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DRAWING FROM DISCOURSE:
AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTIONS OF RACE, GENDER,
AND THE PRACTICE OF TEACHING ART

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by
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ABSTRACT

In this autoethnographic study, I consider how I, as a White woman teaching art, participate in, maneuver, and manipulate spoken and unspoken racialized and gendered discourses within the context of a high school with a diverse population of students. The study was performed in an urban public school in Southeastern Pennsylvania where I have served as an art teacher for 10 years. Through the data collection process of journaling over a 10-month period, I recorded reflections on conversations, speeches, and written communication with, between, and regarding teachers, students, parents, and school administrators.

I employed critical discourse analysis on these texts and draw upon Gender Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Whiteness Studies to examine the discourses that govern the school and inform its social conventions as manifested in my professional identity and practices in the classroom, collegial spaces, and school community. I also consider my own position as a White, female teacher in relation to White normativity and gender and racial stratification in U.S. educational systems, the discourses that maintain them, and how these discourses influence individuals’ teaching and learning stories which, in turn, influence future teachers and learners.

This study reflects on the contradictions, disappointments, triumphs, concerns, moral dilemmas, and the realizations of my own limitations in understandings as a White, female teacher and demonstrates challenges that come with doing the difficult work of self-reflection. I also show the value in performing an autoethnography as a way to evolve as a social justice educator and scholar as well as a means to give voice to teachers’ stories so that we can render visible the way gendered and racialized discourses shape the daily practice of teaching art.
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Autoethnographic Prologue:

My Journal/Journey From a Savior to a Cynic and Why Research is My Only Hope

I laugh at the ignorance and naivety of my younger teacher self. At the same time, I long to once again taste such enthusiasm and optimism. During my first several years of teaching, I always arrived early, stayed late into the night, and volunteered for every committee, event, and community service project that came up. I was convinced that if I worked hard, worked long, and came to every play, performance, and sporting event, it would make me a better teacher. If I was becoming a better teacher, others would strive to be better teachers, too. If teachers strived to be better, the students would also strive to be better. Our school would finally be better. Granted, I didn’t really know what “better” looked like, because I wasn’t really sure exactly how it was “bad.” I knew it was vastly different from my own working/middle-class, rural-suburban, predominately White high school, but those were mere demographics, right? What exactly made my students call our school “ghetto” while educational bureaucrats continuously called our school “failing?” I knew that we, as a school, had to get better, but who is “we,” and whose version of “better” am I striving for?

Over the next few years I volunteered, started clubs, coached, and joined every committee I could find. Both the building and central administration was pleased with my devotion to my students and the countless unpaid hours I worked; and they rewarded my compliant and selfless behavior with teaching awards and minor promotions within the staff. (Of course, I was used to and enjoyed being an overachieving “good girl” so there was a self-indulgent and narcissistic aspect of my work that went unrecognized.) I had watched
enough television and movies to know how to paint myself as the *White savior* and play the role as the benevolent White teacher who would help the poor Black and Latino students change their attitude and position in life (Choi, 2008; Hill 2009). I was confident in my decision to teach at a school with a high teacher turnover, low pay, fewer technology and supplies, and large class sizes because I felt I was well prepared for the challenge. In my self-perceived martyrdom, I could teach *those* kids (the ones that no one else is willing to teach) because I had a great education from a top research university. In my mind, I was ready for diversity: I had written lesson plans about Romare Bearden and Frieda Kahlo. Race and gender was not problematized, but romanticized through poster images of multi-colored handprints around a bright green and blue globe with generic proclamations “we are all the same on the inside.” As a White female from a racist/sexist background, I was feeling extraordinarily progressive as I entered my new job. I had envisioned myself *“helping” “them”* to become more like my (educated, middle-class, Christian) self, while assuming that they all *wanted* to be more like me.

My own educational history taught me that hard work and dedication could solve almost any problem, which seemed like a helpful mentality when I was informed that our school was “failing” according to state standards. The music teacher hired with me shared my enthusiasm and we instantly became close friends. We basked in each other’s energy and self-subscribed positive attitudes. We planned elaborate interdisciplinary projects together and had long philosophical conversations about how the school can turn itself around with enough positive thinking and action. Older, more experienced teachers rolled their eyes at our exuberance, but we knew that they were just *bitter*. We made a vow to each other that we would never, ever become “old curmudgeons” and that we would quit
teaching if cynicism every crept our outlooks on our practice or ability to enact change in the world.

My dear friend left teaching after five years. Exhausted, exasperated, and feeling defeated, she physically could not give any more of herself as her body deteriorated under the stress of the job she loved so dearly. She could no longer continue to sacrifice her health and personal relationships for a school whose administration refused to listen to her ideas and continued to cut her popular and innovative music program for standardized test-prep classes. Her departure was mourned by her students, many of whom still contact her from time to time. Her discoveries during teaching took her to pursue a career in the mental health field, where she hoped she would receive training to make a more profound impact on the lives of children and work in a field where, hopefully, an individual's emotional needs took precedent over their test scores and behavioral record.

I made it to year seven. After the glowing hopefulness of my first years wore off, I began noticing discrepancies between what I believed to be just and right and what was happening in practice. One of my extra-curricular activities was serving as the Strength and Conditioning Coach for the boy’s football team. Working closely with these predominately Black, male students allowed me to see the school from a drastically different perspective. Not only did I see the school from a very different standpoint from these students, I realized there was also discrepancy between how I regarded these young men as players versus how they were positioned as students, and I felt that the latter did not give accurate credit to the character exhibited by these boys in the weight room or on the football field. It seemed that when these young men stepped out of the realm of athletics and into the classroom, something went wrong. As a White, female, obedient, A-student, the classroom
was my safe and comfortable environment for as long as I could remember, so why were my players’ experiences so different when, as it seemed to me, we were comrades on the field and in practice. Meanwhile, I started noticing how my colleagues and I conferred about “the good kids,” who were almost always compliant, White female students. I looked back at the art department’s featured art students throughout the year: all female and almost all White. My selection to honor female art students in the classroom was in contradiction to how I bolstered male students in the athletic arena. As an education professional, I believed that I was successful in reaching and teaching all students equally, regardless of race or gender because I felt I had a good rapport with all students. Realizing that only the White female students were achieving the highest levels of academic success in my classroom revealed a major deficit in my own teaching and demonstrated that my good intentions were not enough to diminish my own racialized and gendered biases. Even though I had heightened attention to the discrimination experience by the Black, male football players, my own teaching seemed to only bolster the success of the White, “good girls”; the girls that were most like myself.

When I was able to truly envision the widening racial and gender gap, it began to crowd and overthrow the space once occupied by blissful optimism. Falling back on my own traditional methods of finding answers, I assumed if I worked hard enough, long enough, studied enough, a textbook or professor would reveal the problem and then solve the answer. Eighty-three graduate credits later, I still couldn’t locate either a question or an answer, but I knew I could never figure it out if I kept doing the same thing. So I left. I headed off for a doctoral program at the same university that once instilled me with such excitement and optimism for teaching. Hopefully there I could figure out what went wrong
after I left with my undergraduate degree in teaching art. How did I regress from a savior to a cynic?

I still met with my old friend to continue our philosophical conversations about how to improve the school. During these conversations, we realized we were both looking in and at the wrong places. Now that we were positioning ourselves as cynics, we limited ourselves to changing individuals, but felt powerless to change the structure. Furthermore, we realized we didn’t want to change individuals, we wanted to empower them so, perhaps, with enough support, they can change the structure. This is the best hope I have. This is the only hope I have left.

I have selfishly used this research as a source of hope. Since my return to my teaching context to perform my dissertation research after two years of full-time study, I sheepishly confess that I feel powerless and voiceless in my own school context. When I returned to my teaching context as a critical pedagogue rather than a department head, club sponsor, chaperone, and coach, everyone seemed less interested in listening to me. But I wanted to be heard more than ever. I have more to say, I have more passion, and possibly more rage, but my writing has been my only audience.

Perhaps I am not using the correct discourse to address my audience at work, or maybe I can no longer unproblematically participate in the normalized, taken for granted discourses of my workday. I no longer want to be the shining-star teacher in the eyes of my employers. In fact, myself and the few other critical pedagogues I know keep our heads down and do our best to try and fly under their radar. What a horrible contradiction to my understandings of what it is to be an art teacher for social justice!
This autoethnography explores the contradictions, disappointments, triumphs, concerns, and realizations made by myself, an art teacher of ten years in the same “underachieving” high school on the outskirts of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I will present versions of my past and present teacher self as how I am shaped by, participate in, navigate, and manipulate discourses of race and gender in my school context and examine how these discourses define identity markers and position individual subjects. Through this research, I find hope. After all, I am still here, still questioning, still teaching, and I refuse to stop doing either simultaneously.
Chapter One

Approaching the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Art Education

Despite what many K-12 students (including myself) were taught, gender and racial discrimination in U.S. schools did not end with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Gender and racial discrimination often only exists as history lessons in most school curriculum, but the lessons taught throughout U.S. schools about racial and gender identity are deeply embedded within the daily practices of all members of a school community. These are established on a daily basis through casual interactions as well as through policies and procedures on both local and federal levels. Of course, there are the daily interactions between teachers/colleagues/students/parents/administrators that establish relationships of sameness or difference, power or subordination, and allegiance or contention. Beyond the interactions of daily personal relationships, there are normalizing school practices; ways of doing things, policies, and procedures, that define and shape parties in relationship to each other as well as ascertaining the values of these policies’ authors as the dominant values of the school context. In a wider frame, there communal and societal discourses that establish public opinion and position educational parties from (White, female, art) teachers (in low-achieving, urban schools) to (minority/White, low-achieving/high-achieving) students. In this autoethnography, I reveal a glimpse of my own interactions with the racialized and gendered discourses in my teaching context as a way to illuminate some of the dominant school discourses and provide samples of how I am shaped by, conform to, challenge, manipulate, and navigate these discourses through my daily practices. In doing so, I can reveal the complexities of establishing a racialized and
gendered teacher identity and how this identity affects art teaching and ways of interacting within a school community.

In this chapter, I outline some of the most prevalent issues of race and racism (specifically against Black students) in a broader educational context of the United States. Specifically, I discuss systematic racial oppression as a trend in U.S. schools and how vague notions of *multiculturalism* have served as poor replacements for critical examinations of oppression and discrimination. Next, I discuss the absence of feminist discourse across the spectrum of educational practices. I define the problem by highlighting gender inequality in school and discuss the lack of feminist discussion in education as well as teacher education. In moving towards the unique nature of my own study, I provide more specific information about my particular research site to highlight how my teaching context fits into the larger issues I am raising through this autoethnography. I then outline my study’s purpose, specific research questions, and how I use/define particular terms that are critical to this work. Finally, I outline the limitations to my autoethnographic study as well it's significance to the field of racial and gender studies in education as well as the field of art education.

**Background of the Study**

When asked to describe “the perfect student,” most teachers paint a picture of an enthusiastic, polite, White girl (Paley, 2000). During my ten years of teaching art in an urban high school, I had come to realize that the Black male students were viewed by most of my colleagues to be confrontational and threatening to the learning environment. At the start of my second year of doctoral studies, I visited the art wing at the high school where I taught for seven years and my memories of injustices that lead me away from the school
were reaffirmed. As I was talking with a teacher in the hallway in between classes when a very tall and heavy Black male student came running towards us.

“Ms. C, can I get a hall pass? I know I can’t bring my bag in here, but I’m coming all the way from the gym and can’t make it to my locker,” he panted.

“No, that’s your responsibility,” she flatly replied.

“Can I leave my bag in your room then? Next to your desk or somethin?”

“No. You know the rules.” (I glanced under the teacher’s desk, where several of her ‘favorite’ students store their backpacks on a daily basis.)

“Well, what should I do? I’ll never make to my locker and back in time for the bell and I don’t want to be late to class.”

“Then I suggest you move quickly.”

“Ms. C, come on. Even if I run right now, I’ll never make it. Can’t you just write me a pass so I don’t get a detention?”

“The more you stand here and argue with me, the later you’re making yourself.” At this point an older White male teacher from down the hall stepped in to provide assistance.

“Is there a problem here?” he interjected.

“No!” the student replied. “I’m not trying to argue with anyone, I don’t want to get in trouble for being late to class!”

At this point, the male teacher continued to reprimand the young man for being combative to the female teacher, who had already turned away and struck up a conversation with the four White female students that were coming into the classroom. The teacher praised the girls for having their homework out and ready and thanked them (loudly) for being the “perfect students.” The Black male student threw his hands up in the
air, grumbled under his breath and took off running down the hallway towards his locker. At this point I asked the teacher if he was going to get a detention for being late and she replied, “Oh, don’t let him fool you. He pulls this stuff all the time. He’s constantly looking to make trouble.”

The teacher began introducing the art lesson of the day when the student returned. Since he missed the first part of the instructions, he approached the teacher to get caught up. He offered an olive branch by expressing his enthusiasm for the course content by showing her a new art application on his cell phone. The favor was returned by assigning him another detention because he had his cell phone out in the classroom. The student, and I, left the class disheartened that morning.

As an assistant football coach for many years in the same school, I developed close relationships with many of the Black male students. As football players, these students were often the most physically large bodies in the classroom and socially popular students among their peers. They carried a sense of confidence that would be admired and described as leadership in a White man. However, during conversations between sessions or outside of practice, many of my players complained to me about the racist teachers in the school. Upon closer observations, I saw that the students were correct: they were treated poorly by some very racist teachers. I also noticed that students that created the largest presence in the classroom were viewed as “trouble makers.” What I found particularly interesting was the fact that the most common punishment was removal from the classroom (and removing their presence). I confirmed my suspicions with visits to the suspension room, which was predominately occupied by Black male students.
Though every classroom, teacher, and student is unique, I believe that my teaching context is not drastically different from many other urban schools with a diverse student population and a relatively homogenous (White woman) teaching staff. In my own school, I find race to be a topic only discussed by a teachers and (conversely) many students. Gender, on the other hand seemed to be a topic more widely discussed, but a discourse of gender *inequality* is often absent from conversations between teachers and students. Through informal conversations at conferences with other teachers working at schools with similar demographics across the country, I could see that these patterns expanded further than my own school context and, though individual and specific in many ways, also paint a picture of some of the larger racial and gender inequities experienced in schools across the United States. The following sections describe the problems of racial and gender discrimination as they plague schools across the United States as well as some of the research that addresses these issues.

**Systematic Racial Oppression in U.S. Schools**

Curriculum and school rules/policies can be created or interpreted by teachers or administrators under the veil of “educating all students,” but these are often carried out in ways that are detrimental to a large population of learners. Educators like to believe that all students, even members of disenfranchised groups, leave school empowered to take charge of their own destinies (Sleeter & Grant, 1986). Sleeter and Grant (1986) suggest that the skills and content taught in schools needs to be broadened so that teachers and students can be more realistic about the realities of the oppressions in the world in which they live. Through this, students and teachers can work together to incite change and empowerment. Watkins (2001) warns that education can be used to liberate, but it can also oppress.
Racism in U.S. schools represents one of many institutionalized practices that maintain and perpetuate the domination of those (constructed as) White over racialized Others “through a discourse that presents the racial status quo as the natural order of things” (Ostertag & Armaline, 2011, p. 276). Blum (2002) also states that institutional racism sustains, or even intensifies, inequalities in accordance with “normal operating procedures” (p. 24).

According to a May 2012 report by the Center for Public Education, changing patterns of birth rate and immigration have put the United States on a short road to a rise in population diversity never before experienced by any nation. It stated that there will be no majority (more than 50%) racial group in the United States in the very near future. Despite the lack of a racial majority in the U.S. population, the nation’s educators do not reflect these demographics. The National Center for Education Statistics (hereafter referred to as NCES) (2010) reports that 83% of the nation’s teachers are White. Watkins (2001) and Delpit (2006) claim that Whites maintain a culture of power in U.S. schools. What is more troubling, Delpit (2006) adds, is that those in power are often least willing to acknowledge the existence of a structure that privileges the values and experiences of those Whites in charge educational decision making. Mills (1997) sees the Racial Contract as a failure to ask questions that challenge taken-for-granted ideas. “The fish do not see the water, and the Whites do not see the racial nature of White policy because it is natural to them, the element in which they move” (Mills, 1997, p. 76). Mills also points out that textbooks and course curriculum are most commonly designed by Whites who take their position so much for granted that they do not even see it as political, or as a form of domination. Nonetheless, this comfort (and ignorance) keeps Whites satisfied with their positions in society and believes it to be the right order of things.
As a result, a “colorblindness” develops in U.S. schools that serve the interests of White people who do not want to confront the racial disparities that surround them and helps them avoid facing their own racist presumptions and understandings by a de-racialization of education (Lewis, 2001). For many Whites, seeing race means being racist, and ethnicity is somehow bad, something to “see past” (Bell, 2002, p. 239). However, simple declarations of “I don’t see color” or “race doesn’t matter” do not eliminate systematic racial oppressions; it merely eliminates the need for a critical re-evaluation of policy and practice so as to perpetuate a White-centered educational system. In fact, Bell (2002) states that colorblindness is not an individual construction but rather part of an entire social fabric. This social fabric, she states, serves as a mechanism of White dominance while concurrently professing commitment to equality (Bell, 2002). Watkins (2001) adds that current ideology leads us to believe that education is somehow disconnected from the world of power, partisanship, and the shaping of the social order. This ideology, he states, is perceived by those in power as the “natural order,” and stops us from questioning the views that are actually a product of the dominant power (Watkins, 2001).

Delpit (2006) critiques the under-theorization of the role of a teachers’ own racial identity in shaping Black youth’s place in education. I agree with Delpit, but I also think we need to take it one step further and consider some of the most salient mechanisms that maintain White supremacy and shape images of Black youth’s place in society for not only teachers, but for the community at large and consider how mechanisms foster White

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1 Colorblindness refers to the notion that one does not engage in racial discrimination because the subject does not see differences in others’ skin color. A failure to acknowledge such important components of identity such as race and culture causes many educators to ignore important elements of their students’ understanding of themselves and the world. For more details, see Chapter Six.
supremacy in teacher discourse and practice. Communal attitudes and perceptions all come together to make up a dominant school discourse that promotes or demotes certain values and beliefs. Osertag and Armaline (2011) examined how race relations changed in the public opinion after the election of Barak Obama. They discovered a widespread belief that racism was reduced to individual actions and attitudes and was no longer a larger social problem. On the contrary, they also cited another study (Parker, 2010) that found that 45% of white supported right-wing ideals, only 35% believed blacks were hardworking, only 45% thought blacks were intelligent, and only 41% of Whites thought blacks were trustworthy, despite their denial of structural or systematic racism in the country.

Gallagher (2003) found that Whites often feel threatened as their proximity to Black populations increase, primarily out of fear of losing White economic, political, and social standing, thus creating a discord between White teachers and the students they teach. According to Matias (2013), these fears feel very real for White teachers who see themselves as willing to sacrifice themselves in the battle to humanize savage students who cuss at them, disrespect their presence, and cannot even read.

Perhaps what is most troubling about the existence of a negative image of Black youth in White public consciousness is how the White consciousness becomes THE consciousness through the normalization of these beliefs by a dominant group and the internalization of these beliefs by subordinate groups (Fanon, 1967; Rolling, 2003, 2008). Therefore, it is important to continue to examine the structures that maintain White imagination to be THE American public consciousness, particularly the structure of education. If education is led by mostly White women who fail to examine the source and origin of their own racial understandings, they are in danger of unwittingly continuing to
maintain old systems of racial oppression based on outdated and false stereotypical assumptions. Not only is the role of White, female teachers (and ALL teachers of children) to examine their own racialized biases and attitudes, but it is the responsibility of teachers to revamp public consciousness to create a more honest and flexible understanding of racial identity. If teachers are in the business of shaping children’s’ minds, they have the incredible power and responsibility to challenge and change harmful ideologies that become entrenched in US society.

**Vague uses of vague terms as a replacement for considering discrimination**

The shift in U.S. populations has lead many educational administrations to promote a *multicultural* approach to curriculum. However, this is a loosely defined term that is ambiguous to most educators (Paley, 2000).

Multicultural education is an umbrella term that can mean many different things to different people, and how a person defines multicultural education will affect how that person approaches it. In other words, how a teacher enacts multicultural education in the classroom may depend on how that teacher understands and conceptualizes multicultural education (Chung & Miller, 2011, p. 39).

Even when a curriculum guide is written with cultural sensitivity in mind, it is only as strong as beliefs of the teacher implementing it, thus a misinterpretation of vague (but always seemingly positive) multicultural paradigm can actually reinforce negative stereotypes and tokenize cultures often under represented in art curricula. The term *multiculturalism* typically implies a positive spin on pluralism and has become a more comforting word for educators to use in lieu of more polarizing terms of race (Pawley, 2006), despite the fact that multiculturalism implicates many factors beyond racial differences. Nonetheless, multiculturalism is often practiced as a drop-in lesson that
trivializes other cultures through celebrations of food and dress without addressing systems of oppression (Agyepong, 2010; Ballengee Morris & Taylor, 2005; Banks 2006; Colombo, 2008; Curtis, 2008; Kraehe & Acuff, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Pawley, 2006) and actually serve as a smaller part of the larger educational system of oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The wide range of implementation of multicultural curricula has inspired many to take a highly critical view of its development outcomes, both intentional and unintentional. Knight (2006) contends that multicultural art education does not successfully teach the Brown and Black students of the U.S. schools because it continues to focus on the bodies of the students rather than the cultural and racial positionalities of the teachers.

The under-theorized use of multiculturalism serves as a replacement for deeper considerations of racial inequality in art education as well. Art education, like many other fields in education, have often attempted to address inequality without adequately theorizing race and racism as a fundamental part of educational and social processes in the United States (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013). In my experiences as an art teacher, I witnessed half-hearted attempts of multiculturalism take shape as inauthentic lessons about diversity that misinterpret diversity to mean getting along and showing respect for Others, rather than recognizing difference. “Multiculturalism as enacted in a majority of elementary and high school classroom is about tolerating diversity, which has lead to the marketing of difference in particular ways” (Desai, 2010, p. 23). Each spring I look through art supply catalogs and find multicultural art kits with construction paper to represent tokenized versions of ethnic skin colors, complete with examples and descriptions of how to make paper cut-outs that follow a standard template of a human form. Our district art
curriculum, like many art curricula in the U.S., includes lessons on African masks to celebrate Black History Month. Ballengee Morris and Taylor (2005) consider how simply looking at a style or technique of a mask often results in misrepresentation, objectifying, and romanticizing cultures, which, in the long-run, produce stereotypes and biased knowledge. They add that these, like other forms of cultural re-representation become especially problematic with objects (such as masks) that have significant, sacred, spiritual, or religious meaning for the group from which they are appropriated (Ballengee-Morris & Taylor, 2005). Unfortunately, it has been my experience as an art teacher and scholar that examples such as “African Mask” lessons appear much more often and are more popular with art teachers than contemporary artworks confronting issues of systematic racism.

Banks (2006) outlines the varying levels of cultural recognition in the classroom from the focus on minority contributions made to the dominant society through holidays (the most commonly applied Level One) all the way to a social activism approach that encourages students, teachers, and community to work to alleviate social injustices (the rarely applied Level Four). In order to implement Banks’ (2006) ideal curriculum of Level Four, teachers need to assess their own personal commitment to listening and challenging tough racial issues. Since much of what defines race in the U.S. is visual (Knight, 2006), the art curriculum should be an appropriate space for critically discussing and problematizing visual culture reproductions of race. However, since many teachers, like myself, begin their teaching with a colorblind ideal (Bell, 2002; Choi, 2008), any significant changes in ideas about race will be accepted at a “snail’s pace,” difficult to enact, and maybe even met with resistance (Choi, 2008; Leonardo, 2009, p. 265).
The Absence of Feminist Discourse in Educational Practice

The NCES 2010 report states that 76% of teachers are women. With such a high female influence on education, it is not surprising that boys are more frequently disciplined and are more likely to be placed in special education, while (White, middle class) girls serve as the benchmark for the ideal student (Bettie, 2003; Ferguson, 2003; Kunjufu, 2005). Walkerdine (1994) notes that there is a discourse in schools of good behavior, neatness, and obedience—pathologies that often appear in girls. Conversely, she notes, activity and exploration is discouraged. Kunjufu (2005) claims that the U.S. has designed classrooms for qualities exhibited more by female students while dismissing the needs of male students. He generalizes male students as having shorter attention spans, higher energy levels, increased aggression and competition, increased size, emphasis on gross motor over fine motor skills, and a slow maturation rate. As a result, patterns of classroom practices often suggest that girls' composed behaviors, though harmful to their own psychological and moral development, are pleasing to their teachers (Walkerdine, 1994) while boys' rambunctious behaviors often result in disciplinary actions (Ferguson, 2001; Gregory & Thompson, 2010; Kunjufu, 2005; Milam, 2008; Morris, 2005; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). All of these factors play into gender stratification in the typical, female-led classroom. The gender stereotypes established in educational and social systems limit the individuality, compromise the integrity, and affect the self esteem of all students (Caldwell, 2012).

Gender is one of the central elements of identity in U.S. society. Failure to properly identify within socially recognized categories carries the price of social reprisal and loneliness (Boldt, 2004). However, researchers continue to prove that gender biases (though often subtle) exist in many classrooms and go unnoticed or uncritiqued (Garber,
2003; Lundeberg, 1997; McCaughtry, 2004, Sadker, 2000, Titus, 2000). Garrahy’s (2001) study uncovered that all three of the teachers she studied claimed to be “gender blind,” believing that they did not take student gender into account when teaching (cited in Garber, 2003). When gender is addressed in writing aimed at practicing or pre-service teachers, much of these texts imply that inequality can be eradicated by so-called gender-neutral practices (Grossman & Grossman, 1993; Horgan, 1995 in Titus, 2000). Titus (2000) found that teachers and pre-service teachers are resistant, angry, and threatened when confronted with a feminist discourse that addresses issues of power and privilege. Other teacher educators such as Buffington and Lai (2011) found that their pre-service teachers (as well as practicing teachers) welcome feminist discourse as class discussions, but are honest in their unwillingness to implement it in their practices.

Just as Banks (2006) describes how tokenizing, add-on curriculum that recognize minority contributions to dominant society do little to advance a social justice agenda, McIntosh (1983) creates a similar framework for feminist contributions. She establishes five phases ranging from one of women-less history, to phase two women in history, phase three women as a problem, phase four women as history, and phase five history reconstructed to include all. She notes that phase five does not yet exist in practice. McIntosh (1983) claims that phase two (women in history) is the most offensive to the advancement of women because it causes the need to inject a few inferiors that others temporarily associate with the achievements of the superiors. Phase two is evident in how some art teachers select exemplar artists to teach about in schools. At the beginning of the year, I asked my contemporary art class to draw up a list of all the artists they could remember. The chalkboard filled up with names such as Monet, Picasso, DaVinci, Warhol,
Michelangelo, etc. I asked the students if they knew of any women artists and one girl said, “the lady with the big eyebrows,” then another girl said, “and the one who paints flowers.” The students were referring to Frida Kahlo and Georgia O’Keeffe, commonly taught artists in the narrowly addressed “women artists” category for K-12 art classrooms. However, it appears, not common enough to remember their names. Ironically, both of these women artists gained their entry to the artworld through their abusive, male sexual partners.

It is important to note that a lack of a feminist discourse in education affects more than individual classrooms; it affects the entire structure of education through the school’s social context, educational administration, as well as teacher education. I once overheard my students having a conversation about the “smartest teachers in the school.” Despite the fact that the vast majority of our teachers are female, the students didn’t mention any women teachers as being a contender for the “smartest in the school.” I immediately noticed because I was (selfishly and narcissistically) offended. As a Ph.D. Candidate with two Masters’ degrees, I am, by far, the most highly educated person in our school, including building administration. Though I don’t brag about my academic endeavors to my students, I wondered why I didn’t make it into their conversation. The two “smartest” White, male, middle-aged, teachers that the students spoke of, teach from a very similar critical paradigm as myself. I relate very well to these teachers as we all incorporate issues of social justice, politics, and critical media studies into our classrooms. All three of us teach or have taught Advanced Placement courses in the humanities. So why do the students not regard me, a female art teacher, as a contemporary to these male English teachers?

Walkerdine (1994) notes that girls succeed because of hard work and following rules, not because of intelligence or education. I have found this to be true for teachers as
well: I felt much more appreciated by most of my colleagues and building/central administration when I worked long hours and chaperoned many social events. However, when I speak of research that might advance our practice as teachers, pass along articles to administration, or ask challenging questions during faculty meetings, I am often ignored or my comments are dismissed. Walkerdine (1994) notes that women who work hard and pay attention to details are supposed to support the careers of men without achieving their own advancements. Furthermore, Walkerdine (1994) notes both mothers and female teachers are expected to facilitate, nurture, observe, and support a child’s development. This creates an idea about nurturing women teachers as being soft and passive that permeates through all aspects of education.

A common misconception of teachers and pre-service teachers is the belief that all will be well if teachers intend to be fair to all students (regardless of race or gender) and reflect periodically about whether or not they treat students equitable (Lundeberg, 1997). Titus (2000) found that the pre-service teachers in her teacher education program believe that sexism has been ameliorated and they interpret feminist research and theory to be nothing more than “male bashing” (p. 31). When McCaughtry (2004) introduced feminist perspectives in his teacher education courses, the recognition of gender bias was “overreacting,” feminist scholars were “reading too much into things,” and these students failed to “see how gender relations operate in the classroom” at all (p. 401). Furthermore, Titus (2000) notes that her students reduce serious moral considerations to mere matters of etiquette and political correctness. Much like colorblindness, serious talks of gender identity, equity, and power are challenging, uncomfortable, and are often dismissed for easier and more palatable solutions such as “we
are all the same on the inside” or “just treat everyone with respect.” But race and gender are some of the primary categories through which we make meaning in life, and to ignore these categories would be to ill serve our children (Boldt, 2004).

As a White, female art teacher, it has been my experience that a color- and gender-blind mentality gets veiled on a daily basis as collegial support through a (mostly White female) teaching staff. As I have witnessed, when a teacher has had a negative interaction with a Black male student, other teachers rarely show support for their co-worker by trying to help them unravel the problem. Instead, support is rallied for the teacher through comments such as, “that kid is so disrespectful,” “these kids are crazy,” or “that child is out of control.” These attitudes help to foster an “us-verses-them” stance that keeps the White female teachers polarized from their Black male students. Biases against students often lower academic expectations and increase disciplinarily measures and can have a profound effect on students’ self-worth and attitudes towards school (Emihovich, 1983; Ferguson, 2003; Kunjufu, 2005; Milam 2008; Morris, 2005).

**Problem Statement**

In most U.S. schools, masculine Whiteness acts as the standard, stable contrast group because it is the only group to have never had systematic problems with access to opportunity (Sullivan, 2011). Everything outside of this White normativity is expected to conform to these standards. When students don’t conform, they are often forced. In my experiences, the most common enforcement practices against non-conformists in public schools include alternatives placements or disciplinary tactics. Foucault (1975) identifies schools with courts, prisons, and asylums as sites that share techniques of discipline that revolves around tools that label and scrutinize bodies. During the late 18th and 19th
centuries, there was a shift that moved the focus from punishing physical bodies to disciplining the mind (Foucault, 1975). While students are learning math, reading, and writing, they also learn how to be docile, obedient workers and citizens as well as their position in society (Walshaw, 2007; Willis, 1981).

For male students, particularly Black male students who have been conditioned to project a “cool pose,” this paradigm conflicts greatly with the toughness they are taught in their homes and communities (Majors & Billson, 1993). Schweik (2009) points out that governments of the 19th century began to take a hard-line stance against crime as a way of establishing the governing body’s own masculinity. What does this tell us about the heavy hand of discipline in public schools? If White normativity exists as the baseline for most U.S. educational curriculum and harsh discipline is a way of maintaining a system’s masculinity and dominance over its subjects, it is no wonder that many students in urban classrooms are not meeting the standards set by the external parties that govern these schools.

Specifically, there is a clear discrepancy between what many Black male students are taught about their social role by their fathers, uncles, cousins, brothers, and friends and what they are taught about their social role from their White, female classroom teacher. As a result, a power struggle ensues between Black male students and their teachers (mostly White women) or other authority figures. Boys that don’t conformed to an image of the ideal student can be perceived as “problem children,” and recommended for alternative placements, or too frequently sent to resource rooms or discipline offices to alleviate the

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2 “Cool pose” (Majors & Billson, 1993) is a term used to describe projected toughness and apathy for external authority that has been built as a coping mechanism for years of social, emotional, and economic oppression. See Chapter Five for more details.
stress their behavior causes their regular classroom teacher. Through the frequent visits to these school spaces, students learn to be subjects of discipline rather than learning educational material that will advance their life or careers. The result of a lifetime of learning in a racialized and gendered system can create internalized racism or sexism in the students. According to Huber, Johnson, and Kohli (2006), internalized racism is permeation of racism into the psyche and is often denoted as the conscious or unconscious acceptance of negative stereotypes about one's racial group and their lowered rank below Whites. This also can be applied to negative stereotypes of gender such as too masculine (“butch” girls) or too feminine (“pussy” for boys or “princess” for girls), just to name a few. The fear of being associated with a negative stereotype can have a devastating effect on students (Steele, 2009) and often disengages these students from their school environment and may cause poor performance or even dropping out.

Teachers are the greatest measure of impact on students of all educational resources (Donaldson, 2009). As the implementers of school curriculum and the enforcer of rules, the decisions they make have the ability to either reinforce or eliminate unhealthy stereotypes as well as racist and sexist discourses in their classrooms. The choices teachers make also play a large role in determining, or at least in framing, a child's success in the educational arena.

Teachers play a key role in students’ academic success by determining grades, evaluating behavior, and recommending students for higher-level academic programs. As a result, understanding teachers’ dispositions toward racially diverse populations and how those dispositions shape expectations and treatment of students is a critical component in ensuring equality (equal treatment) and equity (fair and just treatment) in education. Hence, the ways in which future and practicing teachers are prepared for a diverse society is key in developing their ability to be effective teachers in diverse classrooms. (Lee, 2013, p. 142)
Most pre-service teachers are European-Americans from lower to middle class English monolingual, suburbanites females with a strong desire to teach in communities like the ones in which they grew up and see urban education as something that is noble and socially important, but too hard to pursue for their own careers (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Mass media and popular culture also play a hand in representing urban education as something dangerous and hazardous (Donaldson, 2009). Pre-service practicum experience in urban classrooms as well as discussions of culturally sensitive pedagogy in teacher preparation courses become experiences that some teachers don’t think they necessarily need to take to heart. I can clearly recall one of my pre-service teaching students who was adamantly defending his idea to create a lesson plan that taught about “American Thanksgiving Traditions” using Norman Rockwell’s 1943 Freedom from Want painting. Frustrated by all of the ways I problematizing this notion, this White male student from a rural Pennsylvania community finally blurted out, “look. I see that this lesson might not work in some city school, but I plan on teaching in a community with traditional values like the ones I grew up with, so can’t I just go with it?” Aside from the ways that promoting “traditional American values” is problematic in any school environment, this vignette highlighted how this student, like many others I taught, felt that learning about racism and sexism in education wouldn’t apply to their future careers as teachers. As one White, female student from the same class said, “I am so tired of always talking about this stuff. I mean, didn’t racism end in, like, the 1960s or something?”

I worry how many of the pre-service teaching students I taught really valued our content that discussed racialized and gendered classroom discourses versus how many paid lip service to these assignments in order to receive good grades of their own. I am also
troubled by how many student teachers I have worked with in my own teaching context that have attitudes of, “teaching here is a good experience because it will prepare me for anything, but I’d never actually take a job here. I want to work closer to my own (suburban) school district.” In reality, many will end up taking jobs in urban schools out of economic necessity and their lack of preparedness will be a disservice to yet another generation of disenfranchised students (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Ladson-Billings (2011) adds that many of these teachers end up leaving. This creates a revolving door of teachers in urban classrooms that leave students with confusing and inconsistent learning environments. During my year of journaling for this autoethnography, one particular language classroom had five different teachers throughout the course of one school year. The students were often left in the hands of per diem subs without lesson plans and by mid-spring they were assigned a teacher’s aid to monitor them taking the remaining months of their class through online learning. The (young, White female) teachers that left throughout the year were all new teachers who claimed that the students in the class were too difficult to handle, but I wonder if they themselves were unprepared to teach these students. Donaldson (2009) notes that inexperienced teachers often don’t have the retention and positive effects of their experienced counterparts and also found that White female teachers in urban education are twice as likely to leave teaching while White males were almost five times more likely to leave. Donaldson’s (2009) study also noted that learning to teach with a social justice perspective might not necessarily stop teachers from leaving the classroom. This brings up one problem that has presented itself to me through my teaching: just because a teacher manages to survive in an environment with a diverse population of learners, doesn’t mean that teacher is thriving in that environment. I know of
many teachers who employ racist and sexist discourses both in and out of their classrooms and discuss their disgust with their teaching assignment, but they lack the financial security to leave their position. Additionally, high stakes tests and value-added assessments of teachers lead teachers to resent the students that need them the most (Ladson-Billings, 2011).

