told me, "I am who I am," meaning he is a scientist *and* a Mormon. Furthermore, if people cannot accept that he has his opinions (about evolution among other things), then he feels he cannot participate in that

community. His Mormon community not only accepts him but values and appreciates his opinions, even when he may not agree with the group. This acceptance is very powerful and is wrapped up with his relationship with his wife, Deborah.

After two failed marriages, Reed has a deep appreciation for his wife and the love that they shared. He also became teary when explaining to me how important it was to him that he knew they would be together in eternity because they were sealed in a Mormon temple. While he acknowledged that he cannot know for sure if this is true, he asserted that it did not really matter, believing it was enough and very important to him. This idea that he is still connected to his loved ones who have died provides him with a great sense of comfort.I think the comfort of this eternal connection is so strong that it allows Reed to reconcile ideas that might trouble others. He may be willing to overlook the contradictions in his life because he is a scientist who believes in evolution but needs to have his faith in order to be at peace in the world.

From the stories that Reed shared, it is clear that he sees his academic prowess as a source of strength, confidence and pride. He emphasized the importance of rationality (a characteristic of the sciences) in his decision making, largely influenced by his parents. Reed expressed that as a young man, he wanted all of the answers. Science is a field that is largely, if not entirely based on asking questions and systematically finding the answers. Reed expressed that as a young man, he wanted all of the answers.While religion could not provide that for him as a young adult, what he shared with me suggested that perhapsI believe that science offered him a place to do just that.

The strong sense of belonging and comfort, of appreciation that Reed got from being an active Mormon, made it essential for him to balance his religious views with what he knew about the world from a scientific perspective. We talked at great length about how those two viewpoints could be integrated and while he explained some of the specifics he also recognized that he did not really know the answer. Moreover, he accepted that he would not be able to figure out the answer in this lifetime but that he was willing to live with that. It seemed the major reasons that he was content to live with his self-recognized tension and dissonance was the power of his love for his wife (and his desire to be with her forever) and the importance of being part of a group that accepted and appreciated him.

That being said, Reed never fully addressed how he truly handles those contradictions. He emphatically repeated, "I am who I am" but it seems to me that to some extent, in order to be accepted and be successful in both worlds (science and faith), he has to juxtapose the two worldviews somewhat separately and try to move between them, from one to the other. This phenomenon could extend beyond Reed to other scientists who are also people of faith. Several strategies, including the redefining of boundaries between science and faith have been identified as being employed by scientists who are also people of faith (Ecklund et al., 2011). The scientific world is relatively polarized or at least is seen to be opposed to faith and faith – based ideas. I imagine it would be challenging to be a scientist who is a person of faith, especially if that faith is more orthodox or dogmatic.

While Reed asserted that he does handle the contradiction, he also acknowledged that to some extent, he is just living with the tension and that's who he is. While he and I have developed a unique and close friendship that I treasure, I still wonder: how does that really work?

Implications

My work with Reed provided insights that have potential implications for teacher education, student education in the sciences, and science as a whole. Understanding where individuals are coming from is essential. The stories that Reed shared made it clear that any assumptions about how people view the world can be flawed. Being religious did not necessitate a disbelief in evolution. It is possible for people to accept evolution and believe in a religious faith. This realization could impact how we educate future teachers and how those teachers educate our students.

Specifically, teacher education should take into account the understanding that especially science teachers should not only develop an understanding of evolutionary theory but should be aware that students most likely already have a way of viewing the world (typically learned from parents) that is not consistent with a scientific worldview. Perhaps teachers should be taught about the continuum of worldviews regarding evolution that exists (Scott, 2000) ranging from literal biblical creationism all the way to atheism. A greater understanding of this issue would allow them to be better prepared within the classroom.

Furthermore, in science classes, the laws of our government currently do not support the teaching of any faith based or religious ideas that explain the diversity of life on the planet. Yet, it is important to recognize that our students come into the class with their own views and we have a better chance of reaching and engaging them if we can understand their perspective (Barnes et al., 2020; Borgerding et al., 2017). While I do not advocate the instruction of non-scientific material in a science class, it may be that more instruction on what the nature of science is, how scientists view the world, could be beneficial to student understanding of scientific theories. This idea is advocated by others within the fields of education and science (e.g., Carter & Welsh, 2010; Sampson & Gerbino, 2010).