High stakes testing also hinders other aspects of student growth, including the arts. Achievement gaps on standardized tests are most pronounced in urban schools with diverse populations of students (Anyon, 1997 in Lewis, James, Hancock & Jackson-Hill, 2008). Acuff (2013) also notes that these same urban schools are also most depleted in their art resources and opportunities. While I am fortunate that our art department has only been cut by one teacher in the past three years since I’ve returned from my doctoral coursework, other alarming issues have arose due to our failing status as per standardized tests. On one particular day two years ago, my class arrived and I noticed many vacant seats. Curious as to why so many students were absent, I checked the attendance list to see that approximately 20% of my students were dropped from classes. My heightened sensitivity to racialized and gendered stratification in school also alerted me to the fact that most of these students were Black male students. After investigating throughout the day, I learned that any student that was labeled as “below basic” on the standardized state test in the previous year was removed from their art, music, or family/consumer sciences classes and placed into remedial test prep training courses. This was done without the consent of the arts teachers or the parent. The parents had the option of retroactively resisting the move, but it was such a long and difficult process that only one student was returned to his music class. This story is only one of the ways that struggling schools respond to pressure
from standardized tests and it also highlights how students are labeled, stratified, and robbed of their voice.

Jackson (2012) cites June King McFee’s (1995) notion of cultural elitism as a notion that culture is a particular body of knowledge rather than a system of beliefs, attitudes, and values that have developed within the group maintaining them. I have seen cultural elitism manifest itself in practice by the use of gendered and racialized discourses towards the body and mind in the ways educators of all levels (teachers, administrators, etc.) talk to and about students and how these discourses manifest themselves in how students come to situate themselves in the context of education. Art educators have the ability to promote a socio-cultural consciousness in the students they teach and through the artwork that they display in the school, but they must first recognize the biases in their teaching institutions and themselves. They have the potential to thrive in urban schools with diverse populations of students if they explore these socio-cultural identity markers in themselves and those around them and promote the same practices for their students and colleagues. The problem therefore, unless art educators are made aware of their own racialized and gendered biases, they cannot work to move past them to stay and thrive in today’s U.S. urban schools.

**Context of Study**

The school providing the context for this study is a “Title I” school, which means that the school receives government assistance for aiding in the achievement of “underprivileged” students on standardized tests. Though I will not be specifically focusing
on issues of social or economic class in this particular study, the topic of class will be considered as it is entangled within conversations of race and gender.

The study will be conducted in this Title I high school on the outskirts of the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with a diverse population of students. The district that the high school is a part of has a 76% graduation rate and serves approximately 6,700 students across six elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools (NCES 2009-2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Demographics</th>
<th>Black</th>
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<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
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<td>49%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Truman Alternative High School</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Truman Alternative High School</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Female</th>
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<td>56%</td>
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<th>Student Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch</th>
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<td></td>
<td>83%</td>
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My specific study was based on observations made in Kennedy High School. However, Kennedy and Truman schools share many students throughout the year, as students are often placed, and later re-assigned placement based on both discipline and academic qualifications. As of Fall 2014, the district employs 16 art teachers (one position was cut from previous years as a cost saving measure). Fifteen art teachers are White women and one high school teacher is a White man. In the past 10 years, the district has only hosted student teachers that were White women with the exceptions of only one White man.

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3 Kennedy High School and Truman Alternative High School are pseudonyms.

4 I recognize that male/female are not the only gender categories, but there are no statistics provided that account for transgendered students in this school and the majority of K-12 institutions.
Though I am not over-generalizing by claiming these numbers exactly mirror state or national demographics for art teachers, the current staff and the recent student teachers do provide a snapshot of the current state (and future direction) of art educators in this region of the country by demonstrating who holds the art-teaching jobs and who seeks careers in art education.

Most of the district’s approximately 6,700 students will never have an art teacher that is not a White woman. For a district with a majority of Black students, this can be highly problematic. From a teaching biased curricula to trends of poor interpersonal relationships, much research indicates that White teachers are often ill equipped to work with students of other races (Delpit, 2006; Chamberlain, 2004; Howard, 2006; Kunjufu 2005; Landsman, 2008; Lee, 2012; Paley, 2000; Pearce, 2005). Furthermore, many White teachers never come to realize their own position as a biased, racial being; and continue to cater their teaching towards the White, middle class majority (Landsman, 2008; Paley, 2000; Pearce, 2005, Watkins 2001). In Kennedy High School, the experiences and interests of the White, female, middle class art teachers do not represent many of the experiences and interests of their students, creating a potential curricular or personal disconnect. I would posit that a failure to make any real connection with any art lesson or art teacher throughout one’s educational career has the potential to create a lasting impact on one’s attitudes towards their ability to succeed in art class, their artwork, or even their creativity.

To be more specific to my study, none of my Black male students have ever been taught art by a teacher that looks like them. We could expect this to change if Black males pursued careers of art education and added a richness of perspective to the existing field. However, if Black male students never feel connected to or inspired by their own art
education, how can they conceive this field as a welcoming space for their own future? Until White female teachers are able to inspire a love of art education in the current generation of Black male students, we may never see a significant development in the teaching field in terms of gender/racial demographics. In Chapter Three, I will elaborate on the literature that supports the need for fostering teaching careers for Black males. On the other hand, Ladson-Billings (2011) notes that there is nothing concrete in scholarly literature to suggest that racial compatibility necessarily ensures school achievement. Therefore, teacher educators, current practicing and pre-service art teachers have an imperative responsibility to confront racialized and gendered discourses that maintain the status quo (Bell, 2002). White, female art teachers need to find ways to welcome all students, including Black male students into the art classroom and open up their understanding of all that the artworld has to offer (Leveston, 2011).

**Purpose of Study**

In this study, I have autoethnographically reflected on one year’s worth of data collected regarding the racialized and gendered discourses as they presented themselves to me in my teaching context. This includes conversations, speeches, and written communication (e.g., emails, handbooks) with, between, and regarding teachers, students, parents, and administrators. In Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six, I tell how the discourses transpired and how I participated in them. Throughout these chapters, I explore the social and moral implications of these discourses and how they come to shape my position as a White, female art teacher in this particular school as well as how I come to situate others based on their racialized and gendered identity markers. In Chapter Seven I will speak
more to how my experiences speak to the social and professional context(s) that situate, normalize, and even challenge some of the dominant discourses of my professional life.

Rolling (2003) posits that autoethnography

“countervails the universality of a reducible social or personal history and expands the discourse of identity into splattering trajectories, like the surface of a lake during a heavy downpour. Our identities are enactments of the diffuse array of droplets and splashings that immediately surround us and then are gone, absorbed into the tensions of the local sociocultural” (p. 55).

As Rolling (2003) reminds me, telling the story of my personal history expands the discourse on White, female teachers’ identity and how they affect and are affected by the contexts in which they teach. Classroom discourses, as well as all discourses within an educational environment, are at “the very heart of the teaching-learning process, as [these discourses] represent the meaning systems mutually constructed the teachers and their students” (Greene, 1991, p. 8 in Zander, 2007). The discourses that I participate in help shape the identities of the (literally) thousands of students I have taught throughout my career. My own way of thinking and behaving is also influenced by my race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and the language around me (Jackson, 2012). My words, actions, and responses are absorbed by the students I teach and their families as well as the colleagues around me, becoming part of the sociocultural fabric of the Kennedy High School and the community the high school serves.

Ladson-Billings (2011) notes that classrooms are complex organisms in which students who bring richly textured biographies meet teachers that bring their own set of complexities. These biographies are shaped by the previous discourses of our lives and are expressed by the discourses we employ or choose not to employ. Holman Jones (2005) says that the body/voice and thought/mind are political, restricted, marked, and also
inseparable. I agree that, particularly for education professionals, our bodies and voices are highly political, restricted, and marked, forcing us to sometimes act in ways that defy our better judgment for the sake of maintaining employment in public education. But is the body and thought really inseparable? I find myself—my body—going along with policies or actions that I know to be racist or sexist in my mind. It reminds me of one of the issues I've previously mentioned: just because a teacher is surviving in their school, doesn’t mean they are thriving. In order for a teacher with a true social justice mentality to survive in a “failing” urban school under heavy political scrutiny, do they have to dismiss (at least some) of their values and practices? How long can a teacher fight (to no avail) against racist and sexist practices before giving up or leaving or what changes in a teacher’s identity that allows them to work under conditions that they know to be racist and sexist?

The purpose of this study is to illuminate how a White, female teacher’s (marked, political, and restricted) identity takes up racialized and gendered discourses in a school context with a diverse population of students and how these discourses influence issues of personal morality and ethics associated with the profession of teaching art in public schools. Another purpose of this study is to show current educational researchers as well as pre-service teachers examples of the daily conflicts of the profession and how critical race and feminist theories can be applied to everyday situations. Most teacher educators and researchers are older, European-Americans that are too far removed from K-12 teaching to be much of a help when it comes to preparing teachers for diverse classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Most practicing teachers are not given a venue where their voices sharing teaching experiences are heard beyond the walls of their own school and home. This study actualizes daily teaching challenges in relation to racialized and gendered
discourses within a school and how White, female teachers navigate, manipulate, and employ racialized and gendered discourses as they balance their own values with how they address others and present themselves in their professional life.

**Research Questions**

My study touches on many aspects including, but not limited to pre-service teacher education for teaching diverse students, the silencing of teachers’ voices, retention and job satisfaction of teachers, the effect of derogatory discourses on a schools’ social identity, various moral conflicts in the teaching profession, the role of gendered and racialized authoritative voice in a school context on various subjects, gendered and racialized relationships between teachers and their administrators, and how gendered and racialized positioning affects relationships between a teacher and their students, their students’ parents, and the teacher’s colleagues.

I discuss these issues as they emerge in analysis of data gathered to respond to these research questions:

1) How do I, as a White, female art teacher navigate, manipulate, and participate in the discourses of race and gender as they are presented to me in my teaching context of an urban school in Southeastern Pennsylvania with a diverse population of students?

2) How do I negotiate my critical understandings and personal values with exercising practices deemed as “professional practices” by those with authority over me? How do these professional practices foster and inhibit my critical pedagogy?
3) What are the limitations in my understandings of the effect of racialized and
gendered discourses in education and how do I, as an art teacher for more than
thirteen years, evolve in ways that are both beneficial and destructive to teaching
for social justice?

**Definition of Terms**

For a study focused on discourse, language and terms are of vital importance.
Therefore, several terms need to be clarified in the ways they are be used in this study.
Because my study is heavily focused on the spoken and unspoken discourses of my school
context, it is imperative that I first consider all that *discourse* means. According to Zander
(2007), discourse is a “philosophical umbrella that encompasses narrative and other forms
of communication such as dialogue and conversation” (p. 189). Foucault (1984) says that
discourse is more than just linguistic speech, both rather a sign system that relates to other
social systems and symbols established through social constructions. Foucault claims that
discourse creates taken for granted assumptions that are established by society as a way of
governing ourselves and each other and has an incredible impact on power, discipline, and
subjects. He considers the notion of a stable subject to be a fiction and that all subjects are
created through language. Rolling (2003) adds that propaganda is a discursive tool of any
authoritative regime. He claims that the character of all beings is constituted through
discourse and these discourses interpret identity and “the difference between one's own
identity and those subjects and objects constituted as other than oneself” (Rolling, 2003, p.
48). In chapters three, four, five, and six, I consider how these discourses create subjects
both in society and, specifically, through education and educational practices such as assessments, labeling students, and discipline. According to Varvus and Cole (2002):

The term *discourse* has multiple meanings in the field of education. [They] use the term in two ways: (a) when referring to [their] method of analysis, which treats the study of language as an integral part of social interaction, and (b) when referring to school violence as a system of representation that defines and normalizes particular interpretations of terms such as *urban schools or disruptive students.* (pp. 88-89)

In my school, terms such as “disruptive student(s),” “blatant disrespect,” “flagrant disobedience,” and “inappropriate dress,” are written (but not defined) in the text of the disciplinary code and thus used frequently (and differently) by administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

*Critical discourse analysis* is a methodological approach that probes texts and speech for underlying philosophical assumptions, ideological commitments and implicit knowledge-power dynamics (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997 in Tupper, 2008) and helps me understand the sociocultural and linguistic discourses (ways of thinking, being, doing, speaking) that govern my context and inform the practices and representations I (and others) employ. Bell (2002) suggests that a focus on discourse can hold up a mirror that allows students and teachers to see their reflections more clearly and find a new language for more honest communication. She pushes teachers to examine rhetoric and underlying assumptions about themselves and others and bring these discourses into awareness, discussing them openly and honestly (Bell, 2002).

I would first like to address one of the most obvious terms I've selected and used in my study. My decision to use *Black* rather than *African American* was a conscious one. Ballengee-Morris and Taylor (2005) noted that the use of the term “African Art” is problematic because Africa is a country that includes many different cultures, including
“Egyptian Art,” which is typically studied as separate from African Art. In a similar fashion, I find the term *African American* to be problematic when describing my students because it both includes and excludes certain students in various ways. Hardy (2010) cites Kewal Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox, and Provasnik, (2007) as describing “African American” to mean “a person having origins in any of the racial groups of Africa” (p. 2). I feel that identity is more closely akin to culture\(^5\) rather than geography and I look to my students for clarity when considering my own use of terms. One of my lessons for my 21st Century Art class called “Culture/Heritage/Ethnicity” helped students understand the definitions of each term and what it meant for them, and simultaneously taught me more about how my students identify themselves. I found that many of whom I considered to be Black felt little to no connection to their African origins. Furthermore, some students with skin tone considered to be Black identified their origins as Caribbean and felt insulted if links to Africa were implied. The race, origin, heritage, and ethnicity of the students in my study are murky, at best.

*Intersectionality* acknowledges that identity is a complex and simultaneous interplay of various markers of cultural difference (Allen, 2012) and although I recognize the interplay of various markers, school files focus on fixed categories for both race and gender. Each child is labeled in his or her school profile as one fixed race and these (falsely) stable categories are how they are regarded for the duration of their educational careers. Many of my students in my classes are of mixed race and my lesson revealed that almost none of students labeled “Black” by school records consider their racial category to be

\(^5\) *Culture* itself is a complex term with more than 300 published definitions (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Though it is historically situated, it is predominately socially constructed. Stephen B. Carpenter II has defined culture as “what we do around here,” (personal communication, 2011).
stable. However, for the purpose of this study, I will use Black to describe students, parents, teachers, and administration with African ancestry and that have been described as such in their school profile (for students only). Likewise, the identity of White is not a clearly defined category, but typically describes a person Caucasian persons with origins from European nations. Like the use of Black, White is also problematic when describing someone who considers his or her own race to be more complicated than a polarizing label. However, I am not so interested in how or to what extent each individual identities with fixed labels of Black and White, but rather how Blackness and Whiteness is constructed and situated within educational systems. That being said, I acknowledge the dangers of labels used in educational arenas. Students are already labeled in so many ways including their grade/age, standardized test score, primary language, or special education needs. Labeling tends to influence the ways adults view students and the way a student views himself or herself (Gates, 2010). Gates (2010) adds that because labels are not always apparent to the child, resulting in a disparity between expectations and performance that may be confusing or even painful for the child. Conversely, Freeman (2013) claims that the use of labels in education makes educators themselves feel in control with a sense of commonality, a point of reference, and even safety net to fall into when asked about how we are managing a child's difficulties. In this study, my concern is how racial labels become articulated through the daily discourses experienced by educational constituents.

If I am to consider how discourses can be racialized, it is important to unpack the term “racialization,” or, to take it a step further, what I mean when I speak of “racism.” For the purpose of this study, I would like to state that I believe “racialized” refers to something or someone that has been placed in a racial context or given racial characteristics. “Race” is
often defined as a “controversial concept grounded in the idea that a group within the human population is considered distinct based on physical characteristics. Although historically race was thought to be a biological difference, today it is generally agreed that race is socially constructed” (Lee, 2012, 49). Racism is a socially constructed mechanism that is designed to create an “Other” to exclude from equal resources and opportunities as a means of maintaining one’s own superiority. Racism is associated with, but separate from, acts of prejudice or discrimination. Racial prejudice has to do with one’s conscious or unconscious stigmatizing and preconceived ideas about a particular race that is not grounded in experience or even reality, while discrimination refers to the action of unfairly excluding a person because of a prejudice. While both of these occur in schools through interactions and relationships, the most detrimental conditions that affect the school curriculum have to do with institutional racism and the internalized racism that it may cause. It might also be helpful to note that race, ethnicity, and culture are often linked, but they do not define the same attributes. Lee (2012) uses Sadker, Sadker, and Zittleman (2008) to help distinguish between these terms. Race refers to common unalterable genetic attributes and ancestry, ethnicity has to do with shared common cultural traits, while culture is described as a set of learned beliefs, values, behaviors, and ways of life shaped by members of a society (Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2008 in Lee, 2012).

Glasser and Smith (2008) discuss the “vague meaning of gender” in terms of education (p. 343). They claim that educators use the word gender when considering the experiences between male and female students, but this distinction is often based on traditional understandings of the term sex, as it seems to be the default definition in both popular and academic texts (Glasser & Smith, 2008). To clarify the way I use the term
*gender* in this writing, I believe a person’s *sex* to explain biological attributes and reproductive functions while *gender* to be more nuanced and performative. Many poststructuralists treat gender as an ongoing social production whose meanings are created through discourses (McCaughtry, 2004). In many cases, particularly in education, these discourses that define gender is from the voice of the socially, politically, and economically dominate, or the White, male, middle-class mentality. These dominant discourses regulate the way an individual performs their gender identity under strict regulations. West and Zimmerman (1987) note that individuals *do* gender, rather than *be* gender and the qualities that constitute *doing gender* is psychologically (not physically) ingrained in a social (not biological) fabrication that is intended to make gender performance as naturally occurring. In terms of this study, I look to the ways that gender performance is regulated through school discourse and how this discourse is enacted by dominant bodies and performed and resisted by subordinate bodies.

Periera (2013) posits that content of gender inequality should be deeply ingrained in multicultural education, though she acknowledges that many multiculturalists fear that it will dilute more pressing issues of race and ethnicity. Gender issues can certainly be a component of multicultural education, but it is more effective to address the topic of gender through the implementation of a feminist pedagogy. Buffington and Lai (2011) define *feminist pedagogy* as “a theory related to critical pedagogy that addresses the process of teaching and learning focusing on gender issues, making them visible, and reducing oppression” (p. 8). Key aspects of feminist pedagogy include collaboration, egalitarian classrooms, drawing on student voice, dismantling teacher authority, acknowledging the politics of teaching, self-representation, seeking mastery based on
experience, considering positionality, and seeking social change (Buffington & Lai, 2011; Garber, 2003; Keifer-Boyd, 2007).

Culturally relevant teaching often attributes the definition of culturally responsive pedagogy to Gay's (2000) work. When Gay defined culturally responsive pedagogy, she describes it as using cultural knowledge and prior experiences of diverse learners to make instruction more appropriate and effective. Additionally, culturally responsive pedagogy legitimizes cultural experiences as means of shaping students' attitudes, dispositions, and approaches to learning (Gay, 2000). Similar to feminist pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching breaks down lines of authority and mastership of knowledge and privileges the position of the learner. When I speak of using critical pedagogy, I am speaking of how feminist and culturally responsive pedagogies are used with hopes of creating social change.

Another point to clarify is the association with the term urban education with diversity. Urban education is a term that draws multiple connotations. In the media, it conjures images of dangerous environments for both students and teachers (Donaldson, 2009). In terms of education, the term urban education is typically associated with “underachieving” and a “diverse population of learners” (Chamberlain, 2004, p. 96). In terms of mere semantics, urban education is merely a school in a city, however, in the popular imagination, it is a heavy term with many harmful implications. The correlation between low achieving and diversity is often assumed (unproblematically) to go hand-in-hand, implicating both terms as negative.

Diversity is a word often used in education, the workplace, and a variety of social situations, but the term itself is rarely clearly defined. For many years, “diversity” was a
“code word for talking simply about race and ethnicity” and to say one was teaching a diverse class meant that one was not teaching European-American students (Ladson-Billings, 2011, p. 13). I believe, in many circles of practice, this is still the case. However, the term diversity needs to be examined further beyond one category of identity, as diversity in my classroom (and classrooms across the country) is diverse in many ways beyond simple White or non-White issue. Amburgy (2011) defines diversity in terms of how it is used in her art teacher preparation program as all aspects of people’s identity that help define who they are such as ethnicity, social class, race, gender, sexual identity, age, and others. As I look to understand how the term diversity is used throughout U.S. society, I look to anthropologist Michael Jindra (2014) to help establish a definition for the commonly used social and educational term. Jindra (2014) defines diversity as actual beliefs or practices in addition to common understandings of diversity based on socially constructed categories of race/ethnicity. Encompassed in Jindra’s (2014) definition of diversity includes social contrasts in lifestyles such as family life, work, leisure, dress, consumption, entertainment, or any other groups marketers use to define people. He also adds that these are not necessarily self-chosen, but established by power and structure and often results in some groups suffering from ongoing discrimination and stigmatization.

I feel that my methodology, autoethnography, also requires some clarity for readers. Though this will be covered more extensively in Chapter Two, a definition of this term is important before one can truly understand the significance of this study. There has been some debate about the definition of autoethnography as well as its place in research, so I feel compelled to state my position and how I’ve come to understand what exactly autoethnography means for myself and this study. Simply stated, it is part auto or the self
and part *ethno* or culture (Ellis, 2004 in Rolling, 2008). For some, autoethnography seems to cross boundaries with both ethnography and autobiography, but it is important to note that although they possess similarities, autoethnography is distinctly different. Boylorn and Orbe (2014) cites Cheng (2008), arguing that autoethnography should be “ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretative orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (p. 48). They also argue that autoethnography is equally focused on the process, whereas ethnography is primarily concerned with the results (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Rolling (2008) agrees, stating that it’s a form of inquiry that does not merely write up the research, but transcribes a human social experience that becomes a story of discovery. I’m drawn to autoethnography because of the defining characteristics that are most salient to me: (a) it allows for research topics with intense emotional connections to the researcher and acknowledges, but permits their biases and sees these biases as part of the research, (b) it allows the reader to understand a larger social system through the eyes of those living it, and (c) it gives voice to researchers/practitioners who might not otherwise have their important stories heard by academic circles.

**Significance of Study**

When I think about the significance of my study, I think about it in terms of “so what” or “who cares?” *Why is this study worth reading?* I think a potential audience member for my work can find the answers they seek when they know *why* I find my study to be valuable. I can break this question down into three parts (a) why race and gender, (b) why art, and (c) why autoethnography?
Why Race and Gender?

It would be an impossible task to attempt to cite all of the authors who answer this question. For decades, scholars have been writing about these topics in various forms from exploring pre-service teacher preparation to breaking achievement gaps to giving all students a more equitable educational career and more hopeful future. If there are so many resources than I can cite to answer this question, why am I asking it?

Stuhr (2003), an art educator and scholar whose work addresses culturally relevant pedagogy, acknowledges those very questions when a colleague asked her the question, “why does no one listen to you?” (p. 301). Stuhr answers the question by citing names of other influential and noteworthy scholars that preceded her, all of whom had been ignored. Yet again, the colleague asked why no one listens (Stuhr, 2003). I’ve asked myself the same questions. Why does the field need yet another work outlining the importance of acknowledging racialized and gendered differences between teachers and students? I believe that many scholars would agree: we will keep saying it until someone listens. If no one is listening, then we must try speaking different languages, perhaps to different audiences, and through different methods. This is where my work enters into conversation.

As a practicing teacher, I’m speaking from a different voice from much of the voices expressed in scholarship. My voice is intertwined with the voices of the young adults I work with everyday and I speak in response to their stories. Caldwell (2012) claims that adolescents live and breathe the politics of social justice everyday and tapping into their voices can provide a wellspring of intellectual activity. While I can certainly cite the importance of studying race and gender in relation to education, I can also speak first-hand how much it affects my everyday practice in my school context. Throughout this study, I
have outlined examples expressing racist and sexist discourses is school practice. Additionally, I have cited literature that supports the need to acknowledge race and gender differences and how they are manifested through speech and actions. However, my writing is motivated by observations and my intolerance for the blatant injustices that happen on a daily basis in the context around me. *Why* do I continue to study an area that might appear as oversaturated in a literature search? *Because until what I see in my daily practices as a teacher changes, I have to.*

Stuhr (2003) later explains that she is trying to make changes in a very deeply politicized and traditional educational system and she can only hope to make incremental changes that will chip away at the K-12 institutional practices. Like Stuhr (2003), I also don’t pretend to have answers to the race and gender questions that will necessarily answer it better than my predecessors. What I do have, however, is direct knowledge of the *why*. It is the *why* that reveals itself to me almost everyday as I see my students become more disenfranchised because of their identity markers. Kraehe and Acuff (2013) state, “those whose cultural knowledge has been least revered will continue to maintain the position of the underserved, as they will consistently have to work within the confines of the established, dominant knowledge paradigm that is different from their own” (p. 301). My job is to reveal stories of how students are ill-served in education and continue, along with others, to try and dismantle the dominant paradigm that keeps many students oppressed.

**Why Art?**

As previously mentioned, there have been numerous studies done in the realm of education dealing with race and gender. It seems that it’s been explored in many facets of
education, so why art education? How is this research different from those studies performed in other classrooms? I remember my own school experiences where racism and sexism was discussed exclusively through literature and history courses (problematically implying that both were issues of the past). Art class, however, was designated for skill development and accurately rendering still lifes and copying master works. Discussions revolved around color blending and perspective drawings, but discourses of race and gender were never uttered.

But that is a lie. These discourses were extremely present, they were just not acknowledged as such. In fact, my most salient memories of my high school art classes were ones that challenged my racialized and gendered identity position in the context of that classroom. As I already mentioned, I was a “good girl” in school. I was an obedient, compliant, straight-A student whose schedule was filled with high level and Advanced Placement courses. The only exception was my art classes, where placement and enrollment was not based on academic achievement. Even though I enjoyed the subject, the social dynamic was unsettling for me. The students in my art class were not the same kids I saw everyday in the advanced courses I was taking. Furthermore, the art teacher’s obvious bias towards male students resulted in a very skewed gender demographic. I was a “good girl” in a class full of what I understood (through the discourses of my school) to be “bad boys.” In my senior year studio art course, I was relentless harassed by one of the few Black males that attended our school, Arthur. He objectified my body, particularly my “White girl ghetto booty.” The other boys in the class chuckled at his antics and provided no defense. I didn’t know the language needed to defend myself in this uncomfortable and unfamiliar situation and my discomfort and fear kept me suffering in silence. As the “good girl,” I
expected the teacher to defend me, but he ignored the harassment. I was appalled that he never intervened. When I did bring it to his attention in a plea for support, he told me to just ignore Arthur and he would eventually get bored and stop. Arthur never tired of making fun of my White girl body. (And so I never did like high school art class.) When I told my teacher that I was accepted to Penn State’s School of Visual Arts, he said, “why would you want to go and do that? You’re a smart girl. You should be going to school to be a doctor or something. Art school is more for these knuckleheads.” (And so I never did like my high school art teacher).

Gendered and racialized discourses happen in the art classroom, regardless of whether the teacher addresses them in his/her actions, reactions, or curriculum. Now that I am the teacher, I see a wide mix of student demographics in my classes. I have students whole are in gifted tracks sitting at the same table with students who are in self-contained special education all day. Students of different grade levels, races, genders, economics, cultures, religions, and sexual orientations are all combined in general art classes. A few years ago a concerned mother of another petite, White, gifted “good girl” spoke to me at Open House regarding her concerns of her daughter being placed in a class that exposed her to the “general population” of the school. I confirmed that the class is open to all students and the girl was removed from my role the next day.

In most every K-12 school, the artroom welcomes all students, forcing some out of the comfort zone of their tracked academic achievement level. Furthermore, the nature of the class allows for socialization to occur. The artroom tends to host longer projects rather than short drilling exercises that you might see in other classes. While students work on projects, conversations emerge. In these conversations, discourses of race and gender
enviably surface, just as they did in my own school experience. Depending on the position of the teacher, these conversations are fostered or silenced. As Lee (2013) states:

Being [an] art teachers allows us THE PERFECT opportunity to have meaningful discussions about our world and how we see it, as well as how we are ‘seen’ in it ... we provide students with a safe environment (free of judgment) to hold these discussions, they will have some of the most meaningful dialogues you can imagine--it also allows the students who are interested in creating art with social/political messages an avenue to explore those topics. Our students feed off of our energy, and we can have either a positive or negative affect in how successful they are in navigating their world. (p. 148)

How does an art teacher provide a safe environment that is free from judgment? I disagree with Lee (2013) because I don’t think it is possible to have a classroom completely void of judgment in some capacity. Judgments can help us navigate our place in the world and establish our own identity markers. However, I think it is possible to provide a space where students are comfortable articulating their opinions and positions and are supportive and understanding of other’s differing perspectives. (Classroom discussion dynamics are discussed further in Chapter Five). I do agree with Lee’s (2013) position that the art teacher is in the perfect position to foster discourses within a safe space that allows students to explore how they see and are seen in the world. Lee (2013) adds that art education is positioned to effectively address issues of social and political biases because visual thinking and expression in art facilitates emotional associations, influencing the way individuals feel and think about an issue. Unless a teacher insists on a silent classroom, racialized and gendered discourses emerge through student dialogue. These conversations can be used to foster incredible learning experiences; silenced to teach students that racialized and gendered discourses are inappropriate school subject matter; or ignored to lead students to make their own (sometimes harmful) conclusions. Lectures and reading only result in 5-10% of long term retention while discussion, demonstration and hand-on
learning results in 50-90% learning retention (Brooks & Brooks, 1993 in Lee, 2012). For a classroom that is based almost exclusively on demonstration, hands-on practice, and (focused and unfocused) dialogue, the directions of these discussions and actions stick with students. Arthur and my art teacher’s attitudes and words live in my memories much more vividly than any class critique or reading assignment.

The art teacher has the power to facilitate dialogues as they present themselves during student work time, but they also determine what gets discussed through how they enact their curriculum. Because art is not yet under heavy scrutiny through standardized testing (at least not to the extent of other classes), most art teachers have considerable power over the selection of images they choose to use in their teaching. Visual images act as a mirror of culture and reflect the attitudes, personal opinions, and interests of artists and those who use their images to teach (Zander, 2007). Unfortunately, the art room typically reinforces the values of the dominant culture by celebrating artwork in the traditions of the economic and political elite (Kraehe, 2010). I cringed last year when a high-level district administrator told the district’s art department that her goal for our classes was to “teach kids to recognize great master works.” I thought about our students and considered how Acuff, Hirak, and Nangah (2012) explore art history’s commonly practiced curriculum that provides a one-dimensional narrative and denies students a rich, complex, and realistic understanding of people and events. They point out that when multiculturalism appears in art history education, the educational circumstances and needs of people of color are the first points mentioned, establishing a single and explicit entry point for people of color. Furthermore, this narrative is fixed and helps strengthen what they call the “Master Narrative” (Acuff, Hirak, & Nangah, 2012, p. 6). Likewise, artists who
are women are often first introduced by their gender rather than their artistic style. Most K-12 art supply catalogs sell poster sets of “Women Artist” or “African American Artists,” implying that these are separate categories and not integral to standard art studies. As a feminist artist activist collective, the Guerilla Girls, point out, women are more likely to be seen in museums as represented in nude paintings created by male artists than by the artwork that was created by women. This discrepancy, although egregious, actually serves as a useful teaching point. The representation of the nude female form, whether in a painting or through pornography or advertising, is conventionalized from an authority established through art traditions (Berger, 1977). I believe the art class is the perfect space for critically teaching about historical representations of women and acknowledging current representations of women in popular culture. However, this often poses challenges in practice as I have been condemned by other faculty and administration for teaching “taboo” or “school inappropriate” contents.

Art teachers need to move past the physical properties of an art object to get their students to a contextualized understanding of the social, political, and cultural conditions of a work’s production (Desai, 2002). Implementing a curriculum heavily laden with discussions about sociocultural contexts can encourage underrepresented learners (Jackson, 2012) and art activities that explore identities and issues of identity will likely assist meaningful intercultural learning (Lai, 2012). Art teachers also have the opportunity to help students contextualize their own visual culture. Visual culture helps place people in

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6 I am referring to Guerilla Girl’s 1989 billboard that read: “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met Museum? Less than 5% of the artist in the Modern Art are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.”

7 An example of this condemnation is the exclusive requirement to have all school-wide art displays approved by two separate administrators who have expressed their concern about the school-appropriateness of my students’ artwork. More details are described in Chapter Five.
positions of power and subordination (Amburgy, 2011) and can even maintain post-Civil rights (colorblind) racism (Desai, 2010). Amburgy (2011) notes that it is important to teach students that these images are not mirrors, but constructions that can reinforce the positions of dominant social groups not only through the stories they convey, but by inviting the viewer to look at visual representation through dominate eyes. I think about how privileging artistic canons of White, rich, politically and religiously dominant, European and American men through the “recognition of great master works” would make the students whom I teach bored with little connection to art class content. By incorporating visual culture, art teachers can help students “think about the visual representations that surround them, including art, and see themselves as agents for social change (Amburgy, 2011, p. 11). This type of teaching can “facilitate an individual developing a higher plane of consciousness, a more alert state of awareness and a keener sense of self-reflection [making one] capable of understanding themselves and the world through multiple perspectives” (Lee, 2013, p. 145).

Culturally responsive teachers can use [art] images to engage students in conversations about the social construction of race [and gender]. What becomes clearer to teachers and, in turn, to learners, is the spoken and unspoken codes of race [and gender] that we as a nation have internalized and that in fact influence each individual’s identity construction. (Jackson, 2012, p. 9)

With this sense of reflection, young artists can recognize community needs and injustices and respond through their expressions of artmaking (Carpenter, Taylor, & Cho, 2010). Therefore, in asking, why is this study important specifically for art teachers, I recognize that the position and curricular choices of the teachers are shaped by the teachers’ understandings, uses, and manipulations of the racialized and gendered discourses in their particular school context.
It is important to study discourses in race and gender in the art classroom for what art can provide, but it is also important to explore this context to expose and discuss it’s challenges. As Rolling (2003) notes, art educators are caving into the pressures to produce standardized learning, regardless of how this conflicts with the art teacher’s own sensibilities. Though we still have the power to select the images we address in class and how we address these images, it has been my experience that art teachers, particularly in schools labeled by the State’s Board of Education as “failing” or “low achievement” feel tremendous pressure to appease administration’s requests for artwork to decorate the school with proclamations of students’ skills-based talents much more than critical deconstructions of the discourses that surround them. In my own district we have been both gently cohered as well as forced into producing student work for contests and displays that serve the purpose of good public relations. Discussions among district art teachers reveal the pressure to produce “nice” artwork for the hallways, and the fear in their voice reveals their concern about losing their job if the work creates dialogue, especially a controversial dialogue. Many of the other “failing” schools with struggling budgets made way for more science, technology, engineering, math, and language programs by cutting the art programs. “Don’t rock the boat, or your school might not have art at all anymore” is a very real threat among art teachers in urban schools.

Kraehe and Acuff (2013) cite recent studies that have demonstrated the presence of race, economic, and gender gaps in art achievement and access to learning opportunities art, suggesting that art education is deeply implicated in the production and maintenance of social inequalities. My own autoethnography explores how I use my position as an art teacher to challenge racial and gender inequalities in the school and society in which I live
and teach. Likewise, however, it also speaks to the ways that I, as an art teacher, am silenced by, forced to comply with, and influenced by dominant and oppressive discourses within this context. It is important to explore how art teachers navigate the discourses of their school context and the demands of the school administration and school community in relation to what they believe to be just teaching practices. Since the art class produces visual work, the product of these classes are much more visible (and open to immediate, focused scrutiny) than most classes. Balancing morals and personal ethics with dominant discourses shape the way art teachers relate to everyone around them.