In the field of biology there is a misconception that the lack of acceptance of evolution is mostly or solely based on ignorance (e.g., Johnson, 2013). Dorner and Petto (2013) suggest instead that there are many factors that contribute to a lack of accepting or understanding the scientific views on the diversity of life (for a summary see Allmon, 2011 or Alters & Alters, 2001), including the idea that people typically want to maintain a reality that is consistent with their beliefs. The stories that Reed shared with me offer a unique look into the mind of a man who has found a way to both maintain his beliefs and accept scientific explanations. While I'm not suggesting that we place the scientific view above all else, I think most would agree that an understanding of science is beneficial. Perhaps we can use the ideas from this paper and others like it to help us move our education system towards a more compassionate way of encouraging students to understand science.

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Frenzy or Quitting: Positioning Myself Within these Extremes as a Near to Retirement Professor

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Abstract

Will I continue like this? Day after day adding a varied range of activities, mostly administrative, while I am supposed to be doing research and teaching.

Retirement comes as an option: I will turn 65 next year, which would allow me to quit my job, forfeiting all professional activities at my university.

Parallel to this all or nothing dilemma that the intense bureaucratization of public universities has testified in Mexico in the last years, I myself have experienced two other major slow, but continuous processes. One is letting go my ability to numb my feelings. The other is realizing that my initial search for belonging to a community of academics, focused on contributing to social justice, had been replaced with competition for personal success and an income increase.

Keywords

Retirement, neo-liberal universities, social justice.

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1:30 pm: So far today I have checked emails, filled out forms for a graduate student to be able to defend her master's thesis, reviewed programs on methodology from other colleagues, attended a department meeting, filled out part of the long and online format to prove my productivity... More than half of my supposed 8-hour day has passed, and I have not done much of what I consider to be "substantive work". Will I continue like this? Day after day adding a varied range of activities, mostly administrative, while I am supposed to be doing research.

Retirement comes as an option: I will turn 65 next year, which would allow me to quit my job, receiving about 60% of my present income and forfeiting all professional activities at my university. There is no other option given to professors here. We can either stay and work full time, or completely quit all professional activities within the university.

I have been puzzled over these, either too much or nothing at all, extreme options for a couple of years. And, as the time to make a decision approaches, I find myself pondering what to do.

Parallel to this all or nothing dilemma that the intense bureaucratization of public universities has testified in Mexico in the last years, I myself have experienced two other major slow, but continuous processes. One is letting go my ability to numb my feelings. The other is realizing that my initial search for belonging to a community of academics, focused on contributing to social justice, had been replaced with competition for personal success and an income increase.

The last two processes I have mentioned become clearer as I reread Art Bochner's texts on academic life (Bochner, 1997). There, he refers to four accounts of women who questioned academic life, three of whom retired early and one who ended up in a difficult faculty position.

The university is filled with professors who are depressed (Tompkins 1996). I've never considered myself one of them, but I've felt on the edge, fighting against depression a

number of times. The experience of depression I'm talking about is not the kind we usually think about. What I'm talking about is *institutional depression*, a pattern of anxiety, hopelessness, demoralization, isolation, and disharmony that circulates through university life.[1]

As I continued reading Art´s article, I just found something else that strongly relates to what I have been thinking about for years: "...I was stunned to learn how tame the academic world is in comparison to the wilderness of lived experience".[2]

Academic life is impersonal, not intimate. It provides a web of distractions. The web protects us against the invasion of helplessness, anxiety, and isolation we would feel if we faced the human condition honestly.[3]

A few months ago, I read something else related to this (not) dealing with my emotions:

Al-Anon assured me that I do have feelings, but that I had lost contact with them because of living with alcoholism for years and having denied any sign of anger, joy, or sadness. When I began to recover, I began to feel... [4]

This has not resulted from one epiphany alone. The pattern to block my feelings was installed in my life much earlier before being in contact with university life. Nevertheless, it crystalized and grew on me through graduate school, and became my survival strategy until a few years ago. In short, if the pattern to block my feelings relates to previous and mostly early family lessons, university life has certainly lent me a hand to master the art of (not) dealing with my emotions.