**Why Autoethnography?**

In recent decades, there has been an increase in reflective and critical inquires on the part of art educators regarding issues of power in the written representation of culture, the complex relationship between the insider and outsider, researcher’s role and theoretical position, and style of writing such as voice (Desai, 2002). Stuhr (2003) adds that scholarship dealing with arts-based research and feminism support the incorporation of narratives and researcher’s voice. The notion of voice intrigues me as it relates to the field of education. After all, when I originally sought to pursue doctoral studies, I was determined to examine the gaps between the academy and the classroom. Why did I feel so hopeful and inspired when I was learning to teach in college, but felt so hopeless after seven years of teaching in a public school? The voices I heard in each context were extremely different and the entire nature of the discourses exchanged in these spaces seemed to exist almost in opposition of one another. Which voice was the correct one? Why couldn’t practitioners speak with the empowering voices of my favorite scholars? Why
couldn't my favorite scholars hear the whimper of defeat in the voices of struggling practitioners? After seven years of hearing one fairly narrow discourse, I longed to hear a different (and possibly more hopeful) discourse. At the same time, I wanted to return to academia to **shout** the voices of practitioners for all to hear. Stuhr (2003) acknowledges these different sets of discourses as well. She said that practicing and pre-service teachers saw the value in what she said about implementing social and cultural curricula, but they were leery on her judgment about what was appropriate for schools (Stuhr, 2003). Stuhr (2003) found this revelation to be shocking, but it echoed exactly what I remembered from my own lessons developed during college courses around the same time Stuhr wrote about this issue. My professors and teaching mentors (including my student teaching cooperating teacher assigned by the university) were speaking under different, but equally confining, regulatory discourses.

This study speaks to the regulatory discourses of my school context, but what are the regulatory discourses of the academic context? Denzin (2014) notes that autoethnographic work has been criticized for being non-analytic, self indulgent, irreverent, sentimental, romantic, non-scientific, having no theory, rigor, concepts, or hypothesis. Methodological critics claim that autoethnography lacks generalizability, validity, and reliability, but Denzin (2014) claims that you can't use criteria defined by a positivist discourse if you are not trying to produce a standard science text. Rolling (2008) claims that autoethnography opposes the ruling bodies of the reigning empire of traditional scientific methods of inquiry. Returning to the question of **why** autoethnography; it allows for my voice, the practitioner voice, to be present in academia. Denzin (2014) said that many (in this case, practicing teachers) keep to themselves and tell no one of their story.
Others don’t think they have anything worthwhile to say. I look back at my teaching colleagues and think about how many have wonderful stories to share, but are either afraid to speak up for fear of compromising their job or they don’t have access to an audience for their voice because family and financial constraints keep them out of conferences and academic courses. Maybe it is self indulgent, but the driving need to SHOUT my voice to my academic heroes is fulfilled through autoethnographic work. Being able to share my story after years of silence is liberating. However, with good autoethnography, the promise of self-indulgence is short lived as the emotionally painful process of revealing oneself to be examined by both one’s own critical nature as well as exposure an academic audience begins to unfold. It is only the hope that this pain will bring about transformation to the researcher and their readers that makes the pain worthwhile.

I might have explained why I want to do autoethnography, but I still need to address: who (else) cares? Why does scholarship care about my story? Rolling (2008) often asked himself similar questions. He claims that the relevance of his own private episodes is their very existence research literature, and thus making social injustices public as a way to move towards transformation (Rolling, 2008). Zander (2007) adds that stories do not merely communicate shared understandings; they can help us make sense of our lives, build communities, establish meaning to culturally significant messages and values, and potentially transform our view of the world. “Stories define us and help us to become. We know ourselves, and others, through a patchwork of biography, memoir, myth, parable, and prophesy” (Cosier, 2011, p. 44). These stories, according to Zander (2007) allow readers to reflect on their own experiences and potentially assist in developing a culturally relevant pedagogy.
This statement echoes my original justification for choosing autoethnography. Boylorn and Orbe (2014) describe autoethnography as “storied scholarship” that acts as a bridge between “cultural curiosities and lived experience” (p. 13). I see my work as a bridge between what people (particularly an audience of pre-service teachers) believe about urban art education classroom (for White, middle class, suburban female teachers: a cultural curiosity) and place these beliefs (e.g., curiosities) next to 10 years of lived experience in this context with the ever-urgent incorporation of a critical consciousness. I want my work to say, “pre-service teachers: read my work! Consider my challenges. Prepare yourselves to navigate the racialized and gendered discourses that you will experience by considering my own stories in relation to your personal and professional ethics.”

In her 2003 address at the National Art Education Association Convention, Patricia Stuhr, art education scholar, asked why no one listened to her recommendations for culturally relevant art curriculum. She said that she lacked credibility and her students and practitioners didn’t view her as a real art teacher. Therefore, I ask, “Practicing teachers: will you listen to me? I am a ‘real’ art teacher! I teach 6 classes a day and have hall duty. I can’t go to the bathroom until lunchtime. I understand... will you listen to me?! My work is the work that you need to read!” I kept thinking about how important my voice will be for practicing and pre-service teachers, but I couldn’t shake the notion of the term “cultural curiosity” used by Boylorn and Orbe (2014, p. 13). It occurred to me that while a researcher might observe or visit an urban classroom, but, as stated before, ethnography is not autoethnography. There are many research studies performed by researchers that visit and observe urban art education classrooms and write about race and gender (Garber, 2003; Vanet, 2002; Zander, 2007) and there also studies where researchers facilitate community
art projects that could mirror situations that arise in urban art education classrooms while acknowledging differences in race and gender, (Adejumo, 2010; Bastos & Hutzel, 2004; Hutzel, 2007) but where are the published studies that are written exclusively by the classroom teacher that give a glimmer of the social fabric of education as shaped by racialized and gendered discourses as they shape the identity and professional practices of a teacher? If race and gender are social constructs that “play a decisive role in the sociopolitical arena of our society” (Lee, 2012, p. 48) then how a teacher delivers, takes up, and interprets these discourses within a school is a critical avenue for helping to understand the racialized and gendered disparities in U.S. educational systems. Maybe, if more work existed that could speak from a voice of both practice and academia, more research would privilege experience and the transformations that ensue from autoethnographic stories. That’s when it occurred to me: an autoethnography that discusses racialized and gendered discourses in a school context is not only relevant for pre-service teachers but also for the professors preparing students for teaching can also learn from my experiences.

I might not always get to do this kind of work. If my professional career leads me into the realm of exclusively teaching collegiate level, I will lose the ability to speak with from both the researcher and K-12 practitioner voices. Therefore, while I have the unique and rare opportunity to speak to a willing audience as a practitioner, I must SHOUT my stories as loud as I can, to as many different ears that will listen, and in as many different discursive ways I can find.
Limitations of Study

My intended audiences include pre-service art teachers and their professors. Within both of these categories include current or future researchers who might also like to explore similar issues using similar methodologies. However, if any of my audience members are coming to this study to find answers, I must warn you now: you’re not going to find them here.

I think about myself as a pre-service teacher as well as all of the pre-service teachers I have taught in the past. There was, and still is, a driving need for pre-service teachers to find concrete answers to the practical questions that plague them. To those teachers: I cannot offer you tips, or even advice on how to navigate the discourses of your own school context and I do not seek to do so. At best, I can give you a glimmer into a sampling of the racialized and gendered discourses that you may hear in a school with demographics similar to mine. What I am offering you, however, is an example of the ways your professional ethics and personal morals will be challenged as an art teacher. As you read my experiences, think about how you would act similarly and differently and what that means for your own identity positioning. Consider ways you might respond so that you can come to your teaching career more prepared than I did. But I cannot tell you the correct way to respond to any of the situations that I present in this study.

For the researcher who is looking to replicate my study: you cannot. Quantitative research methodology implies that good research should be replicable for ultimate validity/probability. This study, however, can’t be replicated because it is only my study. Every context and the discourses in them will manifest themselves differently. I will provide you with a model of autoethnographic reflection, but this study does not serve as a
how-to for autoethnographic methodology. I am providing an example of one theory of an approach to research\(^8\), but it cannot be simplified to an explanation of how to perform an autoethnographic study. Future researchers can draw on my work as an example of how teacher-researchers can reflect on their school environment and their place in it, but it will be their own story to tell. As with many qualitative studies, my study doesn’t end with answers for anyone, and it might even leave the reader with many more questions than they started with and hopefully it will raise more issues that need to be studied more extensively. However, I would be satisfied with this because, as Stuhr (2003) states, it’s exactly what all good stories in research should do.

An ethnographer performing a study similar to mine will have very different results, each of with advantages and limitations. Though I am able to provide a very in-depth analysis of a 10-year long teaching career in a singular context, this also provides me with some unique challenges. Ethnographic researchers observe school environments as an observer or participant/observer. I, however, have conducted autoethnographic research of a situation that I have been in for more than a decade. Through the years, discourses of my school context have become more normalized to me than they might to an outside observer. A participate/observer might notice things that I have been conditioned to ignore. I have had the unique challenge of re-considering the language, texts, and behaviors of not only others, but myself, and, at the same time, make a familiar situation unfamiliar. Fortunately, I have had the advantage of stepping away from my high school teaching role and the social/professional setting of my school context for the data analysis phase of my

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\(^8\) For a greater explanation of my methodological theory, see Chapter Two.
this study, allowing me to re-read my own stories with from a space that has been separated from the original correspondences through time and proximity.

My study is also limited to discourses surrounding race and gender, but these are, by no means, the only identity markers that situate teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members. A previous section mentioned that urban school implies diversity. In many ways, urban school also implies economic disparity. As a Title One school, we definitely fall into this category, but it is not one that I am specifically addressing in my study. I have certainly heard discourses that economically situate teachers at a distance from their students, but I will not address these in this particular study. One reason is that taking on another identity element to study would possibly dilute my research and prohibit me from focusing on the elements that are most relevant, based on my previous observations. From a personal standpoint, I was less interested in exploring economics because I felt more removed from my students based on my race and gender rather than my economic status. For the majority of my teaching career, I lived in the community where my school is located and worked several jobs to make ends meet. As one of their neighbors, the feelings of economic difference was lessened, though I acknowledge that this is not true for many teachers and it is no longer true for myself since I have gotten married and live in a two-income household. I recognize that economic difference creates a divide between students that live in different sections of the community as well as difference from teachers, but socio-economic class will not be explored as a primary analytic lens in this particular study.

Another omission that falls within the perimeters of gender discourse is the acknowledgement of transgendered persons. Students are identified as a fixed gender
category on their school records and are expected to perform their assigned gender in the school context through regulatory practices such as restroom, locker room, and physical education class assignments. During my year of journaling, I was not aware of transgender concerns among students at the school environment providing data collection for this study. All of the students in my classes did not outwardly deny their assigned gender, but that doesn’t mean that gender identity conflicts were not occurring among these students or for students elsewhere in the school. I also don’t want to imply that I have never been faced with these issues in my own career. However, sexual identity, along with (dis)ability, socio-economic class, or any other forms of identity will not be the focus of this study. Rather, I only consider these issues as they intersect with race and gender.

It should also be noted that although I am considering the intersections of race and gender, the intersectionality of Blackness with femininity is not a focus of this study. Because my intention is to look at my own identity as White, female teacher and I have a particular focus on how this identity intersects with its (seemingly) opposite status of Black masculinity, I do not put a heavy analytical focus on Black femininity within this study. Though I recognize that a focus of Black femininity is an important research topic, this particular study only speaks to Black femininity as it adds to the dichotomy of my story of White femininity and Black masculinity.

My final limitation will once again acknowledge that the nature of this study will not exclude my own personal biases, emotions, and passions. As Rolling (2003) notes, autoethnography doesn’t give a dispassionate report of findings. Rather, it will be a living project that embodies the passion, rage, frustrations, and limitations of my own emotions. These emotions have been fostered through over a decade in a system and is influence by
students, personnel, and the community. Experience in this school’s social, political, and cultural environment has made me particularly sensitive to certain discourses while other discourses might be dismissed. I cannot deliver an unbiased assessment of educational and political policy or dominate social norms as it affects teachers and students, but rather express examples of lived teaching experiences within specifically revealed socio-political constructs. My work is only generalizable in the sense that it provides tension, contradictions, challenges, support, and alignment to theories surrounding race and gender and (unapologetically) emotionally raises questions and concerns about the ways in which discourses become enacted and internalized in some educational arenas.

In the next chapter (Chapter Two), I discuss how my autoethnography has been informed through literature and theory. I also include samples of data collection and explanations of my own data analysis and research framework. In Chapters Three-Six, I present my findings, organized under four major themes: (a) the establishment of a normalizing discourse of “good (White) girls” and “bad (Black) boys”, (b) professional discourses as exchanged with faculty and administration, (c) communication with parents and students, (d) and the realization of my own limitations in understandings of racial and gender discrimination. Throughout these chapters, I specifically explore works in the areas of Black student experience in U.S. public education, the education of White, female teachers, the maintenance of normalizing racial and gender discourses in U.S. education, and gender discourse/performance/regulation as practiced within U.S. K-12 schools. Chapter Seven includes personal reflections, discussion of findings, what my work adds to the field and suggestions for further research.
Chapter Two

(In)forming Autoethnography

As this autoethnography took form throughout the year, I had to consider how the practice of autoethnography informed my findings as well as my teaching practice. In this chapter, I discuss the practice of autoethnography and the benefits to performing this type of research in the field of art education. I discuss my role as a researcher and what this methodology means for me in terms of this dissertation. I also outline my procedures for data collection as well as provide two samples of journal entries that were collected throughout the year as an example of the type of data I collected. I also describe how I performed data analysis and review the predominant theories that inform my work. A consideration of Gender Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Whiteness Studies outline my main theoretical frameworks for data collection and analysis.

Autoethnography as a Practice

Critical autobiography⁹ is vital intellectual work. ... The social analysis accomplished by this form is based on two assumptions: first, it is possible to learn about the general from the particular; second, that the self is a social phenomenon. I assume that my subjectivity is filled with the voices of other people. Writing about myself is a way of writing about these others and about the world in which we create/inhabit ... Because my subjective experience is part of the world, the story which emerges is not completely private and idiosyncratic. (Church, 1995 in Sparkes, 2002, p. 216)

Toyosaki (2012) states that authoethnography is a "methodology for doers who critically engage in the doing of their identity" (p. 249). Tedlock (2000) describes

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⁹ Autoethnography differs slightly from critical autobiography in its focus on one's place in larger social, political, and cultural understandings. In Church's (1995) quote, she is addressing the place of autobiography within these broader meanings, paralleling a definition of autoethnography.
autoethnography as an “ongoing attempt to play specific encounters, events, and understandings into fuller, more meaningful context” (p. 455). Autoethnographers inscribe patterns of a cultural experience and give perspective on life by looking into their own experiences and reflecting more deeply on their interactions with others (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Ellis, 2004). Autoethnography is a practice; it is something that is performed by the researcher and its participants and evolves from fieldnotes into an ethnographic text (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Jewett, 2008; Tedlock, 2000; Toyosaki, 2012). However, this does not mean that autoethnographers use are simply writing about her own life (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It is, however, a way of explaining a way of life by understanding one life (Jewett, 2008). Autoethnography considers its authors to be positioned subjects who come to understand their identity as partial and positioned and thinks in terms of how others view them and interact with them (Desai, 2002). These factors affect the differing access to knowledge situates these differences within discourse, challenge dominant discourse, and demonstrated knowledge through lived experience (Desai, 2002). For Toyosaki (2012), it is a way of understanding social realities in a more meaningful way. For this dissertation, it is a way of understanding the practice of art teaching in K-12 public schools, racial and gender differences in schools, and the discourses that form and inform teacher identity. All of these topics have been heavily discussed, debated, and theorized, but this autoethnography gives life so some of these theories by showing an example of how these ideas live through my own practice.

As mentioned earlier, autoethnography differs from ethnography by placing the researcher as a subject within a social context as a way to understand social phenomenon through the researcher’s experience(s) within a particular socio/cultural situation.
Typically, in ethnographies, the researcher is not included in the analysis and results of their findings. The challenge, then, is for the autoethnographic researchers to fully consider the ways they are both privileged and oppressed within a society and/or to display their own self in vulnerable ways that expose the situated standpoint on positionality of researcher. Ellis and Bochner (2000) explain that many social scientists are not sufficiently introspective about their feelings, motives, and contradictions they experience or they are simply not observant to the world around them. They add that honest autoethnographic researchers are forced to confront things about themselves that are less than flattering and reveal this vulnerability into their text for others to critique both their work and their life. Both the researcher and the reader have much to gain from autoethnographic work. As Klein (2012) states, “using the Self as researcher (Etherington, 2004) can allow for self-reflexivity and bending back on oneself through writing, visualizing experience, and the linking of word and image back to theory and other research” (p. 7). Rolling (2008) welcomes self-reflection for its ability to decode and re-code one’s identity, allowing for the author to generate a new sense of agency within their subjectivity by opening up possibilities of reconstruction and reconfiguration. Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. Connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze ethnographic, first with the wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and they move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and
cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739).

Autoethnography may start with the self, but it doesn’t end there (Jewett, 2008). This blending of the self with the social is where autoethnographic work is unique to other genres of writing. Autoethnography is not autobiography because it doesn’t just explore one person, but rather includes their place within a culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jewett, 2008). Holman Jones (2005) adds,

“autoethnography works to hold self and culture together, albeit not in equilibrium or stasis. Autoethnography writes a world in a state of flux and movement—between story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denunciation. It creates charged moments of clarity, connection, and change” (p. 764).

Autoethnography differs from narrative inquiry because it tells stories that can evoke chaos, disconnect, fragmentation, and incoherence and they are expected to be used as such by the author and the reader, rather than provide a settled story (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Though it includes elements from other genres of writing, autoethnography transcends these genres to become more than the sum of its parts (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). It is a type of writing that urges the reader, as well as the author, to be inspired to consider their own situations and change what is now deemed unacceptable (Sparkes, 2002) and move them both reader and author to ethical action (Denzin, 2014). Good autoethnographic writing allows readers to feel moral dilemmas and consider how their own lives can be made into a story worth telling (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). For autoethnography to be meaningful, it needs to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise go (Miller, 2005). It is also a way to illuminate the author’s experience so that they may find a way to live with present hope and future hopefulness (Toyosaki, 2012) by uncovering social injustices in their own lives.
Autoethnography is the right methodology for this study because, as Miller (2005) explains, traditional framings of autobiography encouraged teachers to resolve discrepancies between theory and practice, between our teaching and personal selves, or between school reform goals and teacher’s enactment of them. Rolling (2003) explains that autoethnography is a methodology that questions the authenticity of voices that tell of an essential self and expands the possibility for a counter-narrative to discursive definitions that confine our identities. Through this study, I have come to realize my own limitations in understandings as White, female teacher. My traditional understandings of education taught me that if I studied enough, I could fix myself and fix the problem. Studying more will never help me truly understand the perspectives of my Black male students or those that continue to oppress them. Likewise, I assumed that my education placed me in position as the empowered pedagogue and the possessor of knowledge in my classroom. I thought that my good intentions, knowledge, and preparation would help me save my students, just like in the movies. My old dreams of being Louanne Johnson from Dangerous Minds10 laid to rest. Boylorn and Orbe (2014) state that autoethnographers need to take the inevitable privilege we experience alongside marginalization and take responsibility for our subjective lenses through reflexivity. It was difficult to realize that I am both a subject of my context and one who helps maintain students as subjects in educational systems (see Chapter 4 for further explanation). Cheng (2001) states that once an individual comes to term with the grief of our ignorance, she must be able to move on to a place beyond mere

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10 Dangerous Minds (1995) is a fictional film that portrays Louanne Johnson (Michelle Pfeiffer) as a tough-minded White, female teacher who wins the hearts of her poor, minority students and transforms their lives. It serves as an example as a “white savior” film and influences public perception of the role of (good) White teachers to minority students while oversimplifying the complexity of these relationships.
personal healing. She suggests that these discomforts must always remain complicated, opening the space for more work to be done.

When I started thinking about graduate school, my main objective was to bridge the gap between theory and practice and repair the ill treatment(s) of Black boys in my school. Autoethnography, rather than an unproblematic autobiography that shows my path to enlightenment, is a more authentic and realistic account of the struggles teachers and researchers face. I was naïve to think that I could figure out how to solve the theory-practice discrepancy. But rather than being discouraged by my inability to solve my original problems, I appreciate that it gives myself, and maybe others, entry points for building new knowledge. Even when my study comes to an end, there should be no firm conclusion or no static renderings that close down potential for reconfiguring the self and other (Greene 1997 in Miller 2005). My self, as well as my work, will be a site of ongoing openness (Butler, 1992).

**Researcher’s Role**

Denzin (2006) says that autoethnography is not an innocent practice; it is pedagogical, political, self reflective (not self obsessed), and an enactment of the world through the eyes of the researcher. In autoethnography, the roles of both the author and the reader are challenged. The challenge, then, is to write texts that create knowing and showing for the individual and the community (Holman Jones, 2005). Ellis and Bochner (2000) connect autoethnography to Foucault’s (1970) obliteration of the modernist concept of the author by problematizing the connections between the author, text, and readers. They also use the influence of Bakhtin (1980) to open up and encourage multiple
perspectives and more pluralistic voices from the readers to affect the outcome of
autoethnographic texts. Jewett (2008) also discusses the intimacy involved in
autoethnographic works because the vulnerability of the authors and their desire for their
texts to be touched by the stories of others and extend to the world outside of the writer.

For this type of research to be successfully executed, researchers must accept an
uncomfortable vulnerability (Jenks, 2002; Sparkes, 2002) that may expose elements that
may be problematic to the author’s personal or professional life (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

One of the most difficult aspects of this study is the way it allows for both cultural
and personal critique (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Zander (2007) notes that the stories we tell
about ourselves not only reveal what we think of others, but also our own prejudices and
misconceptions. As an art teacher of 13 years, I have had to face the challenge of exposing
how my teacher self might bolster gendered and racialized discourses that my academic
self knows to be discriminatory. I have had to face how I participate in the “those crazy
kids!” ableist banter that teachers exchange as a way to vent our frustrations with our own
failures in the classroom while simultaneously maintaining a sense of collegial alliance. I’ve
always struggled to maintain good working relationships with colleagues without letting
my criticality towards racist or sexist actions turn me into a social or professional pariah.

Throughout my study, I consider how I manage these relationships, the effect these
relationships have on discourse(s) exchanged, and if these relationships should be
maintained, altered, or abandoned as a result of this study. Finally, I’ve had to focus on
preserving my integrity as a teacher of teenage art students and constantly evaluate how
my research agenda might be affecting my own classroom discourse. Like all
autoethnographic work, I cannot deny that my own beliefs will not creep into the
discourses of my professional life. As I try to capture the essence of an experience and invite the reader into my thoughts, I am including my histories and standpoints (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Autoethnography is a selective production, but that does not give an author license to exclude details that don't fit the story they want to tell (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). I am faced with the challenge to be honest and thorough in my reflections of these discourses. Denzin (2014) challenges critics of autoethnography on the basis of their selection of facts, or, how the facts are perceived through the eyes of the author, claiming this makes it not exactly factual or fictional writing. Denzin (2014) describes facts as events and happenings, facticites as the descriptions of how those facts were lived or experienced, fictions as the narratives that deal with a story about (real or imagined) facts or facticities, and the truth as statements in agreement with facts and facticities that are understood within a community of minds. With this, he claims that all research writing is actually fictional because of its narrative arrangements of truth and reality (Denzin, 2014). I believe that autoethnography, when executed with honest and critical self-reflection, leaves the researcher with the same ethical considerations that all social scientists face: what are the details and facts I need to include to produce a full and accurate study? For this particular study, this includes my blemishes and misconceptions. I am not the hero of this story, nor can I situate others as villains. My story is not complete and end with answers. In fact, it might leave more questions than answers, but according to Stuhr (2003), that’s what all good stories in research should do.
Data Collection

My primary means of data collection was derived from periodic journaling over the course of one school year from August 2013 to June 2014. My journaling occurred when a particular discourse and/or action inspired recording, reflecting, and writing. This typically occurred 2-3 times per week over the course of the school year, although certain events inspired more writing while other weeks warranted less. In my journaling, I reported on classroom interactions with students, conversations with colleagues about students, discipline referrals and actions against my students, phone calls and meetings with parents, professional development sessions, meetings with supervisors, or any other significant effect that arose.

A typical journal entry would involve immediate field notes followed by a more elaborate review of the notes later in the day. Because time during the school day is heavily strained, I would have to take notes as quickly as possible and often in a cryptic shorthand that only I could understand. Sometimes I would scribble down notes on a handout during a meeting, fold them up, and take them home with me. When I was in my own classroom, I would jot down quick notes or, most often, parts of a dialogue, on my computer and into a personal email account and send them off before the next class arrived. Often, on my hour-long commute home, I would let the conversation, action, interaction, or event roll around in my head. What if I would have responded differently? What else could I have said or done? What did I intentionally/unintentionally NOT say, and what caused my silence? How did my emotions play into the situation? What are some other possible outcomes? How did my words or actions create reactions from others? How did this action/conversation affect this(these) relationships? Am I satisfied/troubled/curious about what occurred? How will I respond to
this person/people/class tomorrow? How does an action/interaction like this affect my identity and the way I teach or the way I relate to others in the school context?

After dinner was finished, lunches were packed, my son was bathed, rocked, and put to bed, my house would be quiet for a few minutes before I also had to catch some sleep before my 5:30am wake up. At this time, I would begin my journaling. I would write about the event and record the specific dialogue in situations from my field notes, but I would also write (sometimes for several pages) about how these events exposed my fears and weaknesses, caused me to question my effectiveness, and enflamed the rage I felt about the injustices around me and my inability or abilities to change them. Through my reflective journaling, I revealed my ugly biases or the ugly biases in other individuals or systems. These rudimentary shorthand notes are not sufficient for publication alone, but they are reminders of my feelings and thoughts during these moments in time and serve as a source of documentation that is open to (re)visions and reflections throughout my writing and teaching career.

Example/Sample

A typical school day starts rushed and panicked. I am standing at the door of my son’s daycare when the teacher unlocks it at 7:00 a.m. I try to assemble my sleepy toddler at his classroom’s breakfast table as quickly and gently as possible, drop of his belongs, then rush back into the car, hoping to catch every green light during the nine to eleven minute drive to school. I arrive in the parking lot and literally run to the front door. At exactly 7:15 a.m., an alarm sounds in the main office of the school where teachers sign in. At the sound of the alarm, a vice principal takes away the sign-in sheet and replaces it with
the “Late Sign-In” sheet, or, as teachers call it, “The Sign-In of Shame.” Everyday teachers (most often teacher-parents in their own childcare race) dodge buses as we run in the door. We always smile knowingly towards each other, acknowledging each other’s plight against time as we pile into the school, hoping to beat the alarm. I avoid eye contact with students and their parents outside or in the lobby— a conversation would definitely make me late. Even though I’ve never heard of anyone being punished for their name being on the “Sign-In of Shame,” teachers tell each other that it’s data that is being collected that can be used against us if the situation ever called for it.

After I sign in (about 60/40 for on-time/late), I head down to the art department and towards my classroom door. There is always a minimum of a half dozen kids waiting for me, more if I am late. Some kids are just early to homeroom, but most are (predominately girls) anxious to tell me about everything that happened since I last saw them. It’s an interesting blend of kids waiting at my door and I’m always impressed how kids from such drastically different social circles congregate around my desk everyday and do so with complete respect and support of each other’s stories. I try to listen and respond to as many stories as possible, but I have to always plead with the youth to get to their homerooms so they are not marked tardy for the day. Repeated tardy offenses would result in disciplinary action against the students as well as criticism from colleagues directed towards me for allowing the children to stay in my room too late. As I struggle to get my own homeroom kids that are milling around the hallways in the classroom door, I’m pleading with other students to leave my room. On a typical day I’ve written a dozen passes for students to come back later in the day to talk more, de-escalated a potential lunchroom fight, printed off a late English essay from a student’s email, warmed up a breakfast or two
in my classroom microwave, re-collected art supplies that were borrowed overnight, and received innumerable updates on student drama before the 7:27 a.m. late homeroom bell.

Homeroom ends and 1st period starts: PLC (Professional Learning Communities). During this period, all five of the art teachers meet. Other than the occasional required administrative tasks (mandated surveys, online test proctoring tutorials, budget and schedule forms, etc), we are expected to spend the majority of the time aligning our curriculum. We must record the daily progress of each meeting in a binder to be reviewed periodically by building administration and central administration if needed (although the latter has never requested to see our work). We share projects, specific assignments, rubrics, review student work, ask advice of other teachers, talk about students, and talk about life. I have found a great deal of my journaling has derived from conversations during these particular meetings. Our morning meeting is the last time I have a significant amount of time to talk to colleagues throughout the day and I go on to teach my six classes: three sections of 21st Century Art: Art Past the Paintbrush, two sections of Media and Visual Culture Studies and one section of Advanced Portfolio Prep/ Art History Studio. 21st Century Art and Media and Visual Culture studies are general courses that I designed after I started my doctoral work. I was troubled by our general art curriculum, as it seemed to be a repeat of the same formalist art principles taught in our elementary and middle school curriculum. I was inspired by Gude’s (2007) re-invention of the principles for a postmodern, 21st century world as well as Duncum’s (2002, 2003) incorporation of visual culture into the art classroom. I created two new courses that focused on the socio-cultural impacts art and images have on our understandings of ourselves and each other. 21st Century Art introduces 9th and 10th grade students to contemporary art and how current
social, political, and cultural issues are being addressed and expressed by the artworld. Media and Visual Culture Studies deconstructs mainstream media and popular culture for similar themes regarding gender, sexuality, identity performance, and a wide range of social norms with special attention to political, social, and economic influences on the images we consume. Both of these courses consume the majority of my day and each section has 28 to 30 students enrolled. Because these are general art courses, students from all academic and artistic levels are welcomed into this course, giving each class a wide mix of student demographics.

In Advanced Portfolio Prep/ Art History Studio, I am actually teaching two courses during one period. Advanced Portfolio Prep is a course that has run for years and the selective nature of the class has always given it very low attendance numbers, typically running with 10 to 14 students. This class is only open to senior students who have received high grades in Art Major I and II and have taken at least two advanced-level studio courses. The purpose of this course is help college-bound art students prepare the strongest portfolio possible by honing their skills while making sure they are still exhibiting a wide breathe of work. Because of a paperwork error in the year prior to data collection, Art History Studio, a general course open to students in grades 10-12, was never given as an option for students during course selection, so they were only enrolled in the course if the mistake was manually corrected by their guidance counselor. As a result, this class had low attendance numbers, with nine students enrolled for 2013-2014. The art department was told that in the 2013-2014 school year, no course would run with less than eighteen students enrolled, so we had to combine the classes in order to keep them both. As a result, a mix of students with extremely varied artistic and academic abilities came
together for an interesting classroom dynamic as I juggled to teach two vastly different classes at the same time.

**Journal Sample #1**

This particular journal passage is from one of my Media and Visual Culture Studies classes. Though these classes are always a blend of different race and genders, this particular section happens to have more girls than boys and is predominately Black, with some White students and only a few Latino/a students.

The class period referred to in this journal entry was the first round of student presentations of the four research projects assigned throughout the year. Prior to conducting their research, I worked with pairs or groups of three students as they selected their own topic that they wanted to explore and eventually share with the class. Their final assignment was a visual reflection of their opinions and feelings on their research findings. Some example topics that they researched included *The Fakeness of Reality TV, Representations of Drug and Alcohol Use in Hip Hop,* and *Controversial Fashion.* This particular reflection was written during the first class presentation, *Rape Culture in Media and Visual Culture.* I take notes during student presentations for grading purposes but also to jot down discussion points or questions that come up. This note taking allowed me to record accurate field notes for my journal as well.

**Tuesday, October 15, 2013**

Today the rape conversation continued, and got a lot more serious. I told the class that we were going to finish up the previous day’s presentation. I was excited because I knew their presentation was good and it also got a lot of great discussion—it’s exactly how I wanted us to start off the “presentation” portion of the project. Devin and Rachel had other ideas.

I got their wiki site up on the screen and started taking attendance, telling them to go to the front of the room to get ready to go. They didn’t move. I figured they were just moving
slow. “Devin, Rachel, you’re up. Let’s get rollin.” Still nothing. Jaleesa told me that they wanted me to come back there and talk to them.

I went to be the back of the room. “What’s going on, ladies? You’re up... let’s go.” Devin said that she would take a “0” for the assignment, but she didn’t want to go through what she went through yesterday. I asked them why they thought yesterday went so bad. **(Everyone was engaged and opinionated—exactly what the teacher wants—clearly not what these students wanted.)** I realized that Devin wants to talk about rape (secretly, her rape) without anyone talking back to her. She doesn’t really want to present a research project, she just wants to say the words out loud and have me, her counselor, and her mom listen without responding. She confided in me, I reported it to her counselor, and she’s still debating whether or not to tell her mom (because she is over 18 the counselor is not legally obligated to report it). She doesn’t want any of us to talk, just listen. The class presentation was her ‘practice’ confession because it wasn’t about ‘her’. The way the class responded was NOT what she needed. She didn’t want a debate or discussion. She didn’t want opinions or perspectives. She wanted sympathetic ears and silent mouths.

At the same time, I couldn’t let the discussion drop when I know that great learning could take place. The students wanted to talk about the topic, but they needed more organization. I promised to try to do a better job in stopping people from talking at the same time and I will do my best to keep us organized and focused.

I told Devin that she didn’t have to present if she truly didn’t feel comfortable doing so, but I encouraged Rachel to move forward. She said it was a disaster yesterday. The girl sitting next to her said that she thought it was a great conversation and an interesting presentation. She just said that people argue that way because ‘it’s their personalities’ but they didn’t mean any disrespect.” I told Rachel that the message still needed to be delivered, and she agreed to present alone. I reminded the students that it is a sensitive topic and it seemed to “click” with them. A few of the students said things along the lines of, “yesterday was great. Keep going.” Rachel pressed on. The conversation was definitely more focused. The four students that sit at the table by the door were off task and clearly more interested in something else. I redirected several times, but realized that addressing them was not going to be worth the fight and attention it would take away from the engaged students and constant interruption would dis-empower other students from speaking). Everyone else was focused and respectful.

Rachel started today’s talk with research about men being rape and a few students were skeptical. I had to explain the physical possibility to the students (particularly the female students that seemed to be confused). The men kept quiet during this conversation.

Perhaps they were embarrassed to talk about male anatomy? I told the class that it has to do with blood flow to that area, not necessarily love or desire. I decided to tell the students about my own (male) friend who was raped by a family friend as a young teenager. The woman caring for him while his mother was away came into his room in the middle of the night and caught him off guard while he slept. He was groggy, confused, and scared. He trusted her and she was doing something that shocked him and he didn’t know how to react so he just froze. The students seemed to think that a man can fight off any woman, but that story definitely set the grounds for a more serious, deep, and thoughtful conversation. There was, for the most part, silence, but extremely thoughtful, focused faces. A few utterances of “wow... seriously?” showed that they were thinking heavily about the topic.
The idea that men could be scared and powerless became a real possibility and body language made it evident that the students thinking more into the psychological process of rapes.

We continued to discuss the notion of men being raped then Rachel used that to go into her segway about the art/empowerment project “Unbreakable.” She showed images of men holding signs in front of their face that were “confessions” of rape but just displayed the words of their perpetrator. “Look at me. What man wouldn’t want me?” Then Rachel showed a picture of a woman. “It wasn’t rape. You’re just a tease.” We got back into the issue of “blame” and the conversation immediately went back to the effects of drugs or alcohol. I was worried Devin would get upset again, but the class was already much more serious and reflective.

Chanise said that women should always be aware of their surroundings and drink responsibly because they ‘should know what is out there.’ Emily started talking about the “gray area” of regret. During yesterday’s class, this “gray area” is where students started running the conversation, so I tried to organize and facilitate by posing particular situations. “If the man and woman are both too blasted to know what is going on, is that rape?” The students were unclear. Rachel said YES. “If the man and woman are both really tipsy and make a bad choice, is that rape?” Even Rachel said “ehhh…. I think that’s pretty gray.” Some students said no, but they did so with less force and more sensitivity. Others agreed that it was gray. “If a woman is too blasted to articulate “no” and the man is just a little tipsy, is that rape?” Almost everyone agreed “yes,” but a few still considered it to be gray. We went on with these different situations when Derik jumped in with “depends on if she was White.”

??!! ...... “Elaborate, Derik.”

“If a Black man has sex with a White woman, it’s over. It’s rape. If a White man has sex with the White woman, it can be debated if it’s rape.”

“is it the race of the woman that matters, or the race of the man?”

“the man.” (a few students agreed with Derik). “If a Black man has [non consensual] sex with a White woman, it’s over. He’s away for LIFE. A White guy, he gets a few year.”

“How about another ethnicity; Mexican, Asian, etc.”

“Oh, if it was a Mexican raping a White woman, they’d just kill him!”

For some reason, I didn’t push the issue of the sex of the offender. Maybe I am less sensitive to the position and concerns of men because of my own sex. Maybe I was focusing on Devin and giving her the reassurance that she needed. Either way, I never addressed the concerns of the boys of the group and how this made them feel. There were six Black males in attendance today and one White man. I didn’t ask them their thoughts or feelings. I just said, “So is it different if it’s a woman of color who is getting raped?” The students didn’t push for a discussion of the male’s feelings. Maybe it’s because it’s mostly girls or maybe because rape culture is still insensitive to the needs and feelings of men— which is one of the points Devin and Rachel wanted to address in their topic of rape culture in the media!!! Still—I never considered “what if one of my students or their male friends have been a victim of rape? What closure do THEY need from this discussion? I only considered the needs and closure sought by the female students. In retrospect, pursuing this conversation more could have been very meaningful and exposed the gender
differences in social norms relating to this topic. Instead, the conversation went in a
different direction.
The students said that black women are less likely to get raped. I asked why and they said
that Black women appear tougher. Chanise said that White women carry mace, but Black
women carry knives. Joe laughed in agreement. He said White women look more scared
and out of sorts. I confessed that I try to project a certain toughness when walking around
North or West Philly. In doing so, I was confessing more than my own gender
perceptions, but my racial perceptions as well by specifying predominately Black
urban regions. I was confessing that I believe a White woman is unsafe in these “tough”
urban areas. It was unnoticed by the class, but a telling statement that I made about race
and gender and I was reinforcing many levels of stratification. Still, it didn’t register on the
radar of any of the students. (Which bothers me that it’s so normalized that it goes
undetected). Instead, Quiesha picked up on the North Philly reference and talked about
how she also had to project toughness when living in North Philly. A few of the students
made similar statements about Black women being tough, so I asked about Mexican
women. They said that Mexican women rarely address rape because they (the Mexican
families) take care of it on their own (meaning that the fathers/brothers bring violence to
the aggressor.) Keandra mentioned that Black and Mexican women often don’t mention
rape at all because of the consequences it will have on their families. When asked to
elaborate, she talked about how young Black girls get raped and their mothers don’t say
anything or they defend the man.

This launched the whole class into a full-on Catholic church confessional. Jaleesa started.
She talked about her friend who was raped by a family friend since she was four (until the
age of eleven) and the mother said that she was a “tease.” She said she can’t even look at
her mother now and she lives with her dad. The violator is on the run and it’s caught up in
the court system. No justice has been served. Quiesha talked about her sister (through her
father) getting raped by her sister’s mother’s boyfriend and how the mother defends the
boyfriend and said “he’s a good guy and would never do that. He has kids of his own.’
Quiesha said he DOES have kids of his own, but he’s not a good guy. Students took turns—
Nicole, Megan, Shonelle— (all girls) confessing stories of friends and relatives who have
been raped by family members or family friends and the mothers have covered it up. I
asked— but premised that it was related back to our previous discussion- if it was possible
that these girls WERE lying to get the men out of their lives — but that was not even
considered. (Earlier Nicole mentioned that girls sometimes lie to get the boys in trouble
after they regret sleeping with them, and it was definitely something the students
considered a problem. However, in this case, it was not even entertained.)

They talked about how the mothers lie for the men to protect the men as well as to save the
life they have (financial stability, etc.) and that the mothers either do it for love (of the
man) or to protect their household. They said that if you call out a man for rape, that man’s
family or friends may do more harm to the rest of your family, so you have to keep it quiet.
These “realities” experience by my young students were concepts that I have never imagined
or considered. To say that only teachers hold knowledge about a topic is ridiculous— I can’t
believe how much these students’ experiences have taught them. What are they learning
about the world through these experiences? How do I adequately mediate a conversation that
Journal sample #2

In addition to reflecting on interactions within my own classroom, conversations with other teachers as well as colleagues in guidance, discipline, security, and administration also help me consider more deeply what is occurring in my own classroom, the context of our high school, and the context of education in general. Throughout my journaling, I recorded conversations with many different people within the school.
community. This particular passage is derived from a conversation with other teachers regarding student discipline problems. This conversation is made of venting, validation-seeking, and suggestions/advice. After the conversation, I consider how much the troubling claims made by others are actually visible in my own practices.

In addition to the reflections done immediately after this conversation, journaling allows me to revisit conversations months later with a fresh pair of eyes. As I re-read this (and many other) journal entries, I raise new questions that didn’t appear as out-of-the-ordinary the first time around. As I revisit this particular entry, I am troubled by the language used to describe students. I am more trouble, however, that this didn’t raise my attention at the time. *How has this language become so normalized? How do I participate in creating (even if by failure to acknowledge) this language? In what ways did my validations/suggestions help or hinder my colleagues’ practice? How did their discourse shape mine?*

Journaling also allows me to situate particular events and conversations against other samples across the year. Throughout my journaling, I have many entries that examine how “good girls” navigate the school context in a variety of situations. *How do these entries speak to one another? Does my attention to this problem help resolve it throughout the year? How do my reflections of this topic evolve throughout the year, and how are some other ways these issues are raised in the discourse(s) in which I participate?*

Wednesday, December 11

Conversations about boy versus girl for the most troublesome students continued today during our Professional Learning Community meeting. (Over the past few weeks, our conversations about classroom management have revealed discrepancies between what we believe to be true about gender and what we have been experiencing in our classrooms.) Christina (a White, female art teacher in her mid-thirties) continues to have
problems with the high achieving girls that she says are “entitled bitches.” These (predominantly White) girls in advanced level studio classes continue to maintain that art should be an “easy A.” Most of these girls Christina speaks of are honor roll students and have self-proclaimed “senioritis.” During the meeting, Christina shows examples of some of these girls’ sub-par efforts and expresses her frustration over their lack of effort and wonders about their true potential as artists. To make matters worse, one of the (White) girls’ parent has threatened to complain to administration over Christina’s inability to see her daughter’s ability like all the other art teachers who have given her straight A’s in the past. Christina said that she refused to buckle to the pressure from the parent and she welcomed a meeting with the student, parent, and administration where the students’ work could speak for itself. (I find this admirable because many teachers in our school cave at the threat of parent complaints).

Conversely, Angela (a White, female art teacher in her mid-thirties) continues to struggle with the general classes that have rambunctious ninth-grade boys. She is at the end of her rope with some of her freshman classes because of the behavior and defiant attitudes of these boys. She is exasperated and exhausted and is desperate to figure out how to handle them. She’s used every classroom management tactic she’s ever learned, and nothing seems to be working. She’s used positive discipline, restorative practices, and getting downright tough, but to no avail. She has changed her teaching style, changed her lesson planning, and even changed part of her curriculum. She seems to be trying everything. She has gotten to the point where she has really given up on teaching these boys and basically wants them to stop hindering the learning for the rest of the students in the class. She does note that most of her students do want to learn, but a few of the “assholes” are ruining it for everyone. This attitude is not typical for the usually-optimistic Angela, and I know the stress of not knowing how to relate to her students is wearing on her. Conversely, I have spent the past several years teaching nothing but general classes and finally at a place where I don’t really have a lot of discipline problems with these classes, and especially not with rambunctious ninth-grade boys. Angela keeps asking me how I deal with these boys and wonders why don’t have any discipline problems like hers, and I honestly don’t know why. Maybe it just has to do with scheduling. I know I have certainly had classes in the past where I struggled with some rambunctious ninth-grade boys—maybe I just didn’t get any placed in my classes this year. But I’m troubled by her exclusionary tactics and giving-up attitude towards them. However, while I’m troubled by it, it’s not foreign to me. I’m no stranger to the “if you aren’t here to learn step aside and let me teach those who are” attitude. It’s a tactic I remember using early in my career when I’ve reached the bottom of my “bag of tricks.” Once I saw it employed against my students by an outside artist during a workshop, I vowed to employ that “trick” again.

This is not to say that I am innocent of treating “good girls” and “rambunctious boys” differently. Though I don’t have whole classes where one profile dominates over the other, I can see it in smaller scales throughout my day. For example, Davante talks all through homeroom. When he isn’t talking, he’s making faces to try to get other people to laugh out loud. He is a very large boy with a baby face... he is the physical personification of what you might expect from an immature ninth grade boy. He situates himself in the middle of the room because that is where he can get the most attention. When he starts acting up in
homeroom, I either move them or threaten to move him to the back of the room where nobody can see him and he can't interact with anybody. However, Jenny, a White girl and DJ, a White boy, also talk all the time. They have less attention-getting behaviors— the only talk to each other, they each speak in a lower volume, they stay in their seats, and they are much smaller in stature. Even though they talk just as much, they do not command the attention that Davante does. He is the one that gets in the most trouble though. I have moved DJ a few times back to his original seat, but I have never moved Jenny. Jenny and DJ are both in 10th grade and have an “I’m so over this” attitude towards the monotony homeroom— particularly Jenny. If I try to move her, she would throw a huge fit and make a big spectacle/power struggle in front of the whole homeroom. It’s not a battle that I’m willing to fight first thing in the morning. Besides, I know that her deviance would not have any disciplinary consequences, so I would end up losing this battle in front of the whole class, thus diminishing my position as the leader of the classroom while bolstering the defiant student in social positioning. Davante and DJ however, are less formidable challengers. When I tell DJ to move his seat, he just smiles and moves. When I tell Davante to move his seat, he whines about it, but eventually goes. He is used to the process of getting in trouble. He’s been doing it ever since he was in school. He gets in trouble all the time and all of his classes and he’s always on the suspension list. Trouble is what is normal for him. Jenny, on the other hand, doesn’t get in trouble very often and I’ve never known her to be suspended. I have a feeling if she does, she uses her brains and mouth to successfully argue her way out of it.

Within my own homeroom, I’m experiencing the same issues that Christina and Angela are facing. “Mouthy” but “good” White girls and “immature” or “rambunctious” Black boys have very, very different ways of navigating the classroom and discipline system. White girls know how to avoid it and Black boys see it as a part of their everyday school experience. These have been put in place long before they get to high school and I feel like another cog in the machine by allowing it to happen in some very small degree in my own room or saying nothing what happens in a very large degree elsewhere in the school.

Data Analysis

Jenks (2002) discusses the struggles autoethnographers face when sorting through notebooks filled with field notes. She writes, “Are my notes any good? Are they filled with others’ experiences or the other way around? And speaking of experiences, I’m not sure I had the right to write what I did. Should I edit the negative comments before I write my study? Are my notes useless?” (p. 171). She adds that this technical issue about field notes underlie the larger theoretical concerns about what it means for ethnographers to write
about observations of others. How much of my work is observational and how much is interpretive?

Throughout my journaling and data analysis, I must keep a clear mind when I consider what I mean by *discourses*. In my writing, I did not solely focus on transcribing dialogue, as discourse cannot be reduced to language; language is merely one mode of discourse (Foucault, 1978, 1982). I had to consider semiotics, behaviors (public/private/intentional/unintentional), texts, questions, and speeches, as well as ways of being, speaking, responding, and not responding. Pregnant pauses, body language, eye contact, and the way people physically situate themselves in a space are all integral elements in analysis of school discourse. With a Foucaultian perspective of discourse, I must also acknowledge that my autoethnographic journaling will be only one part of the discourses, as language spoken by others will be taken by me, re-coded, and redistributed as my own language and those that read my words may receive it differently than how I intend it (Foucault, 1975). Therefore, I have tried to be as descriptive as possible and detail situates, tones, environment, and body language, but I acknowledge that the reports of a translation of discourses are not without my own biases as I translate the discourse and the biases of my reader(s). The biases that I speak of include how discourse and language are assigned to things based on social construction that manipulates discourse to serve particular purposes (Walshaw, 2007). As an educational practitioner and scholar, I realize that my interpretation of educational discourse may differ from those of my colleagues, administrators, and students’ parents and I must be cognizant of how my own critical perspective of these discourses may get translated by those I am engaging in conversation. Though my study is autoethnographic, my input makes up half of all discourses (Foucault,
1982), and this must always be considered as I conduct my analysis so as to avoid leading a conversation in a direction that is desirable to my research.

Now that I have disclosed my biases, I must also disclose how deeply emotional the act of journaling was for me and I believe the very act of frequent writing also changed my perspectives on my educational context. To be completely honest, I did not expect journaling to affect me to the extent that it did. After all, I had been teaching in the same school for a decade and I thought, “I’ve seen and heard it all! Now all I have to do is write it down so I remember it later!” How incredibly naive I was.

After thirteen years of teaching (ten years served in my current school placement), I have never had such an emotionally challenging year of teaching as the year I collected data for my dissertation. Granted, I’ve had many years that were significantly more challenging in terms of classroom management, struggling to get grading finished, teaching too many over-crowded classes with too many different classes to prepare for, etcetera. This year I had next to no major classroom management or discipline issues, I enjoyed teaching the courses I was assigned, and most importantly, I genuinely enjoyed this year’s group of students. Despite the fact that everything was going well from the outside, I came home most days so emotionally drained that my husband worried about my health and wellbeing. The only major difference that could have caused such turmoil was that this year, nothing stayed in the classroom.

Granted, I’ve always been introspective and reflective of my own teaching while critically considering the context around me. After all, this criticality brought me to a doctoral program in the first place. Therefore, I was prepared to write down all of the feelings, concerns, and questions I experienced throughout my teaching day. I was not
prepared for the degree of impact it would have on my self and my teaching. At first, writing things down was therapeutic and I enjoyed the first few months of journaling. I filled page after page with observations, thoughts, questions, and concerns and it felt great to gather so much data. As the school year went on, however, the writings got less frequent, but much longer and much more cynical in nature. Sometimes I would look back at previous writings and compare them to what was happening in my current classrooms. The documentation of past events helped give more context to my current troubles, and the connections devastated me.

One example of one of these scenarios was re-reading and re-living the school year with one of my favorite students, Tanieka. Tanieka, a petite Black girl with boundless energy, came into my ninth grade contemporary art class with unparalleled enthusiasm. She received high grades and was even considering starting a “Performance Art Club” after she enjoyed participating in a successful flash mob for one of my class projects. She, as well as at least a dozen other students, would eat lunch in my room everyday. We’d listen to Mexican pop music and she would dance and sometimes knit. Tanieka said that she wanted to avoid the cafeteria and the “useless drama” that took place there. By the end of the year, Tanieka was removed from my class and placed in study halls and self-contained special education classrooms. She spent the last few months of the school hospitalized for psychiatric treatment and she never finished the school year. What went wrong?

I review the year’s worth of reflections in regards to Tanieka. The first sign of trouble came when teachers started emailing about her declining academic progress in late October. One teacher said that, “she’s off parole now, so she has no reason to care about her
grades anymore.\textsuperscript{11} I’ve re-read the journal entry where Tanieka was made aware of these correspondences, and how it devastated her that teachers now thought she was a “bad kid.” A week later, another journal entry tells about Tanieka sobbing and crying uncontrollably in my room because a White, male administrator called her “an idiot.” By December, she was failing most of her classes. By February, my journal entries reveal that she started exhibiting highly concerning behaviors and making disturbing threats against herself. I started reaching out to her (White, male) guidance counselor, Mr. Johnson, but he just signed her up for community counseling. I go back and read about the day in March when she took a pair of scissors from my closet and shed blood onto a piece of paper, giving it to myself and her best friend. Prior to that day I had been in constant contact with her community counselor, Mary, as well as Mr. Johnson and I notified them both immediately, pleading for their help and immediate response. My heart breaks all over again when I remember that Mr. Johnson responded with an email to myself as well as the disciplinarian that simply said, “Tanieka was taken out of your class and she is not to come near you.”

\textit{Absolutely no! Don’t you dare take her out of my class! Mary, help me make him understand that she shouldn’t be taken out of my class! “I told him the same thing—that’s the worst thing he can do—but he said he’s not making any more schedule changes for her.”} In the same journal entry, Tanieka’s best friend came into my room in the middle of class. “\textit{You didn’t do that, did you? She won’t come out of the bathroom now. She’s been crying in there for an hour.” “I am doing everything I can do to get her back, I promise you and her.”} I did do everything. I even pleaded with the principal to make Mr. Johnson get her out of that

\textsuperscript{11} Sample of a colleague’s email as told in an October journal entry
extra study hall and back into my class. “I’m on it. I’ll talk to him.” The next few entries revealed that nothing happened, despite daily pestering from myself and Tanieka.

Soon after that, Tanieka began rotating in and out of our school and psychiatric treatment and was given a slew of medications, all of which she hated. As I read back through my journal and witnessed her spirit and physical being decline, I can’t help but look at how the discourses that surrounded Tanieka sent her on her downward spiral. As I think about what happened, what should have happened (in my opinion), and how things might have been different if the discourses expressed and decisions made by myself and others were different. I’m not going to attribute all of Tanieka’s troubles to the discourses that transpired over the school year—all I have is my own observations and I know that I only know the part of the story that has been revealed to me. Furthermore, the point of telling this tale is not to give an example of an analysis. (Analysis begins in Chapter Three). My point in highlighting this story is to exemplify how the data collection and analysis process has been a deeply emotional process, and has introduced a degree of cynicism that I am not used to. Rolling (2003) says that autoethnographic projects begin with uncertainty and is uncertain of its end, not resulting in its own legitimatization, but a change of body and mind. I was arrogant to believe there was a degree of certainty at the beginning of my project; thinking that I would simply write down what happens, code it, and document discourses. In attempt to make full disclosure of my own position, data collection has changed me from the time I started journaling to the last entry and has even changed me as an educator. What I once considered to be my concerns has now grown into incredible rage. It’s impossible to not let that emotion creep into my writing and even my analysis. I’m asking the reader to feel free to challenge my work, but know that my biases and emotions
are inextricably linked to my data analysis. I’ll acknowledge the connection, but I won’t apologize for it.

**Theoretical Research Framework**

I see theory, in a general sense, as a way of analyzing, considering, contemplating, questioning, and understanding a principle. However, theory’s meaning and usage changes among different disciplines. Philosophical theories are constantly in flux. These types of theories are shaped by social norms and values, academic discourse and cultural events or phenomenon. If theory is the way in which I make sense of, justify, predict, or explain actions, events, and ideas, then, ideally, I can use theory to gain a better understanding of human nature. With a better understanding of human nature, interventions on current realities could create a better world *in the eyes of the theorist*. Even if a theory is not intended to result in a direct action, the distribution of a thought or theory can alter perceptions, which may indirectly create altered behaviors or ignite intellectual deliberation in its audience. However, as a teacher-researcher, I am aware of the exclusionary nature of the academic jargon used when working with particular theoretical paradigms. If I am writing exclusively for academics, am I not just preaching to the converted? Therefore, I use Feminist and Critical Race theories in a way to explain and (hopefully) re-vision certain status quo behaviors in the educational realm and hopefully create a more just society for those whom my work addresses.
Gender Studies

Feminism: the “f” word? Despite 150 years of activism, “feminism” is still regarded by many as a dirty word (Fudge, 2005). This certainly holds true in many aspects of my personal and professional life. My family considers feminism to be a joke. No holiday gathering would be complete without enduring sexist comments, jokes, and stories told exclusively for my benefit. The message has been clear for years: *keep your crazy, liberal femi-nazi ways out of this family.* The term “femi-nazi,” coined by Rush Limbaugh, conjures images of facist gender terriorists that seek to control all aspects of men’s lives (Fudge, 2005). So even though I have questioned gender norms, stereotypes, and sexism since my elementary school years, the utterance of the “f” word in college seemed to draw an unpopular response to my Republican, rural-based family.

In my urban, diverse teaching context, the “f” word doesn’t seem to be any more popular. The “Guerilla Girls” lesson has always been one of my students’ favorite lessons of my contemporary art class. They love learning about their signage and their guerilla tactics and are intriqued by their methods of anonymity. However, when the “f” word comes up, I can see that I have lost some students. Perhaps their past discourses have also taught them about this “curse” word. One day Rachel, who proclaimed herself a feminist after taking my contemporary art course, stopped in to tell me a story of grave gender discrimination in her workplace. She concluded the story by exclaiming, “yay, feminism!” A student that was listening in on the conversation replied with, “wait, you’re a feminist? I thought you had a boyfriend last year.”

Apparently the “f” word is associated with liberal, femi-nazi lesbians. But this “f” word is not the feminism that I know. It is my job to educate others about what feminism
actually means. However, that is not such a clear-cut answer because feminism takes on a multitude of different forms, sometimes resulting in conflicting paradigms. To understand contemporary notions of feminism, it’s helpful to understood the origins of the study.

Buffington and Lai (2011) and Fudge (2005) outline some of the most clear and direct historical summary of feminism that I have read. They describe first-wave feminism as taking place in the mid-19th and 20th centuries (Buffington & Lai, 2011). This is the wave of women’s suffrage liberation movements that is often taught about in American history courses. I would posit that most students of public school remember this as upper class women fighting for political equity and voting rights. Second-wave feminism, as Buffington and Lai (2011) describe it, took place between the 1960s and 1980s and brought more women to academia, thus resulting in more interest in theories of social constructions of femininity and women that challenged mass media and other avenues of the discourse of patriarchal oppressors. This lead to a mass media backlash showing feminist caricatures as unattractive, fanatic, manhaters (Buffington & Lai, 2011). This caricature has remained salient in the minds of many Americans, including many of those students, community, and family members that I come in contact with everyday. Even though feminism has evolved into many different paths since its second wave, these are not often explored in K-12 school, leaving the images of women’s sufferage and caricaturized 1960s activism to be the only images of feminism that many can recognize.

Second wave feminism is often called feminism for privileged White women for it’s failure to respond to the experiences of women of color, non-heterosexual, working class, or disabled women (Buffington & Lai, 2011). Some third wave feminist see it is rigid and self-victimizing (Buffington & Lai, 2011). Nevertheless, for what second wave feminism
might have lacked, it helped pave the way for more inclusive contemporary feminist theories. Feminism had transformed from grassroots activism to well established theories that cross disciplinary boundaries, grounded in women’s lives and their cultures (Garber, 2003). Generally speaking, third wave feminism extends methods and critiques of second wave feminism to include capitalist consumerism, social change, the inclusion of personal narrative, and responses to visual culture (Buffington & Lai, 2011).

Contemporary feminism is open and flexible, allowing individuals to use feminist theories to serve them in the ways they need for their own lives. Some of these, however, exist in contradiction to each other. Some fear that a lack of a unified vision might lessen feminism as a social movement (Buffington & Lai, 2011). A non-feminist perspective fails to see gender inequality as a social arrangement, or at least recognizes it but sees nothing wrong with it (McCaughtry, 2004). For a non-feminist, “biological differences legitimizes social positions, even inequitable ones” (McCaughtry, 2004, p. 401). This is linked to biological essentialism, which claims that gender is related to biological sex and masculine and feminine behaviors are fixed in nature (Glasser & Smith, 2008). Conversely, racial feminism acknowledges biological differences in showing how each is assigned meaning and status through culture and language that empowers men (McCaughtry, 2004). Radical feminists are not interested in women gaining equal power to men, but rather abolishing all notions of power itself (Fudge, 2005). McCaughtry (2004) adds that radical feminists seek to find social contradictions and stereotypes that use biological essentialism to limit women’s life possibilities.

Post feminism or girlie feminism may be seen as anti-feminism by some critiques. This version of feminism implies that feminism has outlived its usefulness because there
have already been major advances for women, and because many educated women are willing choosing more traditional roles of motherhood (Fudge, 2005). Though it rejects past feminist ideas (similar to many contemporary feminist paradigms), it does so in a way that also solidifies and reduces the notion of femininity as being irrational and something to be sexually objectified. Buffington and Lai (2011) describe this versions of feminism as frivolous, sexual, consumerist, and narcissistic, and possibly satisfying traditional patriarchal views of exoticism. I believe this view was partially made popular through the hit series, *Sex in the City*, which embraces womanly independence as sexual promiscuity, fashion obsessions, spa days, and fanatic shoe-buying, all while doing so with expensive accessories and sexy attire. Similar in many ways, but distinctly different, Buffington and Lai (2011) and Fudge (2005) define *new feminism* and *girlie feminism* as the emphasis on personal choice, the consuming and embracing of visual culture and consumerism and finding pleasure in the contradictions of life.

*Liberal feminism* is, in my opinion, the most concrete, salient, and accessible version of contemporary feminism. Liberal feminism focuses on economic, social, and political resource distribution and fights for equal access to power and program (Fudge, 2005; McCaughtry, 2004) while exposing discrimination in politics and education (Periera, 2013). According to liberal feminism, men and women are no different in any way other than reproductive capacities and should be regarded as equal in every sense (McCaughtry, 2004; Periera, 2013). I believe this is the most salient aspect of feminism in mass culture because it has been my experience that most see feminist agendas as those seeking gender equality or, at least, exposing gender-related inequalities. Garber (2003) also notes that when taught about feminism, most of her art education students took on projects that sought to
share information on gender inequality in the sense of showing that inequity exists, but most students lacked the use of a deeper theoretical understanding of feminist and gender issues.

I believe that the notion that feminisms’ end goal of allowing for women and men have equal access to programs makes many people believe that feminism is an antiquated activist issue, particularly in education. After all, more women students enroll in college, leading many to believe that K-12 education has achieved gender equality. Carinci and Wong (2009) point out that many school-aged children do not feel constrained by gender norms, but most have little knowledge of legal or historical details exemplifying gender discrimination. And as Garber (2003) points out, educational gains have been made for women, but much more so for White women.

Early efforts to characterize a universal feminine experience were larger informed by White, middle class perspective, and were thus problematic (Fudge, 2005). Concerned that feminists were overly focused on gender as a unifying caste, black feminist theorist and activists took emphasized the intersections of race and gender (Fudge, 2005). Black feminist theory (hooks, 1989) focuses on how race, class, and gender are inextricably linked and calls for an end of racist, classist, and sexist oppressions rather than just seeking equality. In many of her writings, Black feminist bell hooks seeks to challenge the politics of domination and dismantle the White, supremacist, capitalist patriarchy that inhibits so many from living their fullest lives (1989, 2004). Womanism is a theoretical perspective both related to and different from black feminist theory in its attention to the exclusive standpoint of Black women in direct response to White, middle class standpoints of feminism (Periera, 2013). This is closely connected to standpoint theory, which focuses on
intersections of power, social relations, and knowledge (Harding, 1991). According to Harding (1991), anything learned or performed by a woman needs to be described from the viewpoint of that woman, not through the eyes of the dominant hegemonic perspective. Standpoint theory acknowledges how all identity markers, including race, class, sexual orientation, and culture affects different standpoints.

Though all feminist perspectives shape some capacity of my understandings of feminism, how I live my own life, and how I teach feminism to my students, I feel most comfortable with a postmodern feminist perspective. Postmodern feminism treats “gender as an ongoing social production whose meaning is negotiated in many places across the social landscape. It sees gender as discourse deeply implicated through identity development, as individuals send out messages about gender throughout their life” (McCaughtry, 2004, p. 402). According to McCaughtry (2004), postmodern feminists are concerned with reading or identifying discourses that infuse gender with meaning, including visual forms (particularly media) as well as spoken/unspoken forms of communication through everything from school district mandates to sexist jokes. He goes on to say that “the point for the postmodern feminist perspective is that men and women navigate, read, and make sense of discourses, ignoring some and internalizing others in construction of the gendered self (McCaughtry, 2004, p. 402). “Postmodern feminism affords us the ability to look beyond binary systems of identity and difference to explore the ways power, knowledge, and meaning are flexible and constructed within particular locations” (Periera, 2013). Postmodern feminism considers identity to dynamic, ever-shifting, context-specific, and interwoven from all of the different markers that define our
position. Periera (2013) describes gender through postmodern theory as a verb instead of a noun; a performance of social constructs of categories by and between individuals.

Postmodern feminism allows me to explore the way that all identities are in constant flux and how these positions are shaped by discourses. Feminist theory is not limiting in the sense that it doesn’t merely acknowledge oppression and equity, but allows us to see gender as a performance and consider the ways each individual takes on their own performance and what gender discourses they choose to adopt or ignore. It is important to note that postmodern feminism also leaves room for criticality towards the structures and discourses that construct our notions of gender and how our performances often face limitations. These internal or forced limits are typically dictated by the dominant, White, middle class, heterosexual, Christian ideologies of gender performance. These performances are enacted by behaviors and personality characteristics that have been culturally determined to be associated with biological sex, even though sex does not create either these behaviors or characteristics. Carinci and Wong (2009) and Glasser and Smith (2008) link postmodern feminist theory to social construct theory to elaborate on how people interact with their surroundings to actively construct their genders. Social construct theory argues that all identity markers (gender, intelligence, etc) are created and shaped by cultural values, perceptions and practices while questioning the doctrine of positivism that creates social hierarchies based on genetic and biological traits (Carinci & Wong, 2009). Social construct theory asserts that discourses have built up a system of oppression that has been based on observable differences between people. These status of these traits have been categorized, defined, and limited by social constructs and inhibits people from maximizing their own lives. Social learning theory elaborates on social construct theory, but
focuses on the ways individuals learn about their gendered, racialized, and cultured limits and possibilities. According to Carinci and Wong (2009), social learning theory begins with infants and endures through all stages of life as we learn through imitation in our environments and various feedback mechanisms.

Feminist theory and research has and continues to examine the roles of women in their culture and the ways the social order give advantage or disadvantage to groups because of gender norms and identities (Carinci & Wong, 2009). Embedded in feminist theory is the spirit of activism. When content of gender inequities along with a critical analysis of gender construction enters the classroom, it often does so through feminist pedagogy. However, feminist pedagogy is as much about a way of teach as it is the content it stresses. Social responsibility and political struggle are inextricably linked to feminist pedagogy (Garber, 2003). Feminist teachers employ techniques that allow students’ to learn through each other’s standpoints and positions. Traditionally, art teachers discuss student artwork formally and impersonally, rather than consider the student’s goals (Keifer-Boyd, 2007). Most of my own art classes emphasize technique and though personal interest might be encouraged, skill development and demonstration far outweighs personal expression. Many art students are told what to do and how to it with little concern for their work’s context of communicative content (Keifer-Boyd, 2007). In a feminist classroom, the teacher is no longer the authoritative master of information, parceling out correct answers as needed. Feminist teachers seek to distribute their authority, or at least delegate their authority because, ultimately, it’s understood that it is still up to teacher to employ traditional or feminist teaching strategies in their class (Garber, 2003). Common threads of feminist pedagogy include “effecting social change, envisioning teaching as a political act;
viewing knowledge as value-laden; valuing personal experience and self-representation; providing avenues for multi-vocality, and sharing leadership in student-centered environments (Keifer-Boyd, 2007, p. 134). Garber (2003) and Keifer-Boyd (interviewing Judy Chicago in 2007) explain that many students have trouble in classroom that employs feminist pedagogy because they are used to traditional methods of education. I have found this to be true in teaching both the high school and collegiate level. In my own high school classroom, many students wait for me to give them the “right answer.” It seems that many students are used to drilling exercises and worksheets and struggle with investigation and exploration of ideas. As a scholar and practitioner, I struggle with feminist pedagogy in my own classroom, but it helps give context to the way students learn. Though I see the benefits of such a learning environment, many of my colleagues have mentioned that it sounds like “giving the kids too much freedom.” Though I want to believe that mutual respect and goals is enough to maintain a feminist-based classroom, many of these techniques simply won’t work in my teaching context that is laden with traditional educational methods. Particularly in my general art classes, a freedom to learn and explore through art also implies freedom to break other educational norms such as coming to class on time or respect for school property (art supplies). It seems to be hard for my young students to differentiate between a break from traditional learning as separate from a break from basic classroom conduct codes, as they seem to be inextricably linked in our school context. Though my scholarly self wants to keep fighting for feminist practices in the classroom, IEP teachers\textsuperscript{12} and parents have both urged me to give particular students less

\textsuperscript{12} IEP teachers are special education teachers who are assigned a “caseload” of special education students. It is their responsibility to oversee these student’s academic progress and distributing the content of the student’s Individualized Education Plan.
exploratory intellectual freedom and more structure through close-ended worksheets.

When I talk to guidance counselors or parents about missing assignments and explain the assignment as, “consider the societal influences shape our understandings of…” I am often met with a hasty reply along the lines of “what are they suppose to do/draw/write?” This implies a need for students to produce work, and a critical social analysis is just the “fluff” of a project.

Many students at the collegiate level also struggle with feminist pedagogy. What concerns me for the terms of my own study, is how education and art education students resist these teaching methods, as they have been conditioned in traditional schooling methods that they will likely replicate if they don’t open their minds to new pedagogical possibilities. The student who once told me, “just tell me what you want me to say to get the ‘A’” demonstrates many pre-service teachers’ discomfort with arriving at conclusions on their own and confidently articulating their own perspective as being legitimate. Some students are willing to discuss feminism and feminist pedagogy in class, many are not willing to use it in their own practices as teachers (Buffington & Lai, 2011), likely attributed to some of the examples of challenges previously stated.

Weaver-Hightower (2003) critiques gender work that is practice-oriented for failing to address the larger issues and implications of feminist work, while simultaneously criticizing theoretical-oriented work for undermining the desires and interests of teachers, parents, and students themselves. He claims that both paradigms lack a general awareness of the binaries and dualisms on which they are built. Weaver-Hightower (2003) makes some excellent points in contrasting theory/practice oriented work and although it will be important for me to consider his critiques, I disagree that there are fixed categories, each
with their own agenda. My work demonstrates the use of feminist perspective and feminist pedagogy in practice and in analysis. This work demonstrates the ways the “f” words (feminism and feminist pedagogy) is misconstrued in school context and how it can also be used to empower students. It is also used in helping me analyze how the discourses of my school context shape the gender constructions of myself and my students. Through postmodern feminist theory, I am able to get a better sense of the societal regulations that the authors of these discourses are breaking or acquiescing to.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theorizing over recent decades continues as an extension of the initial work done by legal scholars drawing on literature from law, sociology, history and education and represents an effort to understand the social construction of race, subjectivities, and subordination (Rolling, 2008). Educators and scholars employ critical race theory (CRT) to explore the social, political, and moral aspects of how race is translated into education. For critical race theorists, racism is not an exceptional situation or act, but deeply ingrained in the U.S. psyche (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Stovall, 2005), and thus deeply ingrained the American educational system. CRT has provided a lens through which one can examine individual practice and attitudes as well as school/ district level policy and practice as windows onto structural ideologies and mechanisms of race and racism (Vaught, 2009). Through a critique of White hegemonic discourse and power and the social disparities between races, CRT rejects notions of objectivity and neutrality (Donner, 2005) and rebuilds knowledge based on individual stories about systematic racial oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT seeks to remove the dominant ideologies of
race talk and valorizes narratives drawn on experiential knowledge (Rolling, 2008). Stories of one’s experience(s) with discourses in particular classroom(s) highlights not only exclusionary acts of racism by school personnel, but also how racialized practices are maintained and normalized throughout educational systems. By studying these power dynamics of education, one can get a better understanding of classroom discourse, curriculum development, unequal funding, and resource distribution as mechanisms for maintaining White supremacy. CRT theory examines these inequities and how they are employed, as well as how they are internalized in the public consciousness.

**Colorblindness**

Whiteness and other forms of normalized privilege does not acknowledge power relations that may oppress some, leading to research and practice that inappropriately generalizes all groups (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013). The idea of “not seeing race,” or colorblindness, is a common issue addressed in Critical Race Theory. Colorblind ideology fosters the notion that races are “all the same,” everyone’s history is homogenous, and fairness and equity exist over real differences (Chandler, 2009; Wise, 2010). Colorblindness serves the interests of White people who “do not want to confront the racial realities that surround them and helps them avoid facing their own racist presumptions and understandings by de-racializing these events” (Lewis, 2001, p. 801). However, simple and righteous declarations of “race no longer matters” do not eliminate systematic racial oppressions. In fact, in Lewis’s 2001 study, she found that despite a strong commitment to colorblind talk that race “didn’t matter” in their lives, evidence showed that it was a large factor in determining where parents and teachers live, work, attend school, and how they
interact with people. Wise (2010) adds that colorblind ideologies can even perpetuate and deepen systematic racism (p. 19).