I have evolved out of these numbing patterns through a long personal journey that has implied a double path: At the more personal level, with years of therapy and becoming a member of Al-Anon, and at the academic level, unlearning my traditional training as a sociologist and becoming an autoethnographer. It is by using this complex set of tools that I have moved (it has been a process which is not finished) out of the numbing patterns in which I was installed for decades.

It is likely that none of the books or articles I have written will become very well known. However, there are many people who have come to me through the years, particularly groups of students I have taught autoethnography and the graduate and undergraduate theses I have directed, that have allowed me to testify to the extent to which I have contributed for some others to view their experiences from a different perspective, and more, to make decisions considering what they have learned through these autoethnographic writings.

Impact, such a precious word in academia, has twisted the appreciation I have of my work. I want to focus on carefully noticing and remembering the relevance of my work as it contributes to meaning-making and dialogue on a personal level within and outside academia and do that, not in terms of measured impact, like in academic journals and using quantitative criteria.

If I remember that, I can follow the light through the cracks again with Art and Carolyn's writing as they refer to their own retirement. Art affirms that:

What I want to do, what I find meaningful, is making people feel stuff, continuing my quest to put into circulation self-clarity, evocative, and transforming stories; and keep alive the conversation in the human sciences about what can make life good.[5]

[1] Arthur P. Bochner, "It's about time: Narrative and the Divided Self*," Qualitative Inquiry* 3, no. 4 (1997): 431.

[2] Arthur P. Bochner, "It's about time: Narrative and the Divided Self," 421.

[3] Arthur P. Bochner, "It's about time: Narrative and the Divided Self," 421.

[4] Al-Anon Family Groups, *Valor para cambiar*, (Virginia: Al-Anon, 1992): 114 (self-translation).

[5] Arthur P. Bochner, "A meaningful academic life: Improvised, amusing, unsettling", *Nauki o Wychowaniu. Studia Interdyscyplinarne/Educational Sciences: Interdisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 8 (2019): 255.

And Carolyn writes: "Together, we create a new chapter where talk is still the kiss of life."[6]

A few weeks after writing the previous paragraphs and months of working on this text and reflecting on what my professional life might be like if I retire, I realize that I have been somewhat depressed and doubtful about what I might do if I decide to leave the university. I continue to feel unwilling to stay due to the highly bureaucratized procedures associated with what is the neoliberal university.[7] I also realized how excessive I find those efforts to write papers, particularly when doing it in English, and simultaneously questioning if my writing has any impact. Finally, being torn between writing in the two languages, English and Spanish, challenges me not only regarding my linguistic limitations, but it again leads me to position myself as an outsider in both, the Anglo-Saxon, and the Latin American worlds.

Finally, knowing that I contribute to enhancing social justice, however in a limited manner, becomes a condition without which my sense of purpose fades away. I want to survive academia – whether it means remaining within the university or to retire – without losing the impetus to continue writing and living an autoethnographic life. This way, I wish I can continue to be a part of, and to expand, the autoethnographers' large family beyond languages and borders. If I do this humbly and acknowledging myself as a common human being, I will be satisfied.[8]

Closure

I had written parts of this paper to present at ICQI 2022. But since then something important changed.

The Mexican National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT), has recently changed the regulations regarding the National Researcher's System (SNI). Beginning next 2023, exactly the year I turn 65, researchers who turn that age who have been part of that system for at least 15 years, will be allowed to continue having the SNI 15 years more with no periodical evaluations, or need to prove any of those academic activities we have had to every 4 years. In a few words, we will be liberated from the bureaucratic burdens we go through in order to earn a significant part of our total income.

For me this change has at least two significative consequences. The most obvious, is that instead of receiving 60% of my actual total income once I retire, with the regulation changes I would get 87%. There is no need to say much about what this would mean for my material life quality.

But there is something less evident at first sight: Since I found this out, and once I appeared on the list of researchers that got the nomination to remain as member of SNI, I have begun to reencounter myself with that woman who has for decades been willing to understand herself and others in order to make this a fairer world. That person who can continue

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[6] Carolyn Ellis," A meaningful academic life: Loving, fulfilling, challenging, flabbergasting," *Nauki o Wychowaniu. Studia Interdyscyplinarne/Educational Sciences: Interdisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 8 (2019): 248.