According to Lawrence Blum’s “I’m not a racist, but...” (2002), colorblindness takes shape through the idea of race neutrality or racial harmony. Racial neutrality, as Blum claims, is based on the underlying moral claim that since race is such an odious social category, we should attempt as much as possible to eliminate it altogether. Racial harmony, Blum (2002) describes, seeks a society in which different racial groups live harmoniously with one another without losing or devaluing their distinct racial identities. Both of these seem to reflect the values of many schools in the United States. The common images of multi-colored handprints or the stereotypical image of smiling racial minorities holding hands with each other and White children around a cartoon globe demonstrate that all races can live together and “get along,” fostering the idea that race is no longer an issue that needs to be addressed with teachers or students. Pollock (2004) notes that when there is talk of races “getting along” in schools, they are only referring to student-student relationships, not the important dynamics of teacher-student relationships. The notion that teachers automatically all see their students for their internal qualities only fails to consider how students’ cultural values and histories construct their identity and everyday knowledge and practices. Rather than pretending that one’s racial identity has no bearing on their own experiences or our interactions with them, education must correct the fallacy of colorblindness and address the positionality of each individual subject (Brown, 2005).

“This is not to say that schools are directed by ill meaning individuals who conspired to suppress and oppress others. Quite the opposite is the case... Yet in their zealousness to avoid conflict and negativity at all costs, schools seem to militate for a pseudo-ethic of care” Longwell-Grice & Letts, 2001, p. 194).
Desai (2010) considers colorblindness to be the dominant narrative of post-Civil Rights racism. She posits the beliefs that dominate the current discourse on race include notions that (a) people of color should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, (b) discrimination is not the cause of inequality, (c) government gives too many opportunities to people of color and too much attention to issues of race, (d) people of color are to blame for any gaps in socio-economic conditions and education, (e) race is no longer an issue, (f) Whites experience reverse racism, and (g) people of color pull the race card to their advantage (Desai, 2010). Desai (2010) attributes contemporary marketing of inauthentic multiculturalism and the images produced and distributed through visual culture as one of the primary elements that promotes colorblind racism in U.S. society.

Castagno (2013) claims that colorblindness actually serves to protect and maintain White supremacy by maintaining the belief that race does not matter. Though that charge may sound harmless on a motivational poster, the reality is that if race doesn’t matter, it excuses one from ever considering the possibility of inequality, privilege, or oppression. If these problems cease to exist, we then don’t have to examine or change them (Castagno, 2013). She links the term powerblindness to colorblindness and describes it as an avoidance of race, social class, language, gender, sexuality and any other politicized aspect of identity that is linked to power and distribution of resources in the United States. According to Castagno (2013), colorblindness and powerblindness maintain Whiteness as the status quo in U.S. educational systems.
**Whiteness Studies**

In addition to Critical Race Theory, Whiteness Studies have been considered throughout the course of this study. It is difficult to assign a definition to Whiteness Studies because Whiteness itself is difficult to define (Garner, 2007; Kellington, 2002; Kincheloe, 1999). Whiteness is not a thing, but can best be described as an individual’s *White experience*, which is elusive and is constantly shifting along with changing meanings of race in the larger society (Kellington, 2002; Kincheloe, 1999). Whiteness is a marked racialized identity whose meaning is only derived as far as other racialized identities exist (Garner, 2007). “Racial categories are social constructions in that they can be invented, analyzed, modified, and discarded. They are not unchanging, fixed biological categories impervious to cultural, economic, political, and psychological context” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 165). Therefore, if this identity only exists in relation to others forms of racial identity, then to understand Whiteness is to understand how it is negotiated within social/political/cultural structures. Kincheloe (1999) claims that Whiteness is intimately involved with issues of power and cannot be separated from hegemony. He adds that it is profoundly influenced by demographic changes, political realignments, and economic cycles (Kincheloe, 1999).

According to Castagno (2013), Whiteness is the structural arrangements and ideologies of racial dominance. This dominance is manifested through racial powers exercised by those who experience White privilege and the oppression and inequalities experienced by non-Whites (Castagno, 2013). Privilege, according to Sacks and Lindholm (2002) is maintained by social structures that protect the dominate groups and maintain the status quo, and the norm in which all others are judged (Castagno, 2013).
The illusion of a status quo is maintained through the construction of normativity. Kellington (2002) describes White normativity as unremarkable, unremarked upon, and just the way things are. Bhandaru (2013) agrees that with normativity is the mode of being and knowing in the world. Furthermore, White normativity promotes a lack of consideration of racial issues by claiming that if race doesn’t matter to the normative group, then it shouldn’t matter to anyone (Sacks & Lindholm, 2002). This blind-eye approach to racial relations is a contrast from early 20th century conceptualizations of Whiteness that were defined by terror and systematic supremacy (Garner, 2007), but it is no less racist. Bhandaru (2013) looks at the historical formulation of Whiteness dating back to the Civil Rights Movement when “Whiteness” was changed from a legal category to a social norm that was to be more inclusive, create a social distance from those unwilling to conform to Whiteness, as well as diminish the brutality that defined the previous era’s racism. Bhandaru (2013) explores White normativity through the work of Michel Foucault’s work on power and biopower. He draws a correlation to racism and biopower by looking at how it is manifested and maintained in society. Sovereign power is sporadic, brutal, and distant while biopower, much like racism, is constant, near, appears to be non-violent, and proliferates life itself. Biopower takes control by constituting living subjects by abandoning living subjects that do not conform to the norm (Bhandaru, 2013). Since it is a Western tendency that white is discursively represented as the polar opposite of black, these racial identities are often seen as a binary in opposition to one another (Kincheloe, 1999).

There is some debate as to whether or not all Whites possess White privilege. Garner (2007) claims that all Whites possess some degree of benefit of their Whiteness,
even if it is at different levels of others. He says, “the invocations of White identities may suspend other social divisions and link people who share Whiteness to dominant social locations, even though the actors themselves are in positions of relative powerlessness” (Garner, 2007, pp. 2-3). He goes onto say that although White privilege may not be distributed evenly, it is still unique from any other racial identity because of its deep historical and social meanings (Garner, 2007). This sentiment was echoed in Simon and Garner (2010) in their exploration of Whiteness as property and something that all Whites are able to utilize in some capacity. They look at Whites’ opportunity to align themselves with values considered to be traditional, American values, which are always aligned with what is also considered to be White values. Kellington (2002), on the other hand, claims that Whiteness is consumed, or, literally something one buys into. Kincheloe (1999) agrees that not all White people are recipients of White privilege. He claims that the diversity among White people makes sweeping generalizations about their experience with privilege dangerous and counterproductive (Kincheloe, 1999). He says that one can’t essentialize Whiteness and that critical scholars need to focus on studying “the social, historical, rhetorical, and discursive context of whiteness, mapping the ways it makes itself visible and invisible, manifests its power, and shapes larger socio-political structures in relation to micro-dynamics of everyday life” (p. 169). Kellington (2002) suggests exploring White subjectivities rather than White identities because individual viewpoints give a better understanding of the shifting and evolving ways people define themselves.

People take advantage of White privilege in many ways. Sacks and Lindholm (2002) explore the social aspects of privilege by looking at the structural realities that make privilege possible. One particular aspect of privilege that is often unnoticed is the ability, or
perhaps opportunity, to not have to consider issues of race unless the topic is raised by someone else. Even when it is mentioned, part of White privilege is the ability to detach oneself from conversations of race (Sacks & Lindholm, 2002). Conversely, as I write about my experiences and read books about Whiteness, I realized that the very practice of *speaking, thinking, and writing* about Whiteness is a bi-product of privilege itself. I realized that my educational status exposed me to the resources and time to think, write, and talk about race. I have the economic security that allows me to investigate the things that interest me rather than worry about acquiring basic necessities. Furthermore, the access to the university’s large text databases to assist my investigations is not things I readily had access to when I was exclusively a practicing teacher. Therefore, I am hesitant to admonish those who are not provided with opportunities to explore their own Whiteness. If White persons are not exposed to a discourse that allows them to move past stages of owning/possessing/practicing a White racial identity and the privileges it brings to that of a conscious and non-racist stance (Kellington, 2002), I find it hard to fault such ignorance. However, when a person is exposed to this information about racial privilege, their reactions and actions are critical. For many White suburban college students, they have never been confronted with racial issues prior to their experiences in the university (Sacks & Lindholm, 2002). Since statistics show that the majority of education students are White, suburban women, these discourses are key to how they will raise, address, or ignore racialized discussions in the class and curriculum. Literature regarding teacher’s treatment of students different from themselves will be examined through the analysis in Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six.

For many Whites, the introduction of a racist discourse has an unsettling effect.
Thinking about Whiteness can actually become a huge source of anxiety for many Whites (Garner, 2007) and this anxiety can create a multitude of responses. Kellington (2002) looks at a variety of responses ranging from (White) defensiveness, (privilege) denial, to an anti-racist conscious. The most troubling identity stance is the defensive “poor Whites” notion that has manifested itself in many ways. Kincheloe (1999) talks about the “charade of White victimization” and highlights many examples of how mass media and television promotes White supremacy through stories that mock multiculturalism (p. 180). Choi (2008), Kellington (2002), and Garner (2007) look at the wounded response of being called (or even associated with) racism, implying that the injury caused by the label of “racist” is more damaging than the acts of racism. This echoes Mills (1997) ideas that White experience supersedes all non-White experiences. Matias (2013) also explains how Whites are able to elevate their pain above people of color’s pain. Matias (2013) discusses how her White students superiorize their discomforts associated with racism and slavery above the daily discomforts experienced daily by non-Whites. Matias (2013), an educator professor of Color, describes the sleepless nights and anxiety she experiences before every class where she knows her White students will almost mock and aggressively choose to refuse to acknowledge how their racial markers impact the lives of people of color. Like Matias, many of my (predominately White, female) pre-service teaching students at Penn State were extremely resistant to the acknowledgement of White privilege. I found this to be much less at my predominately Black high school. I do remember, however, one bold, White, (Penn State) college-bound, male student in my Media and Visual Culture Studies course who was aggressively defensive towards his Whiteness. He spoke of “reverse” racism, critiqued affirmative action and loss of White man’s jobs, and nostalgia for
“traditional American values” on family and hard work. When this student brought up these ideas, it was easy to recall authors such as Desai (2010) and Simon and Garner (2010) who addressed the discourse surrounding White defensiveness and the lack of actual support for any of these claims. What I think is most important, however, is how these attitudes get spread and addressed in society. I don’t believe the attitudes of my student were exclusively his own. How can he make claims about White men loosing jobs when he’s never applied for one? These beliefs were planted by family and friends and were cultivated and supported by others in the community that he identifies with.

Perhaps it is the seemingly frozen cultural ideals of our elders that influence our beliefs more than we do through learning from our own experiences and explorations. In essence, perhaps we are tainted by the media and our elders who impose their beliefs upon us, which tend to exile us if we do not agree and/or live accordingly. (Smith, 2013, p. 41)

It is the role of educators to address these beliefs. If they have not been able to challenge their own racialized understandings and educate themselves in Whiteness studies, they may continue to unintentionally support others’ racist perspectives.

As a White woman benefiting from various aspects of privilege as previously mentioned, I must be conscious to not position myself as a enlightened individual and thus further bolstering my stance of privilege. I sought recommendations for a critical approach from sociologists working in Whiteness studies. Garner (2007) provided the five pitfalls of using Whiteness as a paradigm including: (a) reification of Whiteness, or treating Whiteness as an essentialized object; (b) treating Whiteness as so fluid that one can imply it is a conscious choice; (c) assuming racial discrimination is historical and complete; (d) recentering, or zooming too far in or too far out of the primary issues that the frame gets out of focus; and (e) assuming that any work that critically analyses Whiteness is an anti-
racist procedure and won’t perpetuate the racialized status quo. Using Whiteness Studies in an autoethnography about discourses of difference will help me situate the positions of the speakers of discourse and the effect they have on the discourse’s audience.

**Limitations to Research Design**

Ellis and Bochner raise interesting points about this type of work. They say, “The question should not be ‘how true is it?’ It should be ‘how useful is it?’” (1996, p. 22) and “The question is not, ‘does my story reflect my past accurately?’ Rather, I must ask, ‘what are the consequences my story produces? What kind of person does it shape me into? What new possibilities does this introduce for living my life?’” (2000, p. 746). Chambers (2000) adds that researchers’ goals should be to have their work contribute to action and decision-making rather than theory and disciplinary knowledge. It is the goal of this work that other teacher-researchers will be moved to challenge and confront racialized and gendered discourses in school interactions, materials, and curriculum; and consider the effects their own biases and beliefs have on their students, colleagues, and school community.

I continue to get hung up on the term “cultural curiosity” that Boylorn and Orbe (2014) use to describe some of the social situations explored in autoethnographic work (p. 13). If my readers can relate to the situations I experience through their own lived experiences, they might think of new possibilities for their actions, challenge them to question themselves in new ways, or it can legitimize their own concerns and re-generate their desires for alleviating the injustices they find in their own lives. If the reader finds my daily realities to only exist on paper, then reading my autoethnography can provide them a window in this world that might otherwise remain a cultural curiosity. This can be a
wonderful opportunity for myself and my reader to share ideas and experiences, but it is also concerning to me because of the responsibility it gives me as an author. I stress that my view of this world is not enough for one to make a judgment about an entire social phenomenon based on the findings of this work, or any singular work. My work should not be used conclusively, but I encourage readers to use it to challenge their own worlds or seek more information about the realities I describe so they can draw their own conclusions about racialized and gendered discourses in an urban art classroom.

**Presentation and Organization of the Study**

Chapters One (Approaching the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Art Education) provides justification for this study by describing the need of attention towards issues of racial and gender discrimination in U.S. schools and how teacher’s identity plays an integral part in the establishment or destruction of oppressive practices. Additionally, it situates the specific study in terms of direction and focus as well as provides information on the context in which this study takes place. Chapter Two ([In]forming Autoethnography) adds to this context by providing specific samples of journal entries and beings to establish how data analysis will be conducted with considerations of the theoretical framework.

The follow four chapters (Chapter Three, Chapter Four, Chapter Five, and Chapter Six) shows data organized around four dominant themes: establishing a context of “good (White) girls” and “bad (Black) boys,” teacher discourses with colleagues and administrators, teacher discourses with parents and students, and reflections of participation in racist and sexist discourses. Through these four chapters do not demonstrate the vast amount of topics raised throughout a year of journaling, they do show the most prevalent trends that raised concern, enlightened, challenged, and informed me
throughout the year of data collection. In the final chapter (Chapter 7: Final Thoughts), I discuss how my reflection of these topics had evolved throughout the year as I became more aware of particular trends and patterns in myself and my surroundings. I end this dissertation with a discussion of findings and suggestions for further research.
Chapter Three

Establishing a Context of Discourse:

“Good (White) Girls” and “Bad (Black) Boys”

The discourses surrounding education in the United States are varied, conflicting, layered, and often heated. Achievement gaps, high stakes testing, privatization of education, teacher accountability, and educational funding are just some of the hot button issues being discussed in today’s educational climate. The topic of education has become a highly debated political issue and much of the discourse centers around teacher practice and effectiveness.

The practice of being a teacher is filled with daily moral, ethical, and political decisions that reinforces and/or challenges the discourses that make us, our students, and our schools as objects of so many discourses. Throughout this and the following three chapters, I will exhibit some of my own ethical debates and moral conflicts as I navigate and participate in some of these discourses, particularly those in regards to how race and gender is lived, discussed, and objectified in my own school context.

In this chapter, I examine the school discourses that create and reinforce the “good (White) girls” and “bad (Black) boys” dichotomy in our school with a specific attention to gender stratification and race issues as they relate to gender stratification. Tatar and Emmanuel (2001) note most teachers are unaware of any policies that regulate gender in their school, reflecting a lack of teacher awareness concerning the in-depth nature of gender stereotypes. I also examine the positionality of “innocent, White, female teachers” and “good girls” as polarizing identities to that of “bad (Black) boys.” I start off by look at
existing literature to help me consider how the role of the White, female teacher is addressed and challenged through teacher education and educational discourses. The readings on gender discourse, performance, and regulations in education provide a context for the gender construction in my own teaching and learning story. However, the literature leaves many things out that are critical to the life of a White, female art teacher when working with classrooms of Black, adolescent boys. By examining the discourses that I am a part of within my school culture, I can speak to gender inequality for both male and female students, and thus shed light on issues surrounding gender in the high school art class and fill in some of the gaps in the existing literature.

Next, three separate journal entries highlight instances where students and faculty enact a discourse that narrowly positions Others based on the intersections of the Other’s race and gender and reflect on my participation in these discourses. In my analysis, I consider the construction of gender norms and how it relates to school practices. I then consider how this false sense of “normalcy” in the “good girls”/”bad boys” dichotomy gets established through the creation of separate and highly regulated identity roles: “good girls,” “well-meaning and innocent” White, female teachers, and everyone else (which includes “bad boys” and “bad girls”).

The Education of White, female Teachers

Research shows that many White, female teachers enter the profession because they are used to being successful in the educational arena as students, and believe they already know a great deal about how to be a good educator (Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011). On the other hand, other research indicates that student teachers with the highest GPAs
tend to have lower retention rates in urban schools (Cochran-Smith, 2004). The high rate of teacher attrition in urban schools with diverse communities attest to the fact that often-well meaning teachers find themselves questioning the very values that brought them into teaching (Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliot, Guttenberg & Kamii, 2006). Donaldson (2009) found that White female teachers in urban education were almost twice as likely to leave teaching in urban schools with diverse populations of students than teachers of color.

According to Briggs and McHenry (2013), students come to teacher preparatory programs with preconceived notions about race and social class based upon limited interaction with people outside of their own spheres and need to be guided in critical reflection to become aware of their own privilege. Cosier (2011) notes that most of her (female) art education pre-service teaching students come from White, working class or middle class families and interpret their experiences as normal under their taken-for-granted assumptions that has been shaped by stories passed down family, community members, and media/popular culture. Unless these teachers are given effective multicultural training in their pre-service education, the teacher’s ill-conceived notions of racial and gender differences could result in cultural conflicts and decreased student achievement (Marxen & Rudney, 1999). However, it is important to note that there is a difference between effective multicultural training and one drop-in diversity course to an existing curriculum. DiAngelo (2011) notes that many Whites only experience limited training in college and/or the workplace and these classes might not address the tough issues necessary to challenge or change one’s biases. DiAngelo (2011) adds that when tough issues such as privilege do arise, many Whites feel anger, avoidance, or dissonance
with the topic while many “so-called progressive Whites” disengage from the content under the claim that they “already had a class on this” (p. 55).

To address the gaps of knowledge and experience in White, female teachers, educational researchers advocate for the incorporation of diverse experiences in all aspects of teacher education— from the classroom, to practicum, to student teaching experiences. Many works have been written by professors telling about their experiences, successes, and struggles in moving homogenous groups of teacher candidates to new understandings about education. Klein (2003) recommends that instructors and students read case studies before class and lead students in a discussions that analyzes the critical incident of the case, examines the varying perspectives of the characters in the case, and considers alternative options, risks, and consequences of each case in order to prepare pre-service teachers to handle a variety of practical situations in the classroom. Adair (2008), Chizhik (2003), and Smith-Shank (2000) speak about a reframing of education classroom settings that allow for students to reconsider their own positions as racialized and gendered persons and think about how this identity will affect their teaching identity by de-privileging the White patriarchal discourses in their classrooms. Smith-Shank (2000) creates purposeful confrontations in her classroom to promote active and assertive acts of self-expression to contradict the “safe” spaces that many other feminist pedagogues promote in gender exploration.

Lee (2013) differs from this confrontational approach, stating that creating an environment where all students feel free and comfortable to be open and honest with their beliefs and feelings about multiculturalism is as important as the content being taught. The question remains, however, if the students will be honest and move forward in their beliefs,
strive to placate the course assessor, or resist what they might regard as forced liberal indoctrination. Many authors, including Chizhik (2003), Lee (2013), Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning (2011), noted the resistance expressed by homogenous pre-service teacher classes to acknowledge and critique their own privilege and position. Chizhik’s (2003) autoethnography explains how she struggled to balance her agenda to teach a course about critical engagement with issues of power with (mostly) White, female students’ agenda of practical tools (i.e. lesson plans) and tips on how to find ways to help their students fit into mainstream U.S. culture. Like many professors, Chizhik (2003) feared that pushing her students too hard would result in silence and further pushback. She resided to scaffold her course with more traditional views of multicultural education and eventually move to more liberal readings and discussions. Chizhik (2003) also touches on students’ difficulty with addressing issues of privilege and how dominance in classroom dynamics often silence any voices of opposition, even if spoken from other White, female students. These examples connect to teaching at my own school where White, female teachers often represent the racial minority in the classroom but represent the racial and gender majority among the teaching staff. My position as a White, female teacher in Pennsylvania grants me authority over the students in my classroom. My membership to the racial and gender majority reinforces the belief that White women are the normal ones in the classroom setting. Unfortunately, differences in cultural beliefs or values between individuals’ gendered/racialized identity group(s) can perpetuate disconnection. When this separation is in the classroom, the authoritative values has the power to subordinate differing believes or values.
There is much evidence to support the need for diverse experiences for White, female teaching candidates during their practicum and student teaching. These works range from offering students mentoring from current teachers or guiding after-school activities (Briggs & McHenry, 2013; Marx, 2004; Siwatu et al., 2011) to requiring education students to teach their own curriculum to multiethnic learners as part of their required coursework (Marxen & Rudney, 1999; McDonald, 2008; Prince-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011). These authors all articulate the necessity for moving theory-based coursework into (monitored) practical experiences and helping students navigate these new experiences to help them understand their positions as teachers in diverse settings. Briggs and McHenry (2013) also emphasize the benefits of varied experiences, noting that allowing teacher candidates to work with students in a community setting outside of the atmosphere defined by grades and bell schedules gives them the chance to work with students on more a personal and individual basis. However, volunteer experiences, intensive coursework, or practicum or student teaching placements cannot be used exclusively; each element is necessary for beginning to break down the racial, gendered, religious, economic, and social gaps between pre-service teachers and the students they will serve. Multiculturalism topics should not be relegated to optional, isolated, special topics courses, but rather infused into “general” methods classes that attend to curriculum development, assessment, and classroom management (Acuff, 2013; Chung & Miller, 2011; McDonald, 2008).

Marxen and Rudney (1999) note that if these experiences are not mediated for teaching candidates, stereotypes may be reinforced, citing that their students “loved” the children and wanted to “save” them (p. 66). I appreciate this work because many authors leave out any discussion of those students who were not affected by their practicum
experiences in the ways the instructor intended. Additionally, it begins to touch on the veil of innocence and superiority of White, female teachers in urban schools.

It is easy to justify the need for varied, diverse, and meaningful experiences during teacher training. What is missing, however, from many of these studies is the unpleasant stories where these efforts prove to be unsuccessful. I know from my own collegiate teaching experience that many pre-service teachers will acquiesce to their instructor’s teachings for the sake of their grade. Many of the students in my pre-service courses (who were almost always White females) believed that high grades were critical in their pursuit of teaching careers. After all, this was as attitude that was affirmed throughout the pre-service teachers’ own K-12 and high education experiences. As a result, I often worried if they agreed with my philosophies, or sought my favor as their course grader. In long discussions about the importance of cultural acknowledgement in the classroom, a frustrated White, female student once said to me, “just tell me what you want me to say to get the ‘A.’” My experience as a collegiate instructor combined with my current position as a classroom teacher allows me to see many sides of this complex issue. Therefore, I believe that unless long-term studies are done to follow the pre-service teachers throughout their teaching careers, there is really no way of knowing how their careers and practice are affected by their practicum experience and if these experiences changed the way they taught their own classrooms.

At the same time, I need to consider the knowledge that educators do bring to the classroom. Miller (2005) talks about the “completeness” of teacher’s stories that tell tales of empowerment (p. 52). I hardly considered teacher educator’s articles falling into the same category until Lowenstein (2009) confronted the existing literature on multicultural
teacher education by dispelling the notion that White, female teacher candidates are deficit in their diversity knowledge and don’t bring valuable multicultural knowledge and abilities to the classroom. Lowenstein (2009) notes that literature often paints the “caricature” of the teacher candidate as the “subtext of a heroic plot” in which the teacher educator rescues the candidate from multicultural ignorance (p. 178). Lowenstein’s (2009) work helps me consider how, without proper criticality, my own story could become “heroic” and she also reminds me that teacher educators must avoid painting portraits of White, female teacher candidates as naïve, ignorant, or deficit in their understandings of diversity. Just as it is problematic for pre-service teachers to want to “save” urban youth, it is equally problematic for teacher educators to try to “save” White, female pre-service teachers.

While I agree that there is a crucial need for diverse experiences in practicum and student teaching, I also believe the stories of what makes a teacher effective is much more nuanced than what they gather from their teacher training. Cochran-Smith (2004) believes that political power structures battling for high test scores from both teachers and students on standardized tests have placed testing ability above an individual’s social and emotional growth and their ability to function in a democratic society. Donaldson’s (2009) study raised the question that teaching from a social justice perspective might not necessarily help to retain teachers in urban schools. I would add that teaching a teacher about racism in schools might not necessarily change their daily practices. I believe that these are influenced much more by a larger school community context. How a teacher positions his or herself has a great deal to do with the discourses of their teacher education programs, but I feel that education granted through a teachers’ past and present school context experiences are under-accounted for in existing literature.
Journal Entries: Describing a Context Through Discourse

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), multicultural praxis is focused on equity, culture, and power by requiring high expectations for all students; centering multiple perspectives, people and world views in the curriculum; and equipping students with an understanding of issues of power, privilege, oppression, and ideas about how they might work toward social justice. How a teacher conceptualizes and approaches multicultural education can greatly affect their beliefs about student achievement and how they treat students (Lee, 2013) as well as affect their students’ psychological and social adjustment (Godina & Choi, 2009 in Chung & Miller, 2011). Teachers, like anyone else, has been socialized by their own influences to understand the world around them and might fail to see social and institutional privileges afforded to them. Social and institutional structures maintain a system of opportunity versus inopportunity and resources verses a lack of resources, foster inequalities as well as misunderstandings, resentments, and conflict between people (Anderson, 2010). Anderson (2010) says that these misunderstandings create stereotypes that encourage distance, misinterpretations, and fear between people or perceive difference between themselves and people they believe to be from “other” groups.

Of all of the topics raised during my journaling, the issue of the “good (White) girls” and “bad (Black) boys” dichotomy presented itself more than any other topic. Specifically, I continued to notice how the discourses of the “good girls” was employed by school personnel and how some of the girls who were subjects of this discourse, in turn, used their own discourses to navigate the school in gendered ways. The following journal entries begin to give the reader a sense of how these discourses create a particular context that
situates these students as different from their peers and how some of these students enact these discourses. The first entry provides a sample of how common practices has shaped an understanding of rules for a group of White female students, the second entry demonstrates an explicit difference in how Black male students and White female students are treated as well as my growing frustration with these practices, and the final entry exposes how myself and others (a student, teacher, and two guidance workers) exchange discourses as one “good (White) girl” takes advantage of her privilege.

**Journal entry 1: Amber’s assessment and enactment of school policy**

Tuesday, December 17

Another conversation came up today that showed the differences between White girls and the rest of the school population. First, the back-story:

Last week, Amber (White, 11th grade female) was using her cell phone during class. She was CLEARLY texting under the table. From what I’ve seen of her through the years, she has her phone out all of the time and takes extreme liberties with all of the school rules (including, but not limited to: late for class, eating during class, leaving without permission, wandering the halls, using her phone, etc.) This is the exact same sort of behaviors that the “troublemakers” exhibit.

Since Amber had her phone out, I followed protocol and called security. She was shocked that I was calling security for her phone and said it wasn’t fair. She said she was tweeting rather than texting, so it was “totally different” … (??)

A few minutes later, a security guard arrived to escort Amber to the discipline office, where she would be required to leave her phone for the rest of the day. Amber said, “fine, take me to Ms. Kabina. It’s not like she’s going to take my phone anyway.” Amber returned ten minutes later, eating potato chips—chips that she said Ms. Kabina gave to her. Additionally, she said that was told to go back and get her phone before her lunch.

As promised, she came in to my room later that day with her phone.

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13 School protocol states that a teacher is to call security to have the cell phone confiscated and returned at the end of the day if it is used during class. I personally struggle with enforcing this policy, as I find the use of “disruptive technologies” more nuanced than the protocol allows. However, teachers are also reprimanded if they do not enforce this policy, so I consistently enforce it in my classroom.
I emailed Ms. Kabina to ask her if there was any special exception with Amber’s phone that was different from the other students with the school rules. I phrased it as if I might not be aware of a 504-plan\textsuperscript{14} stipulation rather than blatantly accuse her of picking favorites (although there was no way to have this conversation without implying it). Ms. Kabina never responded to my email.

Fast forward to today.

During 5\textsuperscript{th} period, Nadeera (Black, 9\textsuperscript{th} grade female) had her phone out and was texting under the table. I called for security, and, like many students, she told the security guard that she didn’t have a phone to surrender. (When kids get caught with their cell phones, they often pass it off to their friends under the table so that when security comes, they claim that they don’t have, or never did have, a phone and that the teacher was incorrect or ‘lying on them.’ Failure to surrender a phone results in automatic suspension\textsuperscript{15}.) So, Nadeera refused to give up a phone and denied having one. Like standard protocol, security was supposed to take her to the discipline office to administer the suspension. Bobby (the new security guard) escorted Nadeera to the discipline office and about 10 minutes later she came back to get her stuff and announced to her friends that she was going home. Makiya (Nadeera’s cousin, also 9\textsuperscript{th} grade Black female) followed her out into the hallway and said that Bobby wanted to see her. I followed them out to see why Makiya had to leave as well, but Bobby was gone. I did see Makiya give Nadeera something behind the corner (presumably returning her phone to her before she went home for the day).

One period after the incident, Amber, Bethany, and Carrie were eating lunch in my room. Bobby was patrolling the halls and stopped in. I said to him, “such a shame over the cell phone ordeal last period! I hate to see kids get sent home over something SO stupid\textsuperscript{16}!” He shook his head and agreed. Amber then commented that she has never gotten sent home over her cell phone. In fact, she never gets her phone taken away from her for more than a few periods. I confirmed that with Bobby and asked him if he knows why Amber always gets her phone back. I mentioned that last week she had her phone back by lunchtime. He asked Amber if that was true and she said yes. But she said that Ms. Kabina never actually gave her back her phone because she never actually gave her phone to Ms. Kabina. (Maybe this is why she ignored my email— she had no idea what I was talking about.) She said that Bobby let her put it back in her locker. Bobby defensively jumped in and said he didn’t remember that and said that Amber is ruining his credibility. Amber went on to explain

\textsuperscript{14} A “504 plan” is a document that outlines modifications for students with disabilities.

\textsuperscript{15} This policy assumes automatic guilt on the student and innocence on the part of the teacher. While many cases the students have passed the phone to a friend for safekeeping, I have a problem with the assumed guilt on the part of the student, freeing myself from any considerations of wrongdoing. However, the implication of automatic innocence leaves me questioning my own guilt internally. The result is an outward policing of the students, but in inward, self-policing of the teacher if the teacher chooses to explore their own actions in the incident or the possibility that they might have misunderstood what they believed to be cell phone usage. Even if the teacher does feel they are implicated by the incident, it is only because they have exercised the privilege of choosing to consider their own guilt and the ultimate choice of action against the student remains in the hands of the teacher.

\textsuperscript{16} I intentionally never specify if I am referring to the policy or the action by the student, since I have not yet rectified this for myself.
what ACTUALLY happened: Bobby gave her permission to walk to the discipline office without an escort and as soon as he left her, she went to her locker, dropped off her phone, and came back and got it before lunch. Even though he escorted Nadeera to the office, he trusted Amber to go on her own.

Bethany joined the conversation and said that they (the discipline office) don’t really enforce the phone policy for her or their friends. She also said that she’s never actually gotten her phone taken away for the whole day. Bethany explained that as long as you are polite, “Ms. Kabina will just tell you not to take it out anymore and she’ll let you keep it.” Amber agreed that that is what happens to her as well.

Bethany also said that the cell phone rules only apply to new kids because, as she explains it, “they [administration] still have enough authority to get away with taking their phone and the new kids haven’t figured out how to beat the system yet.” She adds, like an afterthought, that the cell phone policy also applies to “the bad kids who are always in trouble”.

I thought of Amber’s behaviors (mentioned above) and the kids that “are always in trouble.” Amber is a notorious hall wanderer, but she always sweetly smiles and the teacher/security guard just tell her to report back to class. On the other hand, Adofo (10th grade Black male) has just been suspended for 3 days for leaving class without permission and wandering the halls.

I would like to think that it is not as blatant as color and gender, but maybe it has something to do with these White girls’ knowledge of social graces that keeps them out of trouble. However, the facts speak for themselves. I looked at today’s suspension list; there is not one White female student on it, but there are 7 Black male students, 3 Black female students, and 2 Hispanic male students on the list. Most of them are in trouble for doing the same things that Amber and Bethany do everyday. In the very rare occasions where a teacher follows rules equally for all students, these girls come back from the discipline office with a handful of potato chips.

Journal entry 2: Jacquie and James—similar situations, very different outcomes

February 6

Today the differences between White girls and Black boys in our school presented itself so blatantly as lived by two of my students: Jacquie and James.

Jacquie (White, 9th grade female) has been coming down to my room several times a day for months. Every week that goes by, she seems to find more and more time to visit. How is she maintaining her grades in other classes if she’s always in the artroom? She claims she has A and B grades in all of her classes. She said that she hates sitting around doing nothing when
she is finished with her work, so the teachers let her leave when her daily work is finished and come down to the artroom. She says that she dislikes the kids in her study hall, has no one to talk to, and rarely has work to do. Her study hall teacher, (a math teacher) decided to write her a “permanent pass” to my room so she doesn’t have to waste her time checking in to 7th period study hall. I don’t mind that she’s in my room so much, but I worry about how she is doing academically and socially if she spends so much of her day with me. It might be different if she was a dedicated art student who was working diligently on advanced projects during this time, but this is not often the case. She spends a lot of time with each of her projects and works very slow, but she has never exhibited a real passion for art. She just seems to like to be in my room!

James (Black, 10th grade male) is in 4th period 21st Century Art class and has always been a pretty good student. He is respectful, polite, and puts a lot of heart, thought, effort, and reflection into his projects. When the portfolio prep class was doing figure drawing, he volunteered to come down and stand on a table for the entire period during his 3rd period study hall. He took his role very seriously and packed the same outfit to wear every day during 3rd period so the students could work on their drawings. I asked his study hall teacher (math teacher) if he could also get a “permanent pass” so he could have enough time to change clothes, but she declined, making the art students wait for him report to study hall, pick up his clothes in my room, then go to the bathroom and change. Regardless, he was dependably sitting on the table everyday. When the figure drawings were over, he asked if he could continue to come to the 3rd period class. He said that his study hall is boring and he has much more fun with my portfolio prep/art history class. It is also apparent that he has developed romantic feelings towards Amber, who is in the art history class.

Everyday James gets a pass at the beginning of the day to come to art history, where he has been acting as a full-fledged member of the class for over a month. He takes the notes, completes the assignments, and participates in discussions—without getting any course credit for it! I have been pleading with his guidance counselor to have him put into the class for credit, but they aren’t interested in making schedule changes this late into the year. (!?) I told him that I would make sure that he can get credit for being in the class as of the start of the second semester and he should just come straight to class. I told him I’d work the details out with his study hall teacher and guidance counselor. Eventually, the guidance counselor said she would “work on it,” so I figured his classes would be switched at her earliest convenience. I also told the study hall teacher that she should not mark him absent for 3rd period while his schedule was in limbo. If James was absent for the day, his attendance would be reflected in my 4th period class anyway. She never responded, but I assumed the request was simple enough.

James came into 3rd period today very upset. It seems that he has been written up for skipping 3rd period for the past 2 weeks. I checked his attendance and confirmed that the day that I (thought I) took care of his attendance and credits, he started to be marked as skipping 3rd period. He said he was about to get suspended for 3 days because the discipline office didn’t believe his story, and they never checked with me. I immediately contacted the discipline office and clarified the situation. I (once again) emailed the
guidance counselor and his study hall teacher who finally responded with, “as long as he’s on my role, he has to check in with me. I’m responsible for him and don’t trust him without a pass. He’s a slippery one.” (Are we talking about the same kid!?)

A few periods later, during lunch, Jacquie (White, female student) entered my room, almost in tears. “Hey, what’s going on? What happened to you 5th period today?” She told me the whole story about how she was NOT given a study hall for 5th period at the beginning of the second semester as she claimed- she was supposed to be in health class but went a few times and decided to never return. She said she hated the class and the teacher, so she had been getting the worksheets from a friend, doing the work, and even getting grades, but she would spend her class time in my room or the cafeteria. She said that the teacher was going to call her parents today and tell her what she’s done. That’s it. Call her parents. (Where is the 3-day suspension for skipping two weeks of class??)

After school, I stopped by the discipline office to apologize and clarify the issue regarding James. I learned that there are two different versions of James in this school. I recently found out that he is on parole for drug possession charges. Apparently this was common information to some other teachers (including his study hall teacher) who regard him as a criminal. To these teachers, James is a mouthy, defiant, troublemaker. It seems that there are a small handful of teachers that James reveals a very different side to—this is the side of James that I have come to know, appreciate, and respect.

Jacquie, on the other hand, is one-dimensional. She is a quite, obedient, polite, respectful, rule-following, A-student. Even a visit into this other realm of “rule-breaking” doesn’t seem to weaken her position as a “good girl.” What’s more concerning is that it took her teacher 2 weeks to realize that she wasn’t in class!! (I even checked her attendance—she was never marked absent—it was like she was invisible!) She had been getting grades for the worksheets she was doing outside of class, but her presence was not missed. Conversely, James, is monitored and scrutinized. Every act, including wanting to get his classes switched from a study hall to a credited course, is regarded as suspicious. Even though he repeatedly goes above and beyond in my class, he can’t ever visit the of privilege that Jacquie knows as the only way of being a student. What is worse is those that view him as a criminal are limiting his access to one of the only classroom spaces where he is respected and valued. I am frustrated by how both of my students are viewed and treated. Both students are loosing here. Black males are under a microscope at our school and White females can move through the hallways nearly invisible. Black males are guilty and until proven innocent and good girls (White females) are innocent—the possibility of guilt is never even raised.17

17 In Chapter 6, I further explore the dismissal of the academic and emotional needs of girls. As evidenced with Jacquie, “good girls” are often overlooked. She felt ignored by her teacher, and she has proved this to be true by the fact she wasn’t marked absent after two weeks of skipping class. Despite the fact that my research focus draws me to the needs of Black boys, my affection for many of my female students illuminate how their needs are not being met as well. In Chapter 6 I also explore the possibility of over-compensating for the mistreatment of Black boys in my school by over-bolstering them in my own classes. However, this might also be to the detriment of “good girls,” as I will discuss more in Chapter 6.
Journal Entry 3: Mackenzie—exceptional and forgivable

April 24

I've really started to have enough of these White girls getting away with murder all the time.

Mackenzie, a White, middle-class White female from [the “nice” end of town] lets everyone know that she is going to “Penn State Main” next year. She also lets us know she is “so over this school” and “can’t wait to get out and go to college.” She’s very smart and she’s taken some easy classes this year so she can “enjoy her senior year before the real work starts.” She considers my Media and Visual Culture class to be one of her “easy classes,” no doubt.

Mackenzie often reflects an attitude that suggests that the other students in the class (with the exception of exchange student Yi-Ting, the other female in the class who is also going to “Penn State Main” next year), are definitely below her. She considers herself to be WAY smarter than all of them, despite of the fact that Anna, an extremely quiet Hispanic girl, is ranked 15th in the class, much higher than Mackenzie). Mackenzie has clearly stated that art classes, particularly general art classes, are for dummies. SHE HAS EVEN TOLD ME THAT I SEEM TOO SMART TO TEACH ART, OR AT LEAST TO TEACH ART “HERE.” (“No offense,” she told me, “but what are you doing here, I feel like you should be working somewhere much better, or at least teaching a better subject. You seem like you are smart enough to at least be teaching English or something, but why art?!”)

Mackenzie is almost never in class. She is constantly getting early dismissals. I asked her about her absences a few months ago and she said that she feels rushed to get to her 4pm work shift (as a waitress at a local diner) so she likes to leave school early, go home, eat, shower, nap, etc. Over the past few weeks, she’s been attending about 1 class of every 5 or 6. In the past she would miss a lot, but she would be here more often than not. Now she is out more than she is in. However, she is always “excused.” She is either given an early dismissal excuse from her parents (signed or forged, not sure) or is marked excused from the guidance office. This really started taking off in late January, when Senior Privilege kicked in and she didn’t need to come to school for her first period study hall. So—Mackenzie comes to school everyday around 8:20 and seems to be done for the day after lunch. That would be great... but she has two more classes after lunch.

Her grades in MP1 (Marking Period 1 of 4) and MP2 were 96 and 94. In MP3, she got a 73. She wasn’t here enough to turn in quality work. She rarely participated in discussions and NEVER digs into topics deep enough because she just skimmed the surface of everything just enough to turn in a project that met the requirements and would get her an “A” or “B”. She never showed up to learn— just show up to get enough info to pull together something

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18 In “The Absence of Feminist Discourse” in Chapter 1, I discussed my trepidation about not being considered by a group of students to be as “smart” as 2 male English teachers. This reinforces the idea that female art teachers are not as valued as teachers of other subjects. I discuss the genderization of such subjects further in Chapter 4.

19 Senior Privilege is a set of various privileges awarded to seniors who earned “Advanced” or “Proficient” on their 11th grade PSSA scores.
that would get her that “easy A” she hoped for. When her grades started slipping so rapidly, I was concerned. One day I wanted to talk to her about her grade after class, and then realized she slipped out of class 10 minutes early. I emailed her mom and got a very brief response from her.

Her current grade is a 0. She hasn’t been coming to class at all and, quite frankly, I’m “so over” her arrogant attitude. She doesn’t deserve good grades for jumping through a few hoops to meet requirements when she is learning NOTHING from the class. On Monday, she was absent AGAIN. However, she wasn’t marked excused from the guidance office. I jumped at the chance to catch her skipping. I emailed her 7th period teacher (Mr. Landis)—a general Intro to Business course that she has high A’s in. (It’s notorious for being a “fill out the worksheet” course and Mackenzie requested it for its reputation of being an “easy A.”) I told him that I’m going to write her up for skipping and wanted to see if he would do the same.

He said that he wanted to talk to her about it first. (If we were talking about Dom, Turquoise, Tanieka, or ANY other student than a good, college bound White girl, Landis would have written her up in a HEARTBEAT. However, because it’s MACKENZIE, she deserved the chance to explain herself.)

A few minutes later he emailed me back to let me know that guidance had just overwritten her “unexcused absence” to “excused per guidance”. So that was that. He said that he thinks Mackenzie is playing a game and using the college career center as a place to hang out, “but it’s not worth the hassle of creating enemies in the guidance office. After all, the good kids like to hang out in the college career center.”

I’m not letting this drop. So—I emailed her guidance counselor and told her that if Mackenzie needs to be in the guidance office that much, can she please stagger her appointments so she’s not missing the same class periods everyday since she is currently earning a zero. She replied and said that she’s never seen her. She Cc’ed the college career center director who said that she “sees her out on the computer in the guidance lobby sometimes at the end of the day.” She then wrote back later and said that she overheard Mackenzie tell another student, “Just have Ms. Barber [guidance office secretary] sign you into guidance and then you can leave early for the day.” She then let Mr. Landis and I know that Mackenzie should be written up for skipping if she uses the guidance office as her excuse from now on.

Today Mr. Landis talked to Mackenzie before homeroom. I saw him at an assembly during 3rd period. He said that when he told Mackenzie that he would write her up for skipping she said, “I’ve been doing this since October, and you’re trying to nail me on this NOW?! Are you kidding me?” She also told the college career center director, “what’s the big deal? I didn’t come up with the idea, I just do it.”

Though it is not exhibited by every White, female student, the entitlement of good, White girls runs deep in our school. There are so many major problems that their whiny entitlement is MINOR compared to flagrant disobedience. However, it is not LESS offense,
just more sneaky. Mackenzie skips MUCH more class than DJ or Turquoise, but she uses her class, race, and gender to cover her tracks. The guidance office secretary is never suspicious of her signing into the guidance office for 2 hours a day because she is obviously college bound and would never be the kind of student that would lie. However, Turquoise skips the first 20 minutes of class and hangs out in the bathroom, comes to class late, tells the teacher exactly what she was doing and is -in no way- apologetic for her behaviors. Her lack of compliance AND lack of apology is what gets her suspended CONSTANTLY\textsuperscript{20}. Mackenzie, however, skips class more often and has never even seen the inside of the discipline office.

**Establishing a “Normalcy”**

I think I was always aware that White, middle class girls represent the ideal student and my readings on the topics (Bettie, 2003; Ferguson, 2003; Kunjufu, 2005; Paley, 2000; Walkerdine, 1995) echoed my own experiences as a “good girl” throughout my education. It’s no wonder I pursued a degree in education in college; school was always an arena that granted me privilege and success.

I remember taking certain privileges because of my “good girl” status when I was a high school student. Even in my racially homogenous high school, I can recall never needing a hall pass because I, as an obedient girl, was never accused of skipping class. Conversely, my male friends were almost always questioned. As a teacher, I see that these discriminatory practices have not changed. Amber, Bethany, and Mackenzie demonstrated that White, female students are just as aware of their privileged position as I was in high school, though I never recognized it as privilege at the time. I consider how this inequity is established as ‘normalcy’ in an educational discourse that situates students based on their

\textsuperscript{20} Turquoise, a Black girl, is policed much more heavily than Mackenzie. Though the place of Black girls is not a focal point of this research, there is an emerging field of research that explores the role of the Black girl as an intermediary for the “good White girl” and the “bad Black boy.” See K. Crenshaw (2014) *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected*. I will explore this idea further in this chapter under the section “Are there ‘bad girls’?”
gender categorization. Butler (1990, 2004) questions the very nature of gender as a category and the normalization of these gender roles in our society. She writes,

> gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and de-naturalized...The norm is actively conferring reality; indeed, only by virtue of its repeated power to confer reality is the norm constituted as a norm. (2004, pp. 42 & 52)

Butler considers gender a regulatory norm, performed and shaped by society, which is produced to serve other implicit or explicit norms. According to Butler (2004), gender is not the essential truth that is somehow interior to the body and something we cannot deny. However, she notes that these normative categories are how we are recognized as humans and socially articulated (Butler, 1990). Boldt (2004) adds that this is not only a social demand, but also a psychological necessity to exist in U.S. culture.

To what extent is “identity” a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity? In other words, the “coherence” and “continuity” of “the person” are not logical or analytic features of person, but, rather, socially institute and maintained norms of intelligibility. (Butler, 1990, pp. 16-17)

If Butler helps me understand gender as a social regulation and one’s performance within these socially articulated boundaries, it still does not detail how these regulations are developed in and manifested through K-12 classrooms in the United States. Even though the contemporary women’s movement is older than the high school students I teach, gender equity remains a problem in U.S. schools (Garber, 2003).
Creating the “good girl”

I’ve always thought of it as a chicken-and-egg scenario: pre-service teachers often don’t reflect much on gender issues in their teacher education because they feel that there is no issue with gender biases in schools (Lundeberg, 1997; Titus, 2000). They don’t recognize these biases in the classroom because they have been socialized for years to believe that boys and girls should (and often are) treated equal and fairly (assuming that equal is fair). When it is addressed in college courses, professors often receive student resistance to concepts of teaching feminist theory in their teacher education courses (Lundeberg, 1997; McCaughtry 2004; Titus, 2000). Buffington and Lai (2011) said that their students (pre-service art teachers) saw feminism as a historical movement that was irrelevant to their daily lives or contemporary world. Cosier (2011) agrees that many of her (predominately female) students think that growing up as girls have very little impact on their current daily personal or professional lives. Lundeberg (1997) found that her students generally recognize blatant forms of sexism including sexual harassment or disparities in athletics funds, but they disregard the subtle forms of sexism in classroom interactions such as interaction patterns or non-inclusive language. Titus (2000) notes that education students often enter education courses thinking that all students in U.S. schools have equal opportunity to achieve and they are only constrained by their lack of effort, abilities, or deficient backgrounds. Many of Titus’s (2000) White, female, middle class students’ reason by weighing their own subjective experience against what they are learning; if they have not felt oppression, oppression must not exist. “Both male and females angrily resent any suggestion that their perception of the world is incomplete or that their own individualistic experience is not sufficient enough to nullify a social pattern”
(Titus, 2000, p. 26). As a result, they continue to enact the same prejudices in their own classrooms as practicing teachers and the cycle continues, thus normalizing gender biases as the way things are. Teacher attitudes tend to mirror societal stereotypes and they will likely pass on these messages to their students.

**Establishing the “innocent, White female teacher”**

As I mentioned earlier, many White, middle class females enter teaching because it is an arena that has already granted them much success (Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011). I posit that when a female that views herself as a “good girl” before she enters the field of teaching, she will likely maintain that same identity role in her professional life. When others (parents, teachers, peers) reinforces this identity, it seems that it would be a challenge to dismantle these beliefs. Bell (2003) attributes teachers’ lack of preparedness for diversity on homogenous communities as well as media. Mass media and popular culture often represents urban education as something that is dangerous (Donaldson, 2009). Kincheloe (1999) claims that the media does its share to maintain dominant images of innocence in U.S. culture, and educational professionals are not immune from these effects. Dominant narratives indicate that as innocent, well-intentioned White women enter urban schools, ridden with gangs, promiscuity, and drugs, thus allowing themselves to become victims of urbanity as well as White saviors for taking on the risk of contaminating their inherent purity (Vera & Gordan, 2003 in Matias, 2013). And as this narrative of White saviority persists in the recounts of countless films, newscasts, and textbooks, society cries and empathizes with the heroic action of benevolent White (mostly female) teachers (Matias, 2013). It’s no wonder that films such as Dangerous Minds (1995)
and *Freedom Writers* (2007) become popular for aspiring teachers who find inspiration in the glorification of the work of the White female teacher with minority students. While many education academics express frustration with these movies, we must consider their popularity and how these films have remained some of the most popular movies that tell stories about teachers.

While media reinforces a glorification of White, female teachers, another picture is painted of urban youth, particularly Black youth. Gallagher (2003) found that Whites tend to overestimate the size of the urban Black populations based largely on the overexposure of Blacks on local television news. Additionally, his subjects stated that these representations were almost always negative.

In issues surrounding (Black) crimes, the (often biased) news attempts to give the appearance of representing un-biased accounts by giving the facts in police reports, or speaking to police representatives. However, in these accounts, the police not only represent a kind of discourse, but institutional practices that produce race, class, and gendered subjectivities with a regulating force (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008). This demonstrates how ideas in the public consciousness continue to act corporeally on the bodies and lives of Blacks and only in the minds of Whites. More importantly, however, it speaks to how the public consciousness situates innocent, pure, White, female teachers who have been viewed throughout their own life and consequently view themselves as “good girls” are placed as polar opposites to the Black teenage students (particularly Black males) she teaches. While heroic stories of White, female teachers are made popular through Hollywood, prevalent images of Black teenagers in desperate need of guidance and control continue to place these youth in the role of the subordinate Other.
Creating the “bad boy”

Male students, particularly Black male students, have a different set of social norms than “good (White) girls” that affect their classroom interactions with peers and teachers. Black masculine posturing is established at an early age and the social environment of the school is a perfect place to learn to act out this identity. Many Black males are taught to be tough, cool, and strong (Majors & Billson, 1993) but this conflicts greatly with the larger social conditioning that occurs in the classroom. Billson and Majors (1993) have often been credited for being the first to establish a key descriptor of Black male behavior and the social factors that establish and maintain these behaviors. They refer to cool pose as the tough and hardened exterior that has been formed as a defense mechanism to years of bodily, social, economic, and emotional oppression (Majors & Billson, 1993). Majors and Billson (1993) highlight the sensibility and creativity of this identity construction as a coping strategy to deal with the conflicts in desires between their own identity and the one-dimensionality of Black masculinity that conforms to social expectations. Coolness is expressed through clothes, speech, style, emotional posturing, humor, physical strength, and toughness (Brown, 1999; Isom, 2007; Kirkland & Johnson, 2009) and becomes the ultimate stance of exerting control for the Black man (Majors & Billson, 1993). Though these masks bring men balance, stability, confidence, camaraderie, and charisma, it also brings men closer to destructive habits such as drug and alcohol use and an apathy towards school, employment, and interpersonal relationships (Majors & Billson, 1993). hooks (2004a, 2004b) looks at the conditions that shape the ‘cool pose’ in everything from relationships to fathers, to misplaced healings of sexual confusion. Jenkins (2006) also looks at the Black family structure and the males’ roles within the family to show how
Black families construct Black masculinity. She uses this, as well as the history of Black men in the U.S. as far back as slavery and the media's glorification of the “gangsta” stereotype as the foundations for explaining the psychological dimensions that result in “internalized self-hatred resulting in low-self concept” (p. 136).

I would add the identity of coolness is not only reinforced by media and family, but also through the institution of education. In particular, this relates to how Black masculinity is seen as drastically different (and threatening to) White femininity. Fanon (1967) addresses his Black identity as how it is formed in relation to Whiteness, only identifies his body from a *third person consciousness*, implying that he always views himself how others (particularly Whites) see his body and actions. As a retaliation to a threat of teacher authority, teachers often over-punish Black male students as a means of bodily control. Davis (2010), Downey and Pribesh (2004), Emilovich (1983), Ferguson (2003), Gause (2008), and Morris (2005) discuss discipline and bodily subjugation of the Black male student. Whether they punish Black male students more harshly than their White counterparts (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Emilovich, 1983) or fixate on measureable control aspects (such as dress code) to promote White values (Morris, 2005), or isolate them from the classroom (Ferguson, 2003; Emilovich, 1983)—many White teachers leave Black male students believing they are inherently *bad* and deserve to be in trouble (Ferguson, 2003). Kirkland and Johnson (2009) also found that Black youth feel coerced to give up their masculinity if they are to do well in school. Crozier (2005) adds that Black high school boys express a “fear of acting White” and are challenged by pressures to conform while simultaneously conflicted by their needs to adopt coping strategies to deal with these pressures (p. 588). Patterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) discuss how rules and
expectations established in schooling institutions shaped how Black teens perform their identity. Their study of high school students revealed that acting Black was based on a performance that included academics, aesthetic style, behavior, disposition, and overall impressions. They also found that most of the categories associated with Blackness were described by the students using negative connotations (Patterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004).

In her 2007 study, Isom asked young Black boys what kind of students they were and the vast majority answered with positive responses that indicated that they were good students. However, when asked how their teachers would describe them, most boys gave responses such as “I kinda get in trouble a lot, sometimes I interrupt,” “I have a little lip sometimes,” or “I can be really smart if I want to, but I don’t put my mind to it” (p. 419).

Isom’s (2007) study showed that in Black male students, gendered and racialized identities demonstrate a sense of self that is constantly shifting and produced, yet also reflected the presence and desire for a self apart from external constructions within the context of school.

While negative connotations of Black masculinity seem to run rampant in the U.S. educational arena, there are few accomplishments to report (Pabon, Anderson, & Kharem, 2011). Black males are far under-represented in Advanced Placement and gifted programs and grossly over-represented in special education, suspension, and dropout rates (Bianco, Leech & Mitchell, 2011). “These disparities shame our nation and clearly fall on race, class, and gender lines” (Bianco, Leech & Mitchell, 2011, p. 369). The disparities created in education likely discourage Black males from entering the field of education. Bianco, Leech & Mitchell (2011) state that “public schooling has tragically failed the very population we need the most in our schools” (p. 368).
Madkins (2011) notes that Black teachers have been on decline since desegregation and the lack of Black teacher presence in the classroom doesn’t allow Black students to see themselves in that professional role. Black male teachers with culturally relevant curriculum can use instructional practices and provide knowledge that connects with the student’s identities and this connection can foster self-esteem and critical understandings that empower Black students (Pabon, Anderson & Kharem, 2011). Gay (2000) supports the idea of Black male teachers in urban schools, noting that teachers that come from the community can develop a culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy that gives students a significant sense of historical and cultural knowledge.

There are only two Black males teaching at Kennedy High School, yet the school security staff is predominantly Black men. This reinforces the notion that Black men are the bodily force in the school, valued only for their ability to confront physical conflict rather than the use of their intellect. Additionally, the security staff is superseded by the district’s School Resource (Police) Officers, all of whom are White males. This gives a small glimpse of White supremacy to our young men (and women) within our school as well as families, teachers, and the community.

The reduction of a Black masculinity to merely a bodily identity relates well to the high school classroom. I believe that for many large Black high school students, their bodies are the sources of threats and intimidation to control, therefore teachers often silence, remove, force into submission, or restrict them so as to look like a well-behaved Black man in the eyes of White authorities. In the case of James, his actions were immediately seen as suspicious, threatening, and worthy of attention and punishment by his White, female teachers. Conversely, Jacquie was never viewed with a guilty eye by her White, female
teachers. The example of James and Jacquie demonstrate how each student is being acted upon in accordance to the identity that has been assigned to the nexus of their racialized and gendered descriptors.

**Are there “bad girls?”**

In her ethnography that explored the intersections of social class, race, and high school femininity, Bettie (2003) finds herself villainizing the girls who most fell in line with traditional views of the model student and relating to the girls that lived in the periphery of their school environment. She spent most of her study coming to understand the high school’s social structure through the perspectives shared by girls as they skipped class and smoked under the bleachers (Bettie, 2003). Bettie (2003) studied how these girls consciously shaped their identity on notions of resistance to standard model of the good, White, middle-class female student. Ivashkevich (2013) looks at the villainization of girls who are in trouble with the law. She discusses the images in contemporary media that show girls gone wild: queen bees and gangsta girls, who pride themselves on being self-centered, mean, physically aggressive, sexually promiscuous, and prone to illegal activity. In particular, many of the female students in my classes enjoy watching and discussing the reality show, *Bad Girls Club*, which places self-proclaimed “bad girls” in a house together where they drink excessively and often fight one another as they establish their dominance as the *baddest* girl in the house. Ivashkevich (2013) notes that these images have been instilled in public discourse and challenge the patriarchal order and traditional images of nice, compliant, nurturing femininity. She also points, however, that while some may see the adoption of these behaviors as gender equality, statistics show that girls are judged
more strictly and often punished more heavily for exhibiting masculine behaviors, particularly physical aggression, which is often tolerated in boys (Ivashkevich, 2013).

Kennedy High School certainly has a great deal of female students that fall outside of the traditional image of the good, obedient, female student. However, throughout my study, I found that the lines separating good verses bad that were crossed by girls were much more blurry than the strict “good girls” and “bad boys” dichotomy. For example, Amber, Jacquie, and Mackenzie were all guilty of breaking school rules. However, their ability to speak and act in ways that seemed to closely align with discourses that situate “good girls” allowed them to maintain their place within this status. Specifically speaking, all three girls maintain high grades, frequently participate in class, and speak in ways that fall in line with contemporary courtesy norms. Conversely, Tanieka (who was introduced in the Data Analysis section of Chapter Two: (In)forming Autoethnography) exhibited a declining interest in grades, profane speech, and frequently spoke of fights or expressed interest in fighting. By exhibiting patterns of behavior that are typically associated with boys, Tanieka, and girls like her, fell outside of the privilege of the “good girls.”

Tanieka, along with many other of my female students, are seen as “bad girls.” In almost every case, the “bad girls” are also Black. Daily suspension logs echo this hypothesis, as they are suspended at Kennedy High School at a much higher rate than White girls and even White boys. Crenshaw (2014) reports that Black female students are suspended exponentially more over White females and the rate of suspension between Black-White female students and Black-White male students show that there is a far bigger gap between Black females and White females suspension rates in several urban schools. Crenshaw (2014) seeks to expose the need to focus attention on Black female students as the
forgotten intermediary between the White femininity and Black masculinity. Crenshaw (2014) notes that Black female students are often omitted from the story of racialized practices in education because of the significant (and important) interest on Black masculinity as well as research about race or gender that does not account for these students’ intersectionality. She notes that girls’ might not project behaviors that deem them ‘in crisis,’ allowing them to fall through the cracks of educational systems leading them to act out or drop out of school (Crenshaw, 2014).

At Kennedy High School, these “bad girls” cannot access the privilege enjoyed by other students of the same gender. Additionally, they don’t necessarily receive the attention from peers or adults that some of the Black male students receive. Research shows that young Black women are often deemed as more mature and self-reliant (Crenshaw, 2014), further justifying their lack of scrutiny, focus, and attention. Additionally, Black female students that don’t fall into the “bad girl” category or the “[White] good girl” category are often the most invisible of all. I will discuss the omission of the Black female student further in Chapter 6.

**Reflecting on my Place within these Discourses**

I was surprised at *how much* of my journaling was devoted to the “good girls” and “bad boys” dichotomy. What also surprised me was the shift in *how* I wrote about these topics as the year progressed. Earlier journal entries simply exposed the problem and my thoughts on how it enhances the racial and gender divide of educational experiences for my students. However, after several months of writing “I noticed that this happens,” my writing took the tone of outrage over the ways that students and staff enact entitlement
and superiority over other students. In December, my journal entry opened with "a conversation that shows the differences between White girls and the rest of the school population," but by late April, I wrote how I am “sick and tired of these White girls getting away with murder."

Bettie (2003) helps me consider how my own presumptions about gender affect my classroom practices as well as research agenda. Bettie researched how gender understanding was shaped by racial, ethnic, and socio-economic class identity. Bettie (2003) found herself villainizing the White, middle class girls who acted as the “model students” within the school she studied. In reviewing my notes in the margins from my first reading of Bettie (2003) several years ago, I was annoyed and even offended and considered this bias to be bad research. However, a recent re-reading of Bettie (2003) showed that I have noticed the same biases in my own thinking, and possibly classroom practices. After researching the schooling of Black boys, am I now resentful of White girls? Though I appreciate Bettie’s candor at admitting her own biases, I have had to challenge myself to do more than say, “I’ve noticed that I’ve done this” by recording the evolution and effects of these feelings in my own autoethnographic study.

Boldt (2001) uses Butler to provide a context for her work in the classroom. Boldt’s work is helpful because it exemplifies how she examines and critiques her own classroom practices and teacher behaviors in contrast with her desires for herself as a teacher. She noticed how her own feminist beliefs manifested themselves in contradicting actions by projecting the role of victim to her female students while projecting the role of classroom and playground dominators to her male students. Boldt (2001) also writes about making decisions of when to intervene and when to observe the social phenomena in a classroom,
something that has helped me in performing my own research within the classroom and school.

Even though I believe that this phenomenon has taken place in the previous nine years of teaching at Kennedy High School, repeated journaling on the topic made it a much more prevalent issue by gradually exposing the frequency and severity in which it occurs. The entries I selected to share each highlight one example of the types of entries that occurred most often: witnessing White female students using or describing their privilege (shown here as Amber and her assessment of the cell phone policy), reflecting on examples of how I consider and reflect on the discourses of others (as shown by describing how Jacquie’s and James's teachers treat them differently), and how I directly participate in the discourses that reflects the exercising of privilege to White, female students. My journal entries also exhibit my own shift from an observer to participator in this dialogue. In December’s conversation with Amber and Bethany, I gave no input, but rather listened to their description of the school policies. Even though a security guard was present for the conversation, I did not actively seek justice for Nadeera or any other student who is punished more severely for this policy, nor did I try to retroactively seek punishment for Amber’s violation of this policy.

By February, I attempted to seek justice for James by supporting his story to the discipline office and trying to offer another perspective of him to the disciplinarians and his study hall teacher, but my concern for maintaining professional collegial relationships hindered me from exposing their discrimination or interjecting myself into Jacquie’s situation with her health teacher by suggesting that she should be given the same penalty as James, or any other (non-White female) student who skips class. In late April, however, I
very diligently sought penalty for Mackenzie and tried to expose her abuse of privilege to a fellow teacher, a guidance counselor, and the college career center director. Unfortunately, I don’t know how effective I was in changing anyone’s ideas on this phenomenon.

Additionally, I don’t know if Mackenzie learned anything about her privilege from this experience. While she did attend class for the remainder of the year, I can’t say if she considered the way she was using her racialized and gendered position as a way to gain an unfair advantage throughout her years at Kennedy. With Mackenzie, Amber, Bethany, and Jacquie, I never drew their attention to their privilege. Amber, Bethany, and Mackenzie are well aware of it, while Jacquie seems to use it, but not understand how or why it exists. I hesitate to be the one to reveal this to them, especially in an informal conversation. And although I am willing to talk with students about sexism, racism, and even discrimination in schools in a blanketing sense, I rarely bring up White privilege, or the privilege of White girls, even though it is a very obvious issue to our students. I’m concerned about implications of crossing professional boundaries by casually exposing a girl’s racialized or gendered privileges. Other journals entries have shown that I am willing to say things like “entitled White girls” or “privileged girls” to colleagues, but I haven’t observed any changes in this status-quo behavior or discourse.

A journal entry from September describes Joe (10th grade Hispanic male), telling about his frustration with the frequent discrimination he experiences when he walks down the hall with his girlfriend (White, 10th grade “good girl”). Joe said that he is always approached and asked for a pass, while she is waved on— even though they are walking together. I see many teachers tell “good girls” things like, “go ahead and run to the bathroom— you don’t need a pass” and “good girls” saying things such as, “I’ll just run to
my locker real quick. You don't even have to write me a pass, no one will stop me.” I try to bridge the gap in this dichotomy in small ways through my own practice by making all of my students get passes, regardless of who they are or where they are going. Small acts of equality such as this might raise the attention of my students, but it does little to change the discourses of my school context.

Hardy (2010) looks to Delpit (2006), Howard (2006), and Ladson-Billings (1995) for characteristics necessary for White, female teachers to successfully teach Black male students. Her findings indicate that when White, female teachers consistently consider students’ cultural needs, adolescent development, and unique family backgrounds, they are able to produce positive academic and social results (Hardy, 2010). Hardy (2010) acknowledged that teachers’ may struggle daily with implementing cultural connections to classroom instruction, but a commitment to recognizing cultural awareness can still make them effective teachers of diverse populations of students.

Additionally, more attention needs to be paid to gender disparities. If teachers do not consciously address gender-based discriminatory practices, students will not develop the criticality to explore new perspectives and develop their own attitudes that are outside of the patriarchal order (Tatar & Emmanuel, 2001). Tatar and Emmanuel (2001) studied gender bias in teachers and found that teachers tend to view gender in more egalitarian terms, though there were major inconsistencies in many aspects of gender equality in their beliefs and practice. Although I was always aware of the “good girls” and “bad boys” dichotomy in schools, the lack of discourses of gender inequality, the ways gender performativity is normalized in education, and the laws that govern this gender normativity in school and society are issues revealed in my greater detail and depth during
my year of journaling. Also, journaling allowed me to consider how these discourses are discussed and acted upon by different members within the discourse. Specifically, I originally thought that this discourse was most exercised by faculty. However, my conversations with Amber and Bethany as well as the actions of Mackenzie show me that these teenage girls are very active members of the shaping, practicing, and enactment of this particular discourse. As a former high school “good girl,” I assumed that I was an innocent bystander to the discourses that framed my own identity. Althusser’s (1971) theories on the creation of subjects indicates that I have been made a subject by the discourses and institutions that has interpellated me throughout the social and professional interactions throughout my life, implying that my identity has been shaped by external social forces dating back to my first educational experiences. However, seemingly simple statements such as, “I don’t need a hall pass, no one will stop me,” made me an active member of this dialogue as I take up and utilize the discourses to define myself to others.

“Good girls” and “innocent” White, female teachers may project an image consistent with the public imagination’s conception of a traditional patriarchal order and nice, compliant, nurturing femininity (Ivashkevich, 2013), but my studies gives evidence to girls’ ability to take ownership of these discourses in very subtle but manipulative ways. Conversely, I believe that Black male students are subjects and participants of the educational discourses that shape them in very different ways. This will be discussed further in Chapter Six. In the following chapter, I will discuss how teachers and administrators create, maintain, participate, and resist a normalizing discourse that regulates how all parties in schools are positioned and placed within their roles in the
school environment. Since the positions of “good girl,” “innocent teacher,” and “bad boys” are created through discourse, Chapter Four elaborates on the discourses exchanged between faculty that support or challenge the notions of normalcy.
Chapter Four

Teacher Talk: Discourses Regulated by

Collegiality and Professionalism

Our language is only half ours (Foucault, 1984). Others receive language differently than the speaker intends, and most of our language has become a re-coding of someone else’s language (Foucault, 1984). Discourse is more than just verbal or written language. It includes non-verbal cues, demeanors, and various means of expression. I would also argue that discourse can be established through allegiances and relationships. Therefore, how we position ourselves as teachers within our teaching context makes up much of our own discourses. Who are the colleagues I align myself with, and how does this convey some of my educational philosophies? What is the status of my relationship with administration, and how does this alter my view of myself and my presentation as a teacher? How has my role as an academic influence how I communicate with my teaching colleagues? In this section, I will look at how I navigate the discourses with my colleagues and administrators. By examining how I engage in these discourses, I explore my own racialized and gendered positioning and the political and social implications of my practices and speech. I also raise awareness of the social and professional norms that regulate my practice and speech.

This chapter considers the impact of external factors on teachers’ attitudes, specifically through discourses shared by their colleagues and administrations. I will highlight how professional practice and social norms inhibit me from freely speaking about my understandings of the racialized and gendered identities of both students and staff. By exhibiting my own moral conflicts and personal challenges as I exist within these
discourses, I can highlight how much it is missing from many conversations about teacher beliefs and practice. Additionally, this chapter gives more attention to the powerful dialogues that many might first consider to be merely the daily grind of teacher experience.

**Teachers (Un)/(Re)learning Through Discourses**

Lee (2013) posits that a personal connection to the social issues allow for the opportunity to unlearn biases. One might believe, therefore, that teaching in an urban school would give anyone a “personal connection” to these social issues. Unfortunately, however, teaching in a school with a diverse population does not necessarily translate into an awareness of issues of inequity education. Chung and Miller's (2011) study found that many of the participating teachers demonstrated rudimentary levels of multicultural education, despite their proximity to urban areas and their personal experiences with diversity. Many of the teachers in this study conceptualized multicultural issues as establishing unity among diversity with a focus on celebrating food, holidays, and traditions of cultures outside of White, mainstream, U.S. culture (Chung & Miller, 2011). When confronted with these findings, the authors wondered if these teachers were never taught critical approaches to multicultural education that might lead to advanced levels of social justice implementation, or if their beliefs as an individual and a teacher were already too solidified to change from their teacher education (Chung & Miller, 2011). Lee (2013) confirms that pre-service training and in-service professional development often fail to drastically change a teacher’s beliefs on multiculturalism enough to change their classroom practice.
Williams (2008) describes the way that groups of White teachers build bonds around their Whiteness and their positions as White teachers in predominantly Black schools. As Williams describes, as teachers share stories, perspectives, and feelings, manifestations of their individual and collective racial status emerges. These teachers liberally used disclaimers, avoidance techniques, colorblind discourse, and stereotypes while unapologetically sharing their outsider status (Williams, 2008). Unfortunately, these are the stories that become the glue that binds these teachers together (Williams, 2008). When analyzing the discourses exchanged between my colleagues, I realized it was hard to not get caught up in the search for solidarity with peers. Teachers in "failing schools" are often under attack by many sources and the need for belonging and support is critical. However, Williams (2008) highlights how this solidarity could have a very negative outcome for teacher effectiveness.

It is crucial to acknowledge the climate of the school context as a force powerful enough to change a new (or even experienced) teacher’s beliefs. As educational mandates change annually with each change in elected official(s) at the local, state, and national level, as well as changes in school and district administrative policies, teachers are given a multitude of directives throughout the course of their careers. Each mandate and policy has the power to change their practices, yet acknowledgement of the vast variety of these external factors is nearly invisible in existing literature. Throughout my year of data collection, I saw how new school rules, administrative directives, increased pressure from parents and the community, as well as increased strain from standardized tests affect teachers’ attitudes and even classroom practices. I feel that many existing studies fail to
address the complexity of a teacher’s sphere of influence on their daily classroom practice and discourse.

**Why So Few Are Talking About What Teachers Are Talking About**

Throughout the course of my research, I have found significantly less studies performed using practicing teachers than pre-service teachers participants. As a practicing teacher and scholar, this doesn’t surprise me and I attribute it to several factors. First, many of the published authors are college professors and they write about their own work in their college classrooms and their experiences in the academic world. It’s no surprise that education and art education students in higher education are much more accessible to these authors than K-12 teachers. There are often incredible road blocks presented to scholars wishing to study in public schools. It’s much easier to study the teaching of pre-service teachers. Secondly, many practicing teachers do not have the time to participate in studies if it is not part of their own formal education in pursuit of graduate degrees. Everyday, teachers are inundated with their own course planning and grading as well as pressures from administration for more reporting, meetings, and data collection because of evidence-based accountability. Unless a teacher is intrinsically motivated to seek out the issues of educational inequality or study one’s teacher identity on his/her own time, daily practices do not necessarily grant a teacher time to participate in research about education or their teaching. The third factor that I attribute to less studies involving practicing teachers has derived from my own thirteen years of teaching experience and observations of my self and other’s behaviors. I posit that as teachers become more ingrained in educational practice and discourse, a disconnect between their practice and what they
were taught in their teacher education program begins to form. When I first started
teaching, my mentor teacher told me repeatedly to “forget everything I learned in the ivory
tower.” For my first several years, I was reminded that “universities don’t get it. They are so far removed from the reality of teaching.”