[7] The term *neoliberal universities* has been discussed by numerous authors; for more sources you can read:
Silvia Bénard, Yolanda Padilla, and Laura Padilla, "Somos académicas privilegiadas y aun así..." Astrolabio, no. 20 (2018): 256-275, https://revistas.unc.edu.ar/index.php/astrolabio/article/view/1770
Rocío Grediaga, and José Raúl Rodríguez, *Políticas públicas y cambios en la profesión académica en México en la última década.* (México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, ANUIES, 2004).
Laura Padilla, María Guadalupe Villaseñor, M. and Tiburcio Moreno, "La habilitación de los académicos mexicanos: una perspectiva desde la encuesta sobre la reconfiguración de la profesión académica en México," In *El futuro de la profesión académica: desafíos para los países emergentes*, Norberto Fernández and Mónica Marquina, comps., (Argentina: Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, 2012), 263-272.

[8] I have read and re-read Kafar as he refers to his relationship with Art and Carolyn, and how he entered the autoethnographic family... I look forward to becoming more and more part of that family.
Marcin Kafar, "Traveling with Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner, or how I became harmonized with the autoethnographic life," in *Advances in autoethnography and narrative inquiry. Reflections on the legacy of Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner,* eds. Tony E. Adams, Robin M. Boylorn, and Lisa M. Tillmann (London: Routledge), 48-63

contributing to clear (herself) out regarding the meaning of life through reflexivity, deep human interactions with others, and practicing writing.

If I gain back the strength to continue with this activity as a retiree, I could reorganize my life and say goodbye to a labyrinth of forms, digital platforms, evaluations of all kinds, and regulations, which hold no meaning for me.

I hope I get the energy to do that! I feel tired, with burnout syndrome, I have been told. So, I am now taking my free time trying to make my home the place where I can continue practicing writing, which for me is such a meaningful activity, but with no check-in clock, deadlines, forms and digital controls. I can read and write with freedom and at my pace, having meaningful and profound conversations with others, and, well, gardening, yes, a lot of gardening!

The Omnipresence of Black Joy

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Abstract

The Omnipresence of Black Joy discussion set out to provide a counter story to the deficit narratives that are typically associated with research regarding Black experiences. While grounding this conversation in Omni's Kujima Theory of Collective Self-Motivation, the panelists shared their personal experiences with Black Joy to create an open dialogue that supported the healing and wholeness of Black people. Four poetic pillars of Black Joy were discussed during this 2023 panel discussion: Black Joy is 1) "... a Statement," 2) "... a Stride," 3) "...Permission", and 4) "Pride."

Keywords

Black people, Joy, Community, Resistance, Pride

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Brief Welcome from Chris Omni

"Greetings to my Beloved Black Sista Queens. Greetings to my Beautiful Black Brothers. Greetings to every soul of Love and Light who is reading and receiving the voice and agency of a Black woman. I welcome you!

I welcome you to a recap of The Omnipresence of Black Joy experience which represented "a process of being in service to political and social change on behalf of communities that one represents and is responsible to" (Dillard, 2008, pg. 65). As a Black female doctoral candidate at a predominately White institution (PWI), I developed this panel discussion to support a growing body of Black joy scholarship and service that pours directly into the minds, bodies, and spirits of Black people everywhere with a particular focus on Black women of all ages.

This culturally tailored experience served as a way to help the next generation of leaders to navigate adulthood, personhood, and self-love all while prioritizing their own self-restoration practices. Furthermore, this experience provided transformative knowledge that disrupted the deficit narratives that have traditionally been the undercurrent of research regarding the Black experience. Just by thinking about the experience, I am feeling the same joy I experienced on January 5, 2023!!!

The Omnipresence of Black Joy panel discussion* modeled what it possible when you perform academia differently (Ulmer, 2017). It also highlighted and honored the lived experiences of young, ages 18-20, Black women (Collins, 1996) from a PWI. Together, this experience gave me, a near 50-year-young Black Joy scholar, artist, and activist, hope for the future of Black joy research. It was truly my honor to serve as the moderator for this lively, interactive discussion. Now, I proudly sit back and let my research mentees, Ashley Powell [AP] shown on the left and Michelle Gunn [MG] shown on the right, guide the remainder of this discussion. Happy Reading!"

~Chris Omni, MPH

What is Black Joy?