Unless teachers remain active in graduate studies, they begin to feel very distant from discourses of their educational preparations. I posit that the further one is removed from these discourses, the more other discourses may influence one’s understanding of their professional role. Furthermore, additional influences including family, colleagues, friends, and personal experience can become more powerful than the memories and beliefs created during their teacher education. Since many teachers end their graduate studies after their Master’s degree or after obtaining the highest level on their district’s salary scale, the disconnect between teachers and universities grow as teachers gain more experience. I would posit that, in many cases, this disconnect harms the possibility for partnerships between universities and experienced teachers who consider themselves to be “experts” in their fields. Lines of communication are not as readily open, and understandings are halted on both the part of the teacher as well as researchers. This became even more apparent as I conducted this study and lived as both an academic researcher and a practicing teacher. Outside of a few colleagues who occasionally inquired about my research to make sure that they would not be implicated in any way, most were uninterested in discussing any contemporary research in art education or even general education. When I would offer articles or research that speak to topics of discussion with my colleagues, the conversation would suddenly turn flat, as if the research had little to do with our daily practice. These conversations certainly play a role in positioning the value of
academic research, studies, and findings play in our K-12 classrooms. From my first years of teaching through my years as living as an academic/teacher researcher, the message received from those within my teaching context shaped my understanding of the value of my own education, as well as the value of the work I am doing as a researcher.

There is certainly a lack of valuable research that focus on teacher-teacher and teacher-administration discourses, despite how influential these discourses are in shaping a teachers’ identity. In performing my own autoethnographic study, I became aware of how much these discourses affect my practice. I am in a fortunate position as a doctoral candidate and a high school teacher to live in a space that grants me access to both academic discourses as well as the discourses of a public high school. My analysis shows that professional conversations in the context of my teaching position challenge my practice without changing my fundamental beliefs that align with my academic research interests. However, the intersections of these discourses are complicated and difficult to navigate, and attending to one discourse is often reliant on dismissing, silencing, or forgetting the other.

In my academic circles, I speak with hope and excitement for the possibilities of change brought about by social justice art education. In my teaching context, I tread lightly with these topics as they are often dismissed or overshadowed by discourses of hopelessness or discouragement by educators. In fact, I’ve often stopped myself from raising these topics because of the pain it brings me when my optimism is dismissed by groups or individuals. Instead, I keep many opinions to myself for the sake of collegial relationships and protection of my own ego and patiently wait for the next academic conference when my excitement is temporarily restored. However, when the conference
ends and I carry new ideas and possibilities back with me, these ideas will remain exclusively with me, causing me to feel quite lonely in my beliefs. I don’t want to believe that my academic life and teaching life are mutually exclusive, but the discourses in each context are so different that they are almost polarizing. Throughout my data collection and even as I conducted my analysis, I struggled to find a way to have these worlds co-exist, and I have yet to rectify this discrepancy.

**Journal Entries: Conversations with Colleagues**

Even before my research began, conversations with my colleagues have raised more moral and ethical conflicts and considerations than any other category of discourses at work. Unsettling racist and sexist conversations with colleagues sparked my initial interest in researching this subject and the need for collegial support maintains the complexity of my participation and navigation within these discourses.

I speculate that no one wants to be disliked at work. It’s a place where you spend a large portion of your life, and most work environments require collaboration and cooperation. Schools are no exceptions. Teachers may not like every single one of their colleagues on a personal level, but they have to maintain a professional work environment for and with each other in order to maintain a feeling of community for their students.

Given the frequency of racist/sexist speech by colleagues, I fear that I would become a social pariah to the majority of the 155 faculty members for directly addressing racist/sexist discourses. Therefore, I have to be manipulative in how I address these topics and calculate my words and timing. Often, my responses to sexist/racist discourses will arise days later, in the context of a different conversation so as to avoid direct blame. Once
again, I question the effectiveness of my covert techniques of addressing these issues and
their ability to truly change discourses that create inequity in our school. Other times I say
nothing at all because I can’t come up with an effective response, or I am just too timid to
create social tension.

I must be clear in noting that not all discourses with colleagues are disparaging to
students. I have many wonderful colleagues who serve their students well and maintain
nurturing and positive relationships with all kinds of youth. I even have a few colleagues
who are keenly aware of racial and gender discrimination in school and also strive to
maintain a social justice approach to their teaching. In this section, I will describe how
teachers’ discourse can provide a safe haven for stratified groups, while others further
exasperate stratification. Finally, I will describe how collegial support is often enacted as an
us-versus-them approach as teachers seek support from one another when faced with
challenging student relationships. I begin with three journal entries that provide the
context for of teachers’ discourses on or creating stratification.

Journal Entry 1: Finding support from other women

Monday, October 28

Last week Tanieka’s math teacher sent an email out to all of her teachers wondering if
they have also noticed a drop in motivation and progress. I have noticed that she is trying
less and less to get her classwork finished, but she is making more and more of an effort to
build a relationship with me. This (White, male) teacher also said that she has been
extremely disruptive lately and she’s heading down a bad path. Another White, male
teacher emailed everyone back, stating that she is now off of parole, and that’s probably
why she’s not trying anymore. I wrote back that I noticed her grades have been getting
lower, but she is still polite and respectful to me.

21 Tanieka’s (9th grade Black female student) downward spiral of academic decline and punitive consequences
was first introduced in the “Data Analysis” section of Chapter 2.
At the end of the day yesterday, I told Tanieka that some of her other teachers are concerned about her grades slipping (I never mentioned the disrespectful/disruption part). I said I was concerned, too. She said that she was struggling in math but she is going to bring up all of her other grades. She wanted to know what her teachers said about her, but I said it was all very basic “what’s her grade like, what helps her be successful” type of questions. She seemed satisfied with that and said she wants to do better. She promised to look over her math work that night and see her teachers tomorrow regarding any missing work.

This morning she came to my room to greet me before heading to homeroom and was in a great mood. However, at the beginning of 1st period (during our art PLC22 meeting), she returned, sobbing inconsolably. She hid her face with her binder and her shoulders were shaking. I jumped up to hug her and ask her what happened. She said, “Mr. Morris [vice principal] called me an idiot.”

This is NOT what I was expecting as an answer. But I pretended to be as offended as she was. (After all, I jokingly call her all the names in the book and she laughs them off). “He what!? He called you an idiot?! Why would he say that?”

She was still sobbing, so her words were broken. “He... said... all... my... teachers... think... I’m... an............... idiot.” “Really? All your teachers? Why would he say that?!”

“He said that all of my teachers think that I must be dumb because.... Of....” And she broke down again. I didn’t know what she wanted from me as far as condolences, but I do know that there was something “off” about this conversation, what he said, and how she responded to it. I do know that I have never heard anyone say “idiot” when talking about Tanieka.

“That is ridiculous. I don’t know why he would say that. Is he trying to say that we all got together in a meeting about you and called you an idiot and we all agreed or something? Don’t you think I would tell you about this if it happened?” (Tanieka nodded). “Or—better yet—they had a meeting— all of your teachers--- but they didn’t invite me. Yeah, that sounds logical.” She cracked a smile and the sobbing and tears stopped, but she was still upset. “So what did he say? Where is this coming from?” “He saw me come out of homeroom and called me into his office and said all of my teachers said I must be an idiot and I am wasting my opportunities. Then he asked if I wanted to stay in this school, because at this rate, I’m going to wind up in Truman23. I said ‘no,’ but I want to now. I just want to go home. I don’t even want to be here.” She started crying again.

22 PLC stands for “Professional Learning Community,” meaning that it is a time for all art teachers to get together to work on curriculum planning and other tasks. On this particular day, only the 4 female art teachers were in attendance.

23 Truman High School is the district’s alternative high school. For further description, see “Context of Study” in Chapter 1.
I talked to her about getting her grades caught up and reassured her that no one has EVER called her an idiot. She was still mad at Mr. Morris and said she hated him and still wants to leave this school. I told her that it was inappropriate, but he surely had her best intention in mind and probably didn’t mean to hurt her.

Tanieka washed her face and went back to class and I immediately went to Mr. Morris’s office. He wasn’t there, so I went back to my room and emailed him to call me ASAP in regards to Tanieka. I didn’t tell him what it was about, because if he thought she was in trouble, I knew he would respond faster. Discipline always seems to trump emotional matters for urgency of response.

He called into our PLC meeting 20 minutes later. I said that Tanieka was extremely hurt and cried over him calling her an idiot. He said, “good. She should cry. She is an idiot!” I was disgusted, but I tried to keep my composure. “I really don’t think you understand how much what you said affected her. She wants to leave the school. She is hurt and feels that her teachers betrayed her and think she is dumb.” He explained that he didn’t mean it like that, etc. She took it wrong, etc. He blamed her for her own misinterpretation while I tried to tell him that what HE said was seriously offensive. He responded by stating that it was only offensive to HER. I had to pretend I understood his position, even though I was thinking that he is an arrogant prick. I asked him to speak to her again to clarify what he meant so she wasn’t feeling so distraught. He said, “I don’t know if that’s the best idea. I mean, if she misinterpreted me the first time, what’s to stop her from messing it up again?”

“Yeah, I guess that could be true.” No. It’s not true at all. He is haughty and lazy. “Still, if you see her, maybe you can let her know that you mean well for her.” I couldn’t keep pushing. He was my administrator, and he was clearly blowing me off24. What now?!

I got off the phone furious. I told the other art teachers what they couldn’t overhear. Christina said “he’s an asshole. He is an arrogant asshole. He would NEVER talk to you like that if you were a man or if Tanieka was a boy.” Christina is right. Tanieka is being dramatic and I am being over sensitive to her needs. That’s what all of us female teachers in the art department do, right?

The art department has six teachers filling five positions. [Because four of the five teachers have had babies in the past two years, Tami, the art LTS, has maintained a permanent position as an LTS at our school and is considered one of the department members. Even Tami had to go out for several months for her own baby’s birth!] Because of the heavy woman/mothering presence in the art department, comments have (often) been made about how we “must be so hormonal,” and “[our PLC] is way too many women in one room.” Mr. Morris has certainly made his share of sexist cuts. Knowing that he was calling

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24 I’ve always struggled to find the best ways to push back against administration when I feel they are wrong, but I have to do so carefully because of their roles as my superiors and supervisors. Vice principals are assigned with the task of performing observations, which play a huge role in rating teacher effectiveness. Even though I often question their qualifications for rating my effectiveness, my inability to change this state protocol puts me in a submissive position. This position forces me to act in ways that are not congruent with my own beliefs. I will discuss my relationship with administrators more later in this chapter.
me during our art PLC meeting, he asserted his manliness over our sensitive feminine nature.

Tanieka came in during lunch and Christina and Tami were both there. Even though neither teacher has any relationship with Tanieka and only know of her bad reputation, they rallied behind her. “Don’t let him get to you. Don’t let him bully you with condescending words,” Christina told her. “Yeah, we don’t tolerate machismos!” Tami told her. Tanieka’s whole posture changed and you could see her body relax as she smiled warmly at both teachers. “It’s fine. He’s just a jerk. I’m going to stay away from him. I know you all got my back.” For the first time since the incident, she started acting like herself again and I know she found support from these other teachers.

As much as I’m frustrated by Mr. Morris’s behavior, I’m proud of the way my department rallied behind Tanieka and supported her—and each other—when a man in power exercised his authority in harmful ways.

Journal Entry 2: Concerning Racist Speech

September 11

Walking back from the restroom after school today, I saw a group of teachers sitting on the tables in a nearby artroom. In the room was Angela, White female art teacher, Liz, a White female music teacher, Allen, a White male tech ed teacher, and Scott, a White male art teacher. I stopped in to say “hello.”

Angela said, “You had Dominic Johnson last year, right? Did you have to write up constantly? How did you deal with him?”

I explained that Dominic (10th grade, Black male) did have a disturbing preoccupation with guns and violence during our one-on-one conversations, but he rarely was a discipline issue or class disruption. I said that he sat with a group of girls who were un-amused by his “antics” and seemed to keep him on target because he didn’t have an audience for his attention-seeking behaviors. I went on to explain that I spoke to both his mom and IEP [Individualized Education Plan] case manager at length about his violent interests, so she might want to try reaching out to them.

Art, like many subjects, has been genderized in the public imagination both at this school and within a large context. The genderization of school subjects will be discussed later in this chapter.

Aware of his reputation as a troublemaker, I intentionally sat Dominic at a table with 3 quiet girls who I knew had little patience for him. I know that he felt isolated and lonely at that table, but sitting him next to his (male) friends caused him to act out and cause wild disruptions to gain their attention and positive reinforcement through their laughter. I was pleased with myself that he didn’t have any major discipline problems in my class last year, but I also regret that he didn’t feel excited by the class, either. He did most of his work, but only because he was bored when he couldn’t act out. Additionally, the girls at his table were always resentful that I sat him with them and I regret sacrificing their happiness for maintaining order with for the class.
Allen added, “that kid has no business being here. He can’t read, he can barely write his name, and all he wants to do in life is shoot people and steal their money.” (Based on numerous conversations with Dominic, this is actually an accurate assessment of how he describes his life goals.)

“You have him, too?” I asked.

“Oh—get this—so do I!” added Scott.

“Seriously, he has 2 more general art classes, in addition to the general art class he had last year? Plus a tech ed class? How is that even possible?”

Angela explained that he had 21st Century Art last year, and was assigned Emotional Support Art as well as Art Appreciation last year and he was also given an Intro to Technology class in the tech ed department. It is unlikely that a sophomore has room in their schedule for 3 electives, so this didn’t make sense to me.

Scott said, “yeah, and there’s not a damn thing any of us can do about. We are given these kids and we’re supposed to teach them and we all know they’re going to fail. It’s so ridiculous. They (the administration) don’t even care. They just dump these kids on us because they have nowhere else to put them.”

Scott has complained at length about the art department being a “dumping ground” for “them” or “those kids.” He’s told enough stories to know whom he is referring to when he speaks of “those kids:” the Black male students who have academic trouble and long discipline records. (I should also note, however, that the term “dumping ground” has been used by the elective teachers for at least the past decade).

Allen concurred. “You don’t have to tell me. That’s all we teach anymore. That’s all they (counselors/administrators) give us. I can’t even teach engineering anymore, I can’t let them anywhere near the equipment we have. Just give them worksheets and keep them quiet. If they act up, kick them out. Eventually they’re all going to wind up in Truman anyway. Or jail.”

“Dominic won’t go to Truman,” Angela said. “He’s ES [emotional support].”

“Well, you’re screwed then,” laughed Allen.

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27 Ferguson (2003) also discusses teacher discourse surrounding Black male students as she describes how teach discourse plays a role in creating the school-to-prison pipeline.

28 General elective classes are intended to be introductory. If students show an interest in a subject based on their introductory/general class, they are encouraged to take more advanced level courses within that subject.

29 Truman Alternative High School doesn’t currently have accommodations for Emotional Support programs; therefore all ES students attend Kennedy High School regardless of their academic needs.
I’ve walked by the tech ed classes for years and noticed an incredibly high population of young men in those classes, particularly Black male students labeled as low-achieving. I also noticed that Scott seems to have a high percentage of male students in his general classes. I wonder if counselors assign “troubled” young men to male teachers on purpose. I’ve heard from adults around the school that Scott and Allen are “good for ‘those’ students,” but I’ve never heard these sentiments coming from the students themselves. Additionally, many colleagues and administrators have made comments about Scott and Allen keeping “order” in the art corner because they are men. There seems to be an unspoken understanding that the women of the art department need a protector from these male students.

What also concerns me is how these classes are referred to as “dummmie” or “dumping ground” classes. It is also common to refer to students as “those students” or “them,” implying there is a fixed group for all low-achieving students with discipline records. What also concerns me is my own silence towards their rhetoric. The phrases “dumping ground” and “those kids” have made me cringe for years. When I returned from my doctoral classes, I volunteered to teach all general classes just so I could perhaps change the discourse of “dumping ground.” But how do I change the discourse of “those kids” when it’s something that spreads so much further than my own department?

Other teachers know I am writing a dissertation and some know that it loosely has something to do with race and gender. If I start spouting off about how we need to change our language, people will tune me out just like they tune out motivational guest speakers at convocation. My words will just be more academic blather, and it will compromise the collegial relationship I have with my fellow teachers. It’s always been so hard to listen to racist and sexist speech, but I never know what to say in response. Would it be easier if I wasn’t a White, middle class woman from suburbia? I think about how my own race, gender, and academic status positions me in relation to my colleagues and it makes me consider how my speech will be received by them. The anticipated reaction, unfortunately, keeps me locked in silence until I can find the key to addressing these topics in a way that will be well-received.

Journal Entry 3: “Us” verses “them”—who’s creating the conflict?

September 16

Jasmine is a mouthy, Black, 9th grade female student in my 4th period class. I taught her older sister two years ago and we had a pretty good relationship. I made sure to capitalize on that relationship by telling Jasmine how much I like her older sister. I know that her sister got in trouble pretty often, but she seemed to like me and did pretty well in my class.

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30 This is another example of how I attempt to negotiate my beliefs and understandings as an academic with the discourses that surround and contextualize my daily practice.

31 4th period is a general art course for 9th and 10th grade students entitled, “21st Century Art: Art Past the Paintbrush”.
From what I have seen and heard from other teachers, Jasmine is a challenge. Today her phy ed teacher e-mailed everybody to let us know that she refused to take a gym locker (out of sheer defiance, according to the teacher) and that we have to watch for her bringing her gym clothes to class (students are not allowed to carry gym clothes around with them during the school day). I am embarrassed to say that I engaged in the negative conversation among the teachers about her decision do not take the phy ed locker. I don't even know why I did it, but I wrote back, “why on earth does she not want a gym locker?” To which the gym teacher replied, “I have no idea. To make some statement? She's on our radar!” I told the teacher that she was on my radar as well because of this act. I hate engaging in negative conversations about our students and then later wish that I didn't comment on this. I think it was my sick need of gossip to know why the student wouldn't take a locker, rather than concern for the student’s feeling on the situation. I felt guilty for saying she was “on my radar” without even hearing the student’s rationale. It’s so easy to be caught up in the conversation. Nonetheless, some teachers (such as this particular phy ed teacher) have always stood out to me as being particularly negative, the kind of toxic dynamic that can bring down the morale of teachers. It seems to me that this toxic dynamic is so much more contagious than a positive one because negative teachers seem to find a way to make fun (via rolling eyes, etc.) of people that are particularly positive. It's almost like the “cool kids group” in high school— they don't have social power because people like them, they have social power because people know they will lose a confrontation with them.

As expected, Jasmine came to my class with her gym clothes. I reminded her that she's not allowed to carry gym clothes around with her all day and told her to go put them in her gym locker (knowing that she doesn't have one). She said she doesn’t have a gym locker. Pretending I didn’t already know about the situation, I told her to ask her teacher for one. She said, “I’m not putting these clothes, or any clothes of mine, in a gym locker. These shoes were $200 and I’m not tryin to get them stolen. You know how these ratchet-ass kids are. My shoes are staying with me.”

She actually had a valid point about the frequency of theft in the locker room, but it was in violation of school policy to carry them with her. I’m torn because I really don’t see a problem with a kid carrying around a pair of shoes, but I am legally obligated to follow the rules. I advised that she leaves her shoes in the main office for the day. She agreed, so I wrote her a pass, but then she never came back to class.

The discourses exchanged about her painted her as a troublemaker and I was probably the third teacher of the day to comment on her damn gym shoes not being in her locker. It showed me how these group email exchanges between teachers don’t allow for student explanation, but rather garner support for the teacher’s perspective and gives other teachers an impression about the student before they’ve had a chance to hear the student’s side. No wonder she was annoyed that I brought it up. Every teacher she had prior to me mentioned it and assumed she would respond with defiance. I’m sure they all (like me) adjusted their speech to her in accordance with anticipated outcomes.
I've always considered myself to be a fairly outspoken individual. My friends and family have referred to me as “the firecracker” or “pit bull.” My colleagues echo this perspectives through speech such as, “I don’t have the guts to say what you say to admin,” or “if it’s not getting done, put Jess on it. She’ll go after it until it happens!” Even my students have told me they appreciate me because I “ain’t got no picks” (meaning I say what’s on my mind). However, my journal entries reveal weekly personal defeats where my moral and ethical desires lose to my silence.

I’m famous/notorious for going after certain student needs. The maintenance department still hasn’t installed the kiln vent? I’m on it. We don’t have enough funding for matte board for the art show? I’ll take care of it. Take down or censor my students’ artwork? My fists are drawn. Gender and racial discrimination runs rampant in our daily discourses? I’m nearly silent. But I know that silence is still a way of participating in discourse, even though it doesn’t feel like direct participation at the time. When I’m not silent, I’m extremely careful. Sometimes a little snarky. One might say subtle. The racism and sexism is overt, but my responses are not. When it comes to raising attention to these issues—the issues I actually feel most passionate about—the firecracker-pit bull is insecure, timid, and fearful of offending.

I admit that I have a need to belong, at least on a cordial level, with my group of colleagues. In doing so, however, I am letting my own self, my passions, and my beliefs be muted by the status-quo discourses that dominate the work environment. The truth is, I don’t feel powerful enough to change the discourse. The way I see it, I don’t carry the rank or power (socially or professionally) to change the status-quo, and that makes me feel very small in my desired role as social justice teacher. Our faculty body does have a handful of
teachers who have their own various soapboxes and I see how they are tuned out, ignored, or even called “weird” when they try to dismantle the dominant order of the school. Racism and sexism is very much at the heart of the dominant order of our (like most) public school system.

Garber (2003) notes that White males are still very much in power in education. Even though my White femininity grants me access to the majority group among the teaching staff, I feel that the feminization of my role as an art teacher diminishes my position within the staff. Paechter (2000) explores gendered power in multiple social arenas and the genderization (specifically, masculinization) of what she considers “powerful knowledge” (2000, p. 26). Her examination of gendered school subjects and departments reveals that particular classes are privileged in the school system with increased attention to testing, budgets, time allotments, physical space, and staffing (Paechter, 2000). The increase in staffing leads to more leadership within the school’s political and social climate, giving these masculine subjects even more power among teaching colleagues. These heavily tested classes (mathematics, science, technology) are associated with analytical reasoning; subjects most often associated with masculine reason (Paechter, 2000; Walkerdine 1994) as opposed to a more feminine writing, literature, or arts class. This draws my attention to how the art room is a gendered space within my own school context. It is no secret that our high school art wing is highly feminized to administration and staff. As mentioned early, our district has 14 White, female art teachers and one White male, who teaches in the high school. Last spring a White, male science teacher walked by during an art meeting and yelled in, “hey, Scott! Are you keeping all of those women in line?” “Doin’ my best, Steve!” Both men chuckled, but none of the women
found the exchange amusing as we have become increasingly exhausted of administrative and staff innuendos that Scott serves as the point of reason, physical security, and stability in the art wing. Conversely, the other five women, all of whom are new mothers, are regarded as emotional and hormonal, diminishing our influence among the staff.

I’m also afraid of becoming so outspoken in my beliefs that I also become tuned out. After all, as a Ph.D. candidate, it’s easy to mark my speech as theoretical, out-of-touch, academic nonsense. During my first faculty meeting back after my two years of classes at Penn State, I raised my hand and expressed my concern for the way we were ordered to correct children who did not use what the administrator referred to as “proper speech.” As I mentioned that it might be dis-empowering to denigrate speech patterns used at home, I looked around the room to see some colleagues looking puzzled, others rolling their eyes and whispering, and others on their phones. Most painful of all, I heard two English teachers giggling at my remark. My comment was quickly dismissed by the administrator and some fellow teachers made comments after the meeting to the effect of, “so what exactly were you learning up there at Penn State, anyway?” In that first faculty meeting, I learned how my perspectives fit in with the popular practices and beliefs, or, how they don’t fit in at all.

As an academic, it is embarrassing to expose my feelings of powerlessness and show how I participate in racist and sexist discourses. My silence perpetuates the us- verses-them discourse that shapes so many relationships in our school. I understand the need for an “us” discourse. In addition, the need of feeling a sense of belonging in any work place, our particular school context is not necessarily an easy place to teach for many people, as evidenced by the high attrition rate of teachers. Some are instantly put off by the challenges
of teaching a student population so different from themselves and instantly leave. Their “us” is established by their own identity markers. I posit that other teachers have become subjects of identity markers that have been assigned to us over a decade: teachers of a failing school. Since the early 2000s, scores of state-mandated intervention programs led by state-appointed interventionist took up residence in our schools for fixed tenures. It is not at all rare to have a group of strangers observe my class without warning, introduction, or follow-up. A few times I requested introductions, but was told to “go back to teaching.” A discourse of defensiveness has been built by the faculty towards the outside media, interventions, and bureaucrats who look to us and our teaching as the causes for our students’ failing test scores. An “us” mentality represents those teachers who value their work and seek outlet for their voice in the conversations surrounding the success of our school verses the anonymous “them” that observes and assesses our teaching then leaves behind a report that we can’t access. However, this “us” doesn’t include the students, although I think it should. Conversely, “them” includes both outside assessors as well as our own students (in many cases). Ladson-Billings (2011) suggest that teachers can end up resenting the low-achieving students that bring down a school’s test scores. I wonder if the “us verses them” mentality would be lessened if our school wasn’t under constant scrutiny. But, as it exists now, collegial validation of “I am doing a good job, despite what the outsiders say” takes on the same look as “I am doing what is right and normal, it’s these kids that are crazy/out-of-control/wrong/bad.” While I agree with challenging the discourses that subjectify our school and our teaching, I disagree with the discourses that subjectify our students. When it comes to responding, I am more than outspoken in rejecting the local
newspapers’ false assessments of our school, but I am much less likely to stand up to my colleague’s oppressive discourses because I have to face them everyday.

I am, in no way, excusing my silence. My point is that my journaling has exposed that there is a great deal of moral conflict that takes place in the presence of these discourses and negotiating one’s place among his or her body of co-workers of 10 years is a delicate dance that needs to be considered in research. Additionally, working as a teacher-researcher is more complex than the label explains. “Teacher-researcher” implies that the two roles have blended into one, but I don’t think this is always the case. In terms of professional discourses, those associated with “teacher” are drastically different from those associated with “researcher,” and attempts to merge those discourses are much more challenging than simply reflecting on or studying one’s own teaching practice. Additionally, an outside researcher ethnographically observing racist or sexist discourses of teachers does not give the full story, either. There may be other teachers who agree with my beliefs, but also feel silenced by dominant discourses as well. More autoethnographic work by teachers might create spaces for these teachers to find that there is an “us” who support social justice goals. Perhaps, we will be able to create a strong voice for “us.” Considering the subtle ways (dismissal, silence, eye rolling, walking away) people maintain the dominant discourse by rejecting opposition to the status-quo, perhaps my own dismissal, silence, and rejection towards dominant discourses might make small steps towards dismantling oppressive speech and actions in return.
Journal Entries: Conversations with Administrators

Before I review my journaling with my administrators/administration, I should explain my particular situation, as the administrative structure varies greatly from school to school. In my twelve years of teaching in Kennedy School District (ten years as an in-service teacher), we have had four different high school head principals. We also have four vice principals at any given time, and each of these positions have rolled over at least once. Our primary central administration (superintendent, assistant superintendent, specialized department heads) have all rolled over once as well.

I feel my relationship with administration has done a “roll over” of its own. Though I would like to think that I have good working relationships with my administrators and I am fortunate to currently have a head principal that is incredible supportive of the art department, I’m not the administrative “good girl” that I once was. Around the time of finishing my own administrative Masters Degree, I began approaching teaching as a social and political act that had further implications than the successes met in my own classroom. As I became more of a vocal/critical pedagogue, I was much less favored by my superiors.

I now find myself constantly negotiating my boundaries with administration. No longer the teacher that will say “yes” to any requests for scenery or displays, I’m much more willing to offer up my opinions on standardized testing, educating the whole child, discriminatory practices, censoring student voice, or any other topic that I feel concerns me on a particular day. Though I am pleased to say that my head principal is willing to hold reflective conversations with me, I am typically brushed off by anyone else in charge. This makes me want to push back more, but I often find myself struggling to practice restraint.
I would posit that there are few teaching environments were teachers don’t find themselves practicing restraint at various levels. As described in Chapter 1: Intersections of Race, Gender, and Art Education, some art teachers appease administration to ensure support for their program. Media (particularly social media) warns teachers that being too outspoken can cost them their jobs. The desire to “not make waves” can stem from motives that fall across a large continuum of rationale. Likewise, the size of waves created by teachers and the waves’ breakers that fall on administrations/administrators also exist over a wide continuum. Through my journaling, I have found instances where I practice restraint and other times when I make various-sized waves. In the first journal entry of this chapter, I describe an incident where I witnessed discriminatory practices, but both a need for professionalism as well as insecurity in my ability to make an impact kept me from responding to the situation. In the second journal entry, I describe how myself and another teacher navigate, participate, manipulate, and even discuss the discourses of discipline code, legal responsibility, special education, and sexual harassment. In my third journal entry, I give an example of one of my acts of resistance, how I have been forced to temper my resistance, how I deal with those restrictions, and show a few exchanges that take place between myself and some administrators.

Journal Entry 4: (Not)responding to Discriminatory Practices

April 11, 2014

An email came out today about the 9th grade class’s upcoming field trip to the local community college. This year admin and guidance are taking the entire ninth grade class a few miles down the street for a community college tour so they can see what college life is like and hopefully motivate them to want to go to college. The email, written by a guidance counselor and sent to the whole staff, read:

“On Monday April 28, 2014, we will be taking the full 9th grade class to TCCC [Tacony
County Community College] for a college visit. This is a morning only trip and staff will be notified in the next week as to who will be chaperoning the trip. Please find attached the full list of all FIRST year ninth grade students who are eligible to attend the trip. PLEASE REVIEW THE FULL LIST AND LET ME KNOW BY 4-16-14 ANY STUDENTS WHO DO NOT MEET THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

1. Student is responsible.
2. Student is an active listener and is able to ask appropriate questions.
3. Student will be motivated by visiting a college campus.
4. Student is able to function well in large groups.
5. Student is able to function well in public places.

Please remember that you are just sending me names of students who do NOT met the above criteria.

TX.”

(capitalization and formatting are original)

Apparently there must have been some concerned responses about the kids (that met the criteria) missing classes BEFORE standardized testing and another email was sent out in a few minutes:

“I understand that some of you have strong academic concerns about these students but we are hoping that a trip like this may motivate them to strive academically, to attend school regularly/on-time and to work towards future goals. Students will only be out of the building for one morning, with the majority of the freshman class.

Our main concern is strictly safety precautions and maintaining a respectful reputation of our school district.”

(emphasis original)

So— labeling a student as being unable to function in a large group or ask questions is COMPLETELY fine and warrants no acknowledgement, but taking out “good kids” before testing is concerning. How can you sit down with a student and tell them that their teachers have identified them as being unable to function in a large group and they will have to stay back from the field trip? Can you imagine being the student left behind? How are we qualified to make assumptions about how our students will act on field trips when we are NEVER allowed to take them on field trips ourselves? How will those kids act in school the day they are stared at for not getting on the bus to TCCC? How will they identify themselves to teachers as being the ones left behind? How will they regard their teachers after they have been identified in this way? How can we say if someone will not be motivated by a
college visit?

As sickening as this seems to me, I know there are many teachers who have NO problem picking these kids out. I can just imagine the email replies: “DJ is not able to function in public nor will he be motivated by seeing a college campus. He should not be allowed to go.” I don’t know who will tell the students that their teachers think they can’t function in public, but I’d be interested in hearing THAT conversation.

Part of me wants to write back and express my anger, but I know it will be dismissed. Even if the sending guidance counselor would read a response I wrote, what is the likelihood that it will change anything, since the wheels were already set into motion?

Another part of me is also angry because I know who’s going to be omitted from the trip. I know the marked students; everyone (teachers, security, admin, and students) can identify them. I can already picture how a group of homogenous students are going to sit in classroom on the morning they are exempt from the trip as they are monitored by a teacher who clearly knows why they are left behind.

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Journal entry 5: Rachel, Rob, and dealing with sexual harassment

Friday, January 17

Today Rachel [11th grade White female] came into my room right after lunch (before 7th period) and seemed very disturbed. She asked if I knew the “kids ... in that room ... down the hall ... they go around with same teacher all day ...” She was referring to the Life Skills students. (None of the kids know what to call the Life Skill students. Many don’t want to say “special” students because it feels wrong to them, but they don’t know how to describe them32). I said yes, I know the Life Skills students. “Oh, okay. Life Skills. Do you know who Rob is?” “Yes, I know Rob. Why?”

She explained to me that Rob [11th grade Black boy] has been really scaring her at lunch. He has been telling her that he is going to “fucking kill her” and repeatedly pushing her with his tray. Today he got in her face and pushed her again and said he was going to kill her. She said it was really freaking her out because she didn’t really know him, but he asked her for her phone number last week and she rejected him. Since then, he has been pursuing her pretty hard. I told her that I would let his teacher know and I assured her that I would take care of it.

I emailed Ms. Tavares (his teacher) and she responded immediately and said that Rob will not be allowed to go to the cafeteria without an aid with him for every single second. I told

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32 Unfortunately, most of the school population has had much interaction with the Life Skills students. Other than one hour per week, these students are not given any opportunity to mingle with students outside of their own program. As a result, Life Skills students continue to express feelings of exclusion while other students are never given opportunities to challenge stigmatizing beliefs.
Rachel about the email and she seemed satisfied. I also told her that I know Rob and I think he is harmless, he can’t express his feelings of rejection properly. She expressed remorse for getting a Life Skills students in trouble, but she couldn’t shake her fears.

Before we left for the day, Ms. Tavares came to my room. She was highly concerned about Rob’s actions, more so than I would have expected. She said that she won’t be alone in the room with Rob and she has demanded a (young, strong, male) aide with him at all times. She said that he has become increasingly violent and threatening in the past year and she was concerned for Rachel. She said that the aide should never leave Rob’s side in the cafeteria and that if he ever comes near Rachel again, she should file a complaint with the SRO\(^3^3\), Officer Willard.

I told her that I didn’t know things with Rob had been this troubling. I had him in class last year and he seemed harmless. She explained that he is very different this year. He has been drawing extremely graphically violent and sexual pictures during class and often talks of sexual aggression or harming others. He also constantly talks about the pornography he watches with his father and brother and he tried to slap his older, female aide last week. She also pointed out that his family claims he is calm and well-adjusted at home, but he also gets heavily beaten if he acts up at home, and he manifests this in his behaviors towards others at school.

I felt sad for Rob, but also concerned for Ms. Tavares and Rachel. Ms. Tavares said that she has been trying to get Rob a safer placement that keeps him away from the general population of students. While we advocate for the “least restrictive environment” for special education students, she fears that keeping him unrestricted could cause him harm to his female peers. She said she couldn’t live with herself if he harms Rachel or another female student because she failed to push for alternative placements for him.

On the surface, I would think that Ms. Tavares is trying to get Rob out of the school because it would remove a challenging student from her caseload. His parents seem to believe that he is not treated well at this school and that’s why he misbehaves. However, when I could see the fear in Rachel and got more clarification from Ms. Tavares, I saw the whole situation differently. Treating Rob fairly and making sure he is getting properly educated is no longer my main focus, protecting these girls from potential sexual assault is now my priority.

Tuesday, January 21

Rob strikes again. Rachel came in to my room today 8\(^{th}\) period and said that Rob followed her up the stairs after lunch, pushing her and telling her “look at me, you fucking bitch. Look at me when I talk to you or I’ll fucking kill you.”

She said that Rob WAS with his aide the whole time during lunch, but found a way to avoid him by following her up the stairs when lunch was over. She said she ran ahead and was able to weave through the heavy crowd enough to avoid him, but she was really concerned.

\(^3^3\) School Resource Officer, or SRO, is a police officer assigned to our school full-time.
I emailed Ms. Tavares immediately for consult. She responded immediately and asked to come by my room and talk to Rachel. Rachel agreed, and the three of us met her out in the hallway. Ms. Tavares wanted to ask if Rachel was willing to file a complaint with Officer Willard. She said she has been trying to get actions taken for Rob’s placement for a long time and no one is listening to her, but if Rachel files a complaint with the police, it would get things moving rapidly. She said that no one (referring to admin) wants a criminal complaint of sexual harassment in their school. Rachel agreed, seemed comfortable and content, so I left her with Ms. Tavares to discuss the details and then I re-joined the rest of the class. It is my understanding that the ladies drew up a complaint and sent the info to Officer Willard and Rachel returned to class about 15-20 minutes later.