According to Chris Omni, and supported by survey data, Black Joy is a statement, a stride, permission, and pride. Black Joy is even a form of resistance and rest (Omni, 2022). These poetic pillars guided our conversation during the 2023 International Symposium on Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry. As members of "The Omnipresence of Black Joy" panel discussion, led by research mentor Mrs. Chris Omni, MPH, we, Ashley and Michelle, made great strides in both living and understanding the pillars of Black joy.

To prepare for this conversation about Black Joy, we were tasked with the completion of literature reviews, the creation of a culturally tailored website, www.BlacktivateJoy.create.fsu.edu, and the design and dissemination of a Black Joy survey targeting Black students at Florida State University. Through all of this and our lived experiences, we were ready to share our research project and voices of Black joy with an international audience. Furthermore, this preparation presented new possibilities of engagement and served as a means to take protective action to honor and elevate our own individual spaces of joy (Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1986).

The Format

The 2023 International Symposium on Autoethnography and Narrative took place on January 5th, from 3:00 – 3:50 pm EST. We began our panel discussion on the Omnipresence of Black Joy with a grounding session that engaged the audience in breathwork, led by Mrs. Omni. During the breathwork, we simply breathed together in unity to recognize everyone who came to support the agency and voice of Black women. We also took a breath for those who made it to 2023 and those who did not. Following the breathwork, each panelist introduced a little bit about themselves. This included our name, classification, major, why we chose this research project, and our specific niches. Most of us expressed that our reasoning for choosing this research experience came from wanting to be part of a project that centered not only joy but Blackness **and** joy; something that each of us could personally identify with.

After the introductions, Mrs.Omni gave background information regarding a previous international panel discussion held in partnership with London's Soundwalk September Global Festival. The panelists in that discussion were 30 - 35 years our senior and addressed the same four pillars of Black Joy. By focusing on an older demographic, The Omnipresence of Black Joy became both an international and intergenerational discussion about Black Joy. However, for our discussion, we centered our perspective from the lived experiences of being Black students attending a PWI (Adams, 2022). All of the panelists are undergraduate students in the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program at Florida State University (FSU), while Mrs. Omni, our moderator, is a doctoral candidate in FSU's Art Education department where she is researching Black Joy in green spaces.

Mrs. Omni shared a portion of her dissertation to provide an academic framing for our discussion. She introduced the three key theories that informed the development of Kujima's Theory of Collective Self Motivation - Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (Dillard, 2000), Womanism (Walker, 1984), and Luxocracy (Maparyan, 2016). Each of these theories supported the methodology, Endarkened Narrative Inquiry, used to guide the conversations associated with

four of the six pillars of Black Joy (McClish-Boyd and Bhattacharya, 2020) starting with *Black Joy is a Statement.*

Pillar I: Black Joy is a Statement

For the first pillar, we individually explained what Black joy meant to us and how that intersected with our daily lives. After we shared our responses, we heard from the audience. Mrs. Omni asked every Black person to share their Black Joy statement. And, to be inclusive of everyone present, she expanded the question and asked how each audience member related to and received our personal Black Joy statement.This deliberate engagement created a space where compassionate listening and empathetic joy (Batson, 2018) became an essential element of our interactive panel discussion. It was beautiful to see how our individual experiences of joy were vastly different but still complemented one another. For example, my [AP] Black joy statement consisted of being at peace with myself, while others found joy in being around family, or cooking at home. My [MG] response involved being my most authentic, Blackest self (Tennant, 2015) because my presence alone, especially at a PWI, is a Black Joy statement all by itself.

With the understanding that not every person identified as Black nor did everyone feel comfortable responding to our Black Joy statements, members of the audience were invited to engage in a "dance party of one (DPO)" as we transitioned between discussions. A "DPO" presented an opportunity to move your shoulders, snap your fingers, revisit old or new school dances, or simply bounce in your seat. This non-verbal communication among an audience that consisted of people from various age groups, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and geographic locations demonstrated that movement was an expression of joy that transcended all potential barriers. (Bakare-Yusuf, B. 2005). Now, it's time for YOUR dance break**.**

We invite you to pause your reading and dance for 30-seconds. Do you accept?

If so, let's dance in 5…4…3….2…GO!

Pillar II - Black Joy is a Stride

This pillar started with a specific question, "How do you slow down as a student when you have so many demands?" Mrs. Omni posed this question for two reasons - 1) because we, even as *young* Black women, have been presented with the unrealistic expectations of being Strong Black Women - an embodied narrative that prioritizes the needs and care of others over the needs and care of self (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T., 2009) and 2) because it is one of her aims to disrupt this multi-generational narrative by offering us an invitation to let BE-ing be enough.

Within this pillar, we discussed the need for balance as students who rarely have the time or take the time to slow down (Baker-Bell, 2017). We focused this talk on *how* we grant ourselves permission to pause and *what* we do in those spaces. Each of us responded with practical advice ranging from meditation, to spending time in green spaces, to doing our hair, or simply listening to music. I [MG] explained that this particular pillar was/is both a literal and metaphorical form of rest. It serves as an invitation to enjoy the moments when I walk across campus, and it allows me to be more present with the environment. I just move differently within the spaces that affirm and celebrate my Blackness.

We invite you to pause your reading, once again, for a DPO. Do you accept?

If so, let's dance in 5…4…3….2…GO!

Pillar III: Black Joy is Permission

The third pillar we focused on during this discussion was "Black Joy is Permission." The answers generated by this question were for other undergraduate students who might watch this panel discussion in the future and resonate with the conversation of Black Joy. Mrs. Omni pointed out that it was important for these students to not only hear from an older generation, but from their peers as well (McAdams & McLean, 2013). So, for this question, she asked, "What permissions do you want to grant undergraduate students around this topic of Black Joy?" This was an interesting question as we were able to address our peers directly. I [MG] began the discussion by extending a permission to be okay with not being okay. I assured them that it was perfectly okay to not have everything figured out and not have everything so neatly put together. Most importantly, I shared that slowing down was not something to be ashamed about. As young, educated, Black people in college, the fear of failure can be crippling. It is important to remind ourselves that we must give ourselves grace and permission to be young and immature. Seeing the audience affirm these words, for this question, was very powerful and resonated with us.

Before we explore the final pillar, do you know what time it is?

It is DPO time!! 5…4…3….2…GO!

Pillar IV: Black Joy is Pride

During the final discussion supporting Pillar IV, each of us shared something that made us proud from the previous semester. This was a weekly practice that Mrs. Omni engaged in with her Scholar Sistahs; she called it #TootToot Tuesdays. Our responses included answers that ranged from academic validations, personal growth, and simply being content with self. For me, I [MG] was proud of my ability to balance both academic endeavors and my extracurriculars. I was also proud of getting into my first international program of study in London during the upcoming Spring Break 2023. For me [AP], I was proud of my overall personal growth academically and socially. I was also very proud of how comfortable I had become in styling and taking care of my natural hair. I often have a love-hate relationship with my hair; something I am sure many Black women can relate to! This moment of prideful reflection allowed us to look back and take in the good energy of the previous year.

We cannot leave you without one final dance break. Are you ready?
5…4…3….2…GO!

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Brief Closing from Chris Omni

The Omnipresence of Black Joy experience was more than a panel discussion that bore my last name; it was an extension of my Divine assignment to create and hold spaces of healing

and self-restoration. It was part of a body of work that represented a journey of belonging. A journey of voice and agency. In between those spaces and journeys, a collective self emerged. With that emergence came a deep responsibility to the emotional, mental, and social success of other Black women. I thank you for pausing the demands of your day to hear directly from young, Black, and brilliant research mentees. Thank you for seeing the value in research that is absent Black pain and amplifies Black Joy. Thank you for bearing witness to the future of Black Joy scholarship! I am grateful!

Notes and Recognition

The Omnipresence of Black Joy panel discussion provided us with an opportunity to communicate our research, enhance our FSU Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program project, and participate in an ***international*** conversation about Black joy - pretty impressive for our first round of public presentations. Furthermore, this experience created a place of healing as well as understanding across generations and ethnicities fostering a beautiful discussion and exchange of ideas. The spirit of Collective-self was truly felt by all in attendance. Overall, this experience was enlightening and served as a pivotal moment in our individual journeys of becoming junior Black Joy scholars. Although not part of this manuscript, we want to acknowledge the contributions of our other two panelists* - Teya Moseley and Simone Eloi.

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