At around 2:40 p.m., I got an email back from Officer Willard that was addressed to Ms. Tavares and myself. It simply said, “Tell Rachel Houser to take this up with the Discipline Office.”

That’s it. No explanation. I was so distraught. A police officer refused to deal with a threat of violence towards a young woman in school and passed it off to the discipline office. This is not the first time this has happened, either. Last year a Black male student told a (7-month pregnant) female teacher that he was going to “kick her in the fucking stomach.” Feeling venerable and threatened, the teacher filed a complaint with Officer Willard. He told her to take it up with discipline. Knowing that the discipline office would not respond to the referral for several days, she called 911 to get a police officer to the school to take immediate action. Once again, this woman had to take extreme measures to get these threats and fears acknowledged.

While I think that the young man was not ACTUALLY going to kick her in the stomach and he was actually just blowing off some steam, these two examples of apathy by the police officer shows the negligence regarding hateful speech or threats against women. It’s shocking that in today’s school climates, these threats are not pursued further. It seems that if it is not believed that the student will carry the threat out, the threat is dismissed or blown off as a guy who shoots off at the mouth too much. Where are these boys learning that it is okay to shoot off at the mouth about acts of violence towards women?? Rachel shouldn’t feel scared to walk the halls, nor should the pregnant teacher feel she can’t be alone in her classroom. Since Rob has hit teachers, the threat of violence against Rachel in school is very real. When I was pregnant, I was frightened to have lunch duty out of fear of encountering a fight. I protected my stomach when walking through the crowded hallways. I know that the fear of a student who threatened to kick her in the stomach would cause an unhealthy amount of stress to a pregnant woman and her family. Even if the threat may be empty, it is a horrible, unacceptable threat.

What can the boys learn from these experiences? How will they (re)consider their position with/against women in their futures? Is the threat mediated, or simply punished, furthering the anger the young man feels?

Wednesday, January 22
I have 1st period PLC [Professional Learning Community] today. Perfect time to get this Rachel/Rob thing resolved. As soon as homeroom ended, I went to see Officer Willard, but he wasn’t in yet. I was happy I didn’t have to face him. I was prepared to be confrontational and I knew he would be confrontational back. I knew we would battle and it wouldn’t resolve anything. He wouldn’t listen to me, and he won’t change his mind. We would just end up arguing. He’s the kind of man that doesn’t back down once he has decided something and would never admit to wrongdoing. Next I went to the discipline office. No one was there, so on the way back (I’m getting frustrated now), I stopped by the Life Skills room. Ms. Tavares and I just looked at each other and felt the other’s frustrations. She met me out the hallway and I told her I couldn’t get a hold of anyone this morning. She expressed her frustration as well. She was equally angry with Officer Willard for not dealing with this threat and we talked about the struggle between the discipline office and police department within our school. (If he doesn’t want to deal with these issues, what is he doing there!?)

We talked a bit more about Rob and how much worse he is getting. After he followed Rachel yesterday, he also tried to hit one of the aides. Ms. Tavares said that she talked to Mr. Maguire (Head of the Special Ed Depart) and said that if Rob ends up assaulting this young woman, it will be on their heads for not addressing his threats.

To complicate matters, she said that the parents were resisting alternative placement for Rob originally because they said that the school should do a better job serving him and he shouldn’t need alternative placement. She said that they had been getting into enough verbal fights on the phone over the past week that the parents now WANT him out of the school because they are so mad at her. She said that if their anger towards her gets him the placement that he needs, she’s willing to battle them everyday. (Does this ever give Rob any responsibility for the severity of his threats?)

I said I would continue to push for a safe environment for Rachel if she continues to push for protection for herself and her aides. We talked about how we could align our forces, and I decided to go back to the discipline office to follow up. Again.

This time, Ms. Kabina was there. She knew what I was there about — you could see that she didn’t want to deal with me.
“So … this Rob and Rachel issue.”
“Yes, Officer Willard forwarded that along to me. I got it.”
“So I’m clear—issues of sexual harassment and violence don’t go to him? I’m not sure when to go to him and when not to.”
“It’s an in-house issue. If it’s an in-house issue, it goes through us. We’ll take care of it. I have the paperwork right here.”
“Okay… because this is a pretty serious issue. If something happens to her, we’re going to be responsible*. If her parents get involved, it could really be ugly*.”
“No, I know. I’m going to take care of it. I’ll meet with him today. You know I can’t suspend him because he’s special ed, but we’ll think of something.”
She was completely blowing me off, flipping through papers as she talked to me.
*Liability is NOT my concern. My concern is for Rachel’s, Ms. Tavares’s, and other female students’ safety. However, when speaking to other people in the school, you have to speak the language of liability and legality. It seems to be the only language that really talks for staff-staff and/or staff-admin conversations. It always gets the fastest result—not the best results, but it gets SOMETHING besides ignored.

Furious, I went back to Ms. Tavares and relayed the information. She was also angry. He won’t even get suspended? She said she’s getting serious. She said that he NEEDS to be suspended so that his parents HAVE to deal with this situation. (Additionally, all students have to be escorted back by parents when returning from a suspension for a principal’s meeting, though those meetings rarely actually take place. But, in the case of a special ed student getting suspended, this meeting between principal, parents, and special ed teachers is absolutely required.) She sees this meeting as a way to get Rob’s parents, the Special Ed department, and school administration at the same table to get some solutions and results. She said she is going to file assault charges for hitting her if he doesn’t get the suspension. Later that day, I saw Rob’s name on the suspension list.

Journal entry 6: Getting “approval” to hang artwork

May 12

I had to get a vice principal to approve my work for the art show today. Part of this makes me very proud because my students are producing work that is challenging the status quo notions of art creation in schools. At the same time, it’s demoralizing that I have to get prior approval for hanging work in the hallway.

Last year, we did an amazing Guerilla Girls project. The students learned about the feminist group and made their own Guerilla Girls posters to hang around the school. I stayed late one day and when everyone was gone, I hung over sixty 9.5”x11” black and white anonymous posters around the school. The next day, all hell broke loose. One social studies teacher made it his mission to walk around the school and remove as many of these posters as he could before the students arrived, but he was unsuccessful. The kids were drawn to their peer’s proclamations about racism, sexism, bullying, relationships, materialism, and the environment (to name a few topics). Another art teacher who works morning breakfast duty recognized the project as “something Jess would do” and alerted me that some teachers and security guards were pretty pissed about the display. I was happy to see kids walking slowly to homeroom, looking for more signs along their way.

When my first period arrived, they were ecstatic to be a part of the coup. They told me which teachers were taking down their work and they were excited that their artwork was causing such an “issue” with school authority—they felt just like the Guerilla Girls. I send out a school wide email to the effect of, “I’d like to thank everyone for their attention to my students’ Guerilla Girls-inspired art exhibition taking place all over the school. For more information on the Guerilla Girls, follow the attached link to their website. Thanks for be a part of our learning experience! If you have been holding on to any of the posters, you can
just return them to my mailbox in the main office.” I received about a dozen emails back from (mostly female) teachers commending me on an incredible project. Those that have been ripping the posters down just threw them away as only 15 were returned to my mailbox. I received about a dozen emails back from (mostly female) teachers commending me on an incredible project. Those that have been ripping the posters down just threw them away as only 15 were returned to my mailbox. I received an email reply from the principal that simply said, “see me.” When I went to his office, he had one poster on his desk. He said that he appreciates the intent of the project and likes the idea, but some of them were completely inappropriate for school. In the future, I would have to get all work of this nature approved by an administrator. (Later in the day, two separate vice principals showed up in my room and said that they would be personally responsible for approving all of my future work). The head principal returned the “completely inappropriate” poster that read: “Discrimination is America’s Initiation? (smaller print:) Almost every ethnic group that has migrated to this country is met with discrimination. It has to stop with us.” The artist, Isaiah, was absolutely thrilled that his comments “got to” the principal and he was hailed by the class as a hero. I thought some of them might go out and buy gorilla masks.

Since that incident, principals race to approve my “controversial work.” Since the art show is coming, I invited my supervising VP to come to my room and go through what I am hanging for the art show. He pulled about 10 works relating to gun control, drug abuse, racism, immigration issues, and sexism. As always, I was told that they appreciate what I’m doing, but these works are “too much” for a school display. With the VP still present in the room, I immediately hung them up in my room under the “Too Real for School” wall. My VP, always uncertain of how to respond to my blatant acts of resistance, tells me all the time with a laugh, “oh, Kirker, you’re too much.”

In a way, it’s pretty condescending to what I’m trying to achieve. It’s as though they are politely exercising their way of taking away my social justice agenda, and do it with a smile and a wave. My pedagogical and curricular goals are trivialized and I think I’m seen as just some radical feminist, not really worthy of any real consideration.

Concerns for being taken seriously for administration echo my concerns for being taken seriously by my colleagues. How much will they tune me out or disregard my speech as feminist/academic/emotional/liberal blather? How much can I push back before they exercise their authority over me and what will be the long-term effects of that battle? While I hope for changes in school language and practices, some of my art colleagues fear I will push too hard, creating difficulties for the department. It is still present in our memories when the school’s music teachers became too outspoken towards a prior principal. The principal responded by cutting their classes, removing their technology programs, and
virtually ending the band program. All of the music teachers were re-located, left the district, or left teaching altogether before the start of the following school year.

What happens when asking the necessary questions are not welcome in schools?

When I returned to teaching after two years of graduate study, I was excited to tell my (Black, female) superintendent what I had been studying. Her only response to my research briefing was that it wouldn’t pass IRB. Determined to gain a response from an administrator, I brought a series of questions regarding racialized and gendered discourses in the classroom to my (Black, male) direct supervisor for my end-of-the-year evaluation meeting. I knew this was the only time all year I had a formal audience with my supervisor and since discussion or questions were not on the agenda, I “snuck” these issues into my lesson plan reflections (an appropriate discussion topic for these types of meetings). I was told that the issues I was raising were “very deep,” and “maybe a little too deep.” I was told that they were good thoughts and I should keep thinking about them, but a conversation never developed. My paperwork was signed and I was sent on my way.

Williams (2008) also found it concerning that as a White, woman teacher working in a predominately Black urban school, she was never asked about her personal sense of cultural competency or culturally relevant teaching in either her interviews or her evaluations. Berchini (2014) wrote about the personal challenges faced when a teacher learned a critical pedagogy in college and takes that philosophy to an environment where critical questions are not welcome. A teacher’s propensity to question, interrogate, and support students may depend on other institutional structures such as their tenure status, the open-mindedness of their superiors, or the nature of the broader discourse around assessments infiltrating the school (such as Annual Yearly Progress) at the time of their
employment (Berchini, 2014). In light of these considerations, Berchini (2014) warns against essentializing White teacher stories as collectively embodying privilege and ignorance or assume all teachers bring a lack of experience with diversity to their classroom.

The reality is that the politics of teaching warrant a particular professional discourse, but this discourse looks different in every school, district, region, and state in the United States. Furthermore, what is acceptable speech changes through time and across different contexts. Teachers, much like myself, have to find their place and voice within this context. This requires a negotiation of beliefs with the desire to remain actively employed. As for my friend that I spoke of in my prologue, the inability to push back and receive the best programs for her students resulted in her eventual departure from the field. She is not alone, as there are many teachers who become too frustrated with structural confines to peacefully live as a teacher. Other passionate teachers have to find ways to live within these confines, even if it requires them to temper their voice against or towards dominate parties. This is the situation in which I find myself.

I re-read some of my journal entries and call myself a “wimp” or a “sell-out” for performing practices with which I morally disagree. I find myself constantly negotiating and restraining myself to “pick my battles;” and I believe that there are many worth fighting for. However, I found that if I fight to win, I can’t fight every battle in my school. I need to be selective. Writing this seems antithetical to what I would say as a social justice-oriented, feminist teacher/scholar and it even seems dis-empowering. A later, more optimistic Foucault (1984) writes about hermeneutics and the care of the self and notes that caring for oneself is dependent on a knowledge of one’s own subjectivity. He also says
that, “power is not evil, power is a strategic game” and that power always leaves room for liberty and possibilities, as every individual is ultimately eminent to their own self (1984, p. 18). This provides me with hope as I know that although I feel subordinate to administrative jurisdiction, selecting my methods of resistance is an intentional and calculated response. My subtle discourse of resistance is my own power strategy. The discourse that I deliver may be subtle, but I have the power of longevity in my teaching career. Intense resistance could have big rewards, but it also holds the possibility of compromising my position as a teacher or cause myself to become too exhausted or defeated. The discourses I deliver might not appear as exemplary stories of teacher empowerment that you might find in a feminist or social justice-oriented teacher text, but they are authentic ... and they're not going away.

In the following chapter, I elaborate again on some of my daily struggles of negotiating discourses to align them with my personal beliefs. However, my year of data collection has also taught me that I am often uncertain of how my speech and actions are received by those I care most about: the students in my classes and their families. While I am often confident that I know how my speech with teachers and administrators will be received, I often question how my discourse will be taken up by the community members I serve. This ambiguity often causes great anxiety. In the worst cases, I fall back on familiar and dominant discourses of White supremacy when I am faced with challenging intersections of discourse.
Chapter Five

Talking With Parents and Students:
Discourses of Discomfort and Learning

As a teacher in the U.S., I know that I am a subject of many discourses. I am portrayed as both a hero and a villain by media and politicians who have no knowledge of my educational philosophies or classroom practice. Before my first lesson of the day is even introduced, I am the subject of politically and socially charged discourses. As an art teacher, I'm the subject of other discourses that attempt to determine my worth. Without any knowledge of my curriculum, I know some position my role as dispensable fluff while others argue for my validity and worth. Within an urban community, a middle-class, White, female, suburban-raised teacher is also the subject of many conflicting discourses. Some families revere teachers while others feel resentment, likely caused by generations of experiences with discrimination in public schools.

In the previous chapter, I explored discourses exchanged with and about those teachers and administrators with whom I serve. The discourses with and about the families we serve are very different in many ways. Of course, the faculty all share the common position as an educator, however, it would be remiss to not acknowledge the racial, ethnic, and socio-economic similarities among a faculty that is predominately female, White and middle class. Conversely, the school in which I teach serves a community population that is predominately Black and whose children often qualify for free or reduced lunch. There are varying levels of cultural separation between the faculty members of Kennedy School District and the families in the area. Nonetheless, I would posit most members of the
Kennedy School District families and teaching staff has been affected by manifestations of this difference at some point in their professional careers/educational careers/interactions with the school district personnel. These disconnects are mixed with other moments of meaningful connections that create a complex discourse to navigate. In this chapter, I reveal and analyze three journal entries reflecting my feelings of trepidation and disconnect as I struggle to find ways to effectively communicate with students’ parents. I then explore works that speak to Black student experience and issues of racism in U.S. public schools as a way to situate some of the racialized problems in my own school. Finally, I reveal four journal entries that display ways that I welcome, challenge, mediate, and learn from racialized and gendered discourses in my own classroom with the students in my courses.

Journal Entries: Discourses with Parents

The subject of parents, families and the community comprise a large portion of the discourses that surround a school, but they don’t always speak the same discourses that are used in the school, at least not by its faculty/staff. Parental support is incredibly important for a school community and even individual children, so it is important that teachers and parents support each other, have an clear understanding of the other’s goals, and have open lines of communication. Wallace (2013) notes that research and literature gives evidence of a lack of Black parental involvement, despite various efforts and many local and federal levels to increase participation. However, acceptable school involvement is typically associated with being positive, cooperative, deferent, and supportive; characteristics that may not be possible for minority parents when faced with a discriminatory school environment (Lareau & Hovat, 1999, in Wallace 2013). Wallace’s
(2013) study concluded that when a group of parents joined together to advocate for Black students in a public high school, they were dismissed by teachers who indicated that their involvement was intrusive and distracting. Conversely, Reay et. al (2007) shows that White parents who send their children to urban schools with a high population of minority students are often enthusiastic and supportive of their child’s educational placement, thus perpetuating notions of ideal parental involvement being associated with White parents. However, Reay et. al’s (2007) research shows that these White parents often have selfish motives for sending their children to urban schools with a diverse population of students, such as the self-esteem benefits that come with being at the top of their classes as well as preparation for twenty-first century multiculturalism. The assumption that the White students will have high academic success and benefit from exposure to multicultural environments maintains a strong sense of White supremacy in these parents that simultaneously claim liberal values and a moral superiority.

Lasky and Karge (2011) note that parental involvement ranges from very active to passive, depending on the school climate. They also point out that if the parents view the school environment as open, helpful, and friendly, and communication is frequent, clear, and reciprocal, then parents are more likely to participate (Lasky & Karge, 2011). Despite the high parental involvement at our three middle schools, Kennedy High School’s parent organization only carries an average of 10 to 12 members each year. Of the approximately 150 students I taught this year, my Parent Contact Log revealed that I was visited by 22 parents during September’s Open House, 11 parents during fall conferences, and only seven parents during spring conferences. My records show that parents are much less interested in visiting the school to meet with teachers later in the year and my reports also
reflect school-wide trends as administrative reports show very similar statistics. However, we can still connect with parents informally throughout the year at sporting events, performing arts productions, and art shows and formally at IEP [Individualized Education Plan] meetings and guidance-scheduled conferences. Regardless, I can’t help but wonder why so many parents disconnect with their PTO/Parent’s Club affiliations when their children enter high school and why so few attend spring conferences as opposed to September’s Open House.

After three and a half years of teaching at Kennedy High School, I bought a house a few blocks from the school. Since I already spend most of my waking hours at school or at the community center, it made sense to become a resident of the community as well. There is a strong sense of community in the neighborhoods surrounding Kennedy High School and the kids and parents seemed to respect that I was one of their own. I couldn’t go for a walk or run out for milk without running into one of my current/former students or their family members, and the infusion of the personal/professional made both environments more comfortable.

However, the social dynamics were often different when I met a parent at the community center verses meeting them on the other end of a negative progress report phone call. The face-to-face meetings were often on the parent’s terms: they chose to go to conferences/football game/game night. When they approached me in the grocery store, exchanges were always pleasant. However, when I contact a parent to let them know their child is in trouble at school, the discourse couldn’t be more different. In this section, I address some of the difficulties I have connecting with parents when speaking to them as their child’s teacher. Specifically, the following journal entries discuss (a) the practice of
obligatory contacts and how it affects my speech for parents; (b) the ways that I try to reach out to parents and bridge our boundaries; and (c) the ways that our differences keep me at a distance and stop me from being comfortable reaching out to parents when their children need support.

Journal entry 1: The “standard teacher speech”

September 23

During the art Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting, the topic of parent contacts came up. We are required to make a minimum of 20 parent contacts per month. These contacts are to be documented and filed for administrators to review during observations and this “contact binder/folder” has to be turned in to administration at the end of the year. (No one knows what happens to it, but it is never returned).

Today we [art teachers] were complaining about making required contacts to parents. Angela (White, female in mid-30s) had mentioned that she has to catch up on her contacts, and I said that I am behind as well. Christina (White, female in mid 30s) also mentioned she had to catch up on her contact log for the month. She also added that it’s so frustrating to call a bunch of numbers that are disconnected or even worse, get through to someone that blames everything on you. I concur34. I’ve had some conversations with parents that make me never want to pick up the phone again. Recently, I called the parents of a Black female student with a bad reputation in the school so we can discuss some conflicts she was having with some other students in the class. Her stepmother told me to just “do what I need to do with her—she can get in as much trouble as she wants,” because she [the stepmother] is “done with her” and her stepdaughter “needs to get arrested.” I was left speechless. Other times I’ve gotten annoyed parents who said I was bothering them at work, or say that their kid is out of control and it’s my job to handle them for the eight hours a day they are at school because they can barely handle them at home. I’ve also had parents brush me off and just say “okay. I’ll talk to them35.”

34 This is another example of participating in teacher-teacher conversations that create a negative discourse directed towards our students and their families. Though I know it to be wrong and against my beliefs as a social justice educator, my frustration with the mandate of 20 contacts/month manifests itself in the seeking of collegial support to temper my own stress with the requirement. As a result, however, this reinforces the us-against-them mentality that was explored in Chapter 4.

35 These difficult interactions are not necessarily caused by racial barriers. I’m unaware of the relationship that this student has with her stepmother. I’m also not in the position to make assessments that speak to the working environments of the parents or other factors that might cause strain to the recipients of my phone calls. However, as I exercise White privilege, I don’t have to look to these families’ economic or familial situations, I can simply attribute the disconnect on the end of the phone to be a product of a racial divide, rather than consider the larger social implications of my lack of understanding, my unwillingness to seek a further understanding, or the privilege of not needing to consider other alternatives to explain our disconnect.
Last year, I called Brittney's (Black female student) mother because Brittney was falling behind in her work. I had a good relationship with her parents because Brittney liked me (and NO one else in the school) so her parents' felt that I was on their side. However, when I called introduced myself as “Ms. Kirker from Kennedy High School...” she just hung up on me before I could explain why I was calling. The next day Brittney told me and her classmates that her mom got so sick of getting calls from the school that she just hangs up on them until they stop calling. Instances like this make me nervous about calling parents.

Even though there are many Black parents that I have wonderful relationships with, when we talk about dreading calling parents, I know that we are referring to Black parents. It’s one of the unspoken discourses—or maybe it’s the way we talk about “those parents” like we talk about “those kids.” I can’t recall ever having a negative interaction with a White family member. All of my parent contacts that have been negative, unsettling, defensive, etc., have been with Black parents (and almost always mothers).

I can tell in my conversations that certain students (almost always the Black students) frequently get phone calls made to their home. It’s clear in their language and demeanor. Those are the easy calls to make. So we do it more. I do it, too. It helps me get my 20 contacts per month done faster.

It’s like they know “the drill.” “Hi, this is Ms. Kirker calling from Kennedy High School. I’m calling because I am concerned about *****’s progress in art class. He is easily distracted and it keeps him from getting his work done... He often comes late to class and he misses the instructions... I don’t want to see him get further behind...” “Okay, thanks for letting me know. I’ll talk to him.” “Thanks so much for your support. Have a great day.” “Okay, you too.”


In the few times I’ve called White parents, the conversations have been much more involved. Last year I called a White mother to talk about her son and I couldn’t get off the phone for 30 minutes. The White parents that I have contacted ask a lot more questions. I feel like I need to be more “on” with them. They are not as used to “the drill.”

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36 White privilege protects me from thinking about the history this Black family might have with school communication. While I was selfishly happy that I had a good relationship with Brittney and her parents, I never thought much about their overall experience with school communication until I read Crozier (2001), Lasky and Karge (2011), and Wallace (2013).

37 These “instances” that make me nervous are those that are particularly challenging to the ways I exercise and view my power as a teacher. My background as a White, obedient, “good girl” with a teacher parent as trained me to speak to teachers under certain rules of engagement. Hanging up on a teacher falls far outside of what I deem to be respectable interactions. As a teacher, this challenges my power of authority over students, families, and community. I will the negotiation of power in the section “Relational Power and Communicative Standards.”
Since it’s nearing the end of the month, I have to rush to get my emails out and phone calls made so I can reach Line 20 of my contact log for September. During lunch today, I sent out two emails: one to a White parent, one to a Black parent. I kept the body just about the same, but changed the name and grade. “Good afternoon, Ms. Such-and-Such. I am writing to let you know that **** currently has a 43 in art class....” I then gathered up my phone numbers and went over the phone for the dreaded phone calls. I reached out to 3 Black parents and 2 Hispanic parents. Of the five numbers, two were disconnected, one voicemail box was full, I left one message, and actually reached one parent who seemed rushed and anxious to get off the phone with me. Fortunately, she seemed to be fluent in “the drill.” At the end of the conversation, she said, “what class is this again? Art? Oh, okay, thanks.”

It should be noted that I am calling parents whose students are failing art class, but it’s only September and we haven’t really done a lot of major projects yet, so it doesn’t give me much of a leg to stand on. I don’t mind contacting parents when it was validated by legitimate concerns about grades or social activity, but making them to hit Line 20 is demoralizing and unprofessional. It’s just “another thing that we have to do,” and I know that is relayed to the parents. If each of the 155 faculty members are calling 20 parents per month for 8.5 months, that’s over 26,000 (for approximately 1600 students) contacts per year, and most kids spend four years in high school. If your child isn’t getting high grades, how annoying does this speech get for all parties involved?!

That’s why email is the preferred method of parental contact. I (and most of my colleagues that I have spoken to) far prefer email to phone calls. In addition to the documentation emails provide, they are also less confrontational. I don’t know if it’s our community or the teacher accountability push in US education (aka “blame the teacher?”), but when I call parents to tell them that their child is failing or in trouble, I often have to go under defense. I’m not good under the pressure of an attack from a parent–particularly a Black parent. I actually feel like I can defend myself against White parents easier than I can against Black parents. I feel like we speak a common language and come from similar experiences and expectations for school. When I do feel attacked (by persons of any race, gender, or professional role) I tend to speak clearly, slowly, annunciate my speech, and I start using more “big words” that pertain to my field. I do it because it actually helps me stay calm and professional, but I’m sure this comes off as very arrogant. To have a White woman speak in unfamiliar terms about their child’s education when being questioned/attacked by a Black woman of the same age is probably an infuriating experience. Also, I have no experience raising teenagers–unlike these parents. I’m afraid I probably come off as some “know it all” who is talking down to them.

**I have also noticed that teachers (including myself) always call mothers rather than fathers, even when the fathers are listed as one of the parent contacts. When we speak about contacting home, we always say, “call mom” or “call his/her grandmother”. The only time that we contact a father is when it is confirmed that there is no mother at all at home. Do I assume that the fathers are not around, or, as a female teacher, am I less comfortable talking to fathers because of the gender divide?

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38 See “Relational Power and Communicative Standards” section in this chapter.
Journal entry 2: Open House: Trying to make a connection

September 27

Last night was Open House. No problem. These are typically the easy parents to address: the ones that care and want to come to Open House. We always say that Open House and conferences are “not for the parents we need to talk to.” Typically, the parents that come to Open House care about their kids’ education and are involved in what they are doing\textsuperscript{39}. These students are often more successful. Teachers often say that we rarely see the parents of the “troublemakers” at Open House.

I have to wonder: do they really not care? Do they not have transportation? Do they have to work? Do they have to get their young kids to bed? Do they not know about Open House because their phones have been disconnected and they don’t have the Internet? Do they not want to hear bad things about their kids? Do they not feel welcomed by the school and/or faculty?

In my 12-minute speech to parents, I tell the parents that I teach about contemporary social issues in 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Art and Media and Visual Culture Studies (MVCS). Even though I feel it is important and I have made the choice to do so, I have no doubt that my blood pressure is elevated when I bring up these topics to parents. I have to be careful about how and who I make eye contact; I look around the room— maybe too quickly (do I look nervous?)— looking for parental reaction. I feel the need to bring these topics up and parents are usually very supportive of my content, but I have to try and read their faces when I say things like “for example, we talked about some of the racist messages in Disney films this week, such as…” Do they look sour? Interested? Offended? The blank face is the worst. I hate those faces. I don’t think they are tuning me out— I’m pretty animated when I deliver a lesson/speech- so how do they have no non-verbal reaction?

Typically, we get mostly White parents for Open House, but in the past year or two, we have been getting more Black families. Hispanic families are still rare, as the language barrier makes it challenging for parents. Tonight I had about a 50/50 split of White and Black parents, even though my classes are mostly Black students. The White parents are the parents I can relate to the most. They remind me of my own parents coming to Open House when I was in school. The mother usually comes, dressed casually or professionally (from work) and takes notes on their student’s schedule. They smile, are polite, and introduce themselves. Sometimes the Black parents make me uncomfortable. Tonight, one mother came in loudly talking on her cell phone and disrupted my speech. Another mom wore a hot pink bra under a tight see-through shirt with high-heeled boots, and this made

\textsuperscript{39} This is a reference to the compliant and supportive (often White) good parent that Lasky & Karge (2011) and Reay et. all (2007) refer to in the previous section.
me oddly uncomfortable. Neither mothers introduced themselves to me. A few others came in with a disinterested smirk.

When I start talking about race (in 21st Century Art we talk about “color” in terms of racism rather than paint mixing and MVCS addresses race in terms of how we come to understand others in the world), I pay close attention to the faces. I like the ones that smile and nod—they are liking what I am saying. Déjà’s dad was giving a wonderful, full-headed nod. I felt comforted and secure that the Black man wasn’t put off by my words. Other parent’s smile and nod when I tell them that I will help students deconstruct the messages in hip hop music and imagery. (Many parents don’t like the messages of this music).

By the end of my speeches, I feel most of the Black parents warm up to me. They often introduce themselves on the way out (rarely ever on the way in). I want the parents to know that I am trying to be a “White ally⁴⁰” for their student in a very racist educational system—without SAYING it. I can’t say everything I want to express to them in a 12-minute class overview, but I try to make it known through my own spoken and unspoken discourse (even down to the dialect I sometimes employ). I try to balance professional with relatable. I sometimes wonder if I am putting off the White parents, but I really don’t care. Educators have been catering to them and their children since ... forever.

Journal entry 3: Changing speech patterns for Black/White parents

November 15 (excerpt taken from a journal entry about a popular 12th grade Black girl making uncomfortable sexual comments directed towards a shy and timid 12th grade White girl with some cognitive disabilities).

I called Marlesia’s mom and got her voicemail. I went in pretty harshly. I tend to talk very professional when I am on the phone with parents, but in this case I told her that “this bullying stuff doesn’t fly with me,” etc. I usually use a more urban vernacular when I am speaking out of endearment for a kid who is typically hated by teachers (I use this to bridge the divide between myself and DJ’s mom to let her know that we are coming from the same place in our feelings for DJ and our conversations has helped me build a great relationship with both her and DJ). In this case, I used it to let Marlesia’s mom know that her daughter’s behavior was a serious offense while doing so in a language that didn’t sound like the typical “concerned teacher speech⁴¹” that we give all of the time. Marlesia is a Washington—a notorious family in the community. When I lived across the street from a property owned by the Washington family years ago, it was a center of drug operations and I was ordered by police to stay in my house during two separate raids in the event of gunfire. Events like this have solidified their reputation in the community. Regardless, I

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⁴⁰ Tatum’s (2009) notion of a White ally (as opposed to a guilty White) will be discussed in the following section.

⁴¹ I use quotes around “concerned teacher speech” to emphasis the insincerity of many of these calls. While there are certainly many parent contacts that are made out of genuine concern, many others are simply to meet the 20-call/month minimum mandate as described in the previous journal entry.
always got along with my neighbors across the street and I was ready to let Marlesia’s mom know that I know the Washington family to put myself on the same playing field as her. If someone from her own neighborhood “means business”, she might listen more. At the same time, maybe my snappy, snippy, head-weaving "ghetto(?)” talk could put her off like I am “comin at her kid” too much. Time will tell and see if there are any results for my message.

Ironically, I didn’t use the same vernacular with Megan’s parents (I say “parents” because she represents one of the rare cases where contact with the father is made, as her mother is often away in a rehabilitation clinic). Megan’s family is just as infamous as Marlesia’s and it is well known in the community that they rob people as a family and her brothers are in jail more often than not. Marlesia’s mom might be an educated, classy woman, but I talked differently to her to because she is from a notorious Black family. I didn’t talk that way to the Megan’s parents, even though her White family’s reputation is equally tarnished. At the end of the day, though, they are from a different end of town—and a skin different color. I heard myself use different speech for each of these families—it came so natural ...

Of all the discourses surrounding my career, I am most uncomfortable participating in conversations with parents, particularly those conversations that are not face-to-face.

The realization of my discomfort makes me examine the ways these conversations are different from the other discourses I participate in throughout the day. In our high school, most parental contacts made are not necessarily positive reports. I think having to deliver less-than-pleasant news to anyone over phone and/or email is an unpleasant task. However, I have no problem delivering harsh complaints with the cable company on over the phone, so why is this different? The most obvious reason for discomfort is the dynamic of the relationship I have with these parents and their children. I can’t be sure if a child speaks to their parents about their teachers, and I certainly can’t know for sure how they speak about me. Does this parent have a good impression of me, a negative one, or no impression of all? In many cases, I have not had the chance to establish a rapport of trust

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42 Though the term “educated” is not problematized in this entry, I do acknowledge that educational attainment is not an indicator of how a person participates in a particular discourse, but it should be noted that I described a person to be educated and classy (positive descriptors) to act as a binary for the descriptor of a “notorious Black family.” In this particular example, the family is notorious because of their heavy involvement in the community drug scene, which is not connected to either education nor class status.
and respect with that parent. Even though I might lack a prior relationship with a parent, the outcome of our conversation impacts the success of their child in my class, and can even alter the relationship I have with the child. This makes these conversations very critical for me. Will the child resent me? Will they change their behavior? Will they even know I contacted their parents?

**Relational Power and Communicative Standards**

Once again, however, I think about how these conversations are different from other conversations in my life. If I can call the cable company and complain, perhaps I can explain my confidence because of the anonymity of the call and the lack of impact it will have on my other relationships. However, if daycare mischarges my bill, I have no hesitation to immediately address the issue with the staff, despite our two and a half year relationship. However, as a customer of the daycare, I feel entitled to make certain demands, such as accurate billing. This challenges me to think about power relationships I have with parents that are different from other relationships in my personal and professional life. The balance of power between parents and teachers is delicate in today’s educational climate. How is power distributed in this relationship? Lasky and Karge (2011) note that “high level” educational correspondences relayed to parents carry a vocabulary and grammatical structure that are unclear to parents (p. 30), diminishing parents’ ability to respond to the information. Some contemporary memes such as comics like Daryl Carle’s 2010 cartoon might imply that the parents have shifted from teacher’s allies to adversaries over the past few decades, blaming teachers for their child’s low grades:
Images like this, common in the visual culture of educators, may heighten the tension of these relationships. Teachers may believe they have power because they are in a dominant position over students, but parents may believe they have power as taxpayers and customers of the school. But Foucault (1975) reminds me power is not a possession, but an exercise and can be used as a strategy to shift particular discourses and actions. He says that if one has power, he/she can always count on the effects of that power, but if it’s an exercise, it can be in flux (Foucault, 1975). In reality, both teachers and parents exercise their power in educational discourses through different ways in different contexts. But what happens when two people with different viewpoints seek to exercise their power at the same time? In thinking about Foucault’s theories on power, I consider my own hesitation to pick up the phone with an anonymous parent. Being hung up on, dismissed, or told “it’s your problem, not mine,” puts me in a place of uncomfortable subordination. When I think of feminist teaching’s paradigm of dismantling the teacher as the expert, this is not what I had in mind. When I call a parent in my role as a teacher, I still feel inclined to exercise power as the “knower” of a particular situation. When I situate myself as the
"knower," I expect certain outcomes from my audience: in delivering art history information, I expect students to take notes on my speech and when I deliver student information, I expect the parents to be receptive to my expertise. A breakdown in my expectations for the conversation clearly creates anxiety for my teacher identity.

I used Foucault's (1975) theories of power to explain how teachers and parents dance through the negotiation of their power and how this performance of the exercise of power can be different than the teacher's expected outcome, causing my teacher self considerable apprehension. However, Foucault's thoughts on power seem to conflict with my primary theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory and Feminist Theory. Foucault implies that all parties have power and exercise it as needed. However, both Feminism and CRT suggest that there are rigid power structures that keep education inequitable. In his later works, Foucault (1984), explores the notion of domination where powers are so strongly intact that subordinate people are unable to influence these forces. Gros (2005) notes that although domination might be temporary, it is something that is difficult to remove once it's set into place. I think Foucault speaks well to CRT and feminism for acknowledging the influence of dominating discourse, but provides hope for resistance. As Foucault (1975) discusses, power exercises are used contextually to manipulate particular situations. In the context of U.S. education, those historically in power (White, males) have exercised their power in such powerful ways that they have created a dominant discourse that is so pervasive and unmarked that it is seldom challenged. However, efforts of resistance can and are being made.

As noted in my first journal entry of this section, I often call mothers as opposed to fathers. This is not exclusive to any particular race or socio-economic class. I don't feel that
this gender discrimination has exclusively manifested in myself; it’s been a common educational discourse in every public school context I’ve ever been a part of. Even as an elementary student, our parties and field trips were hosted by “homeroom mothers” rather than “homeroom parents” or even “homeroom fathers.” Though today’s family structure may allow for more paternal involvement (single fathers, two working parents, legality of gay marriage, etc.), I would posit that many of today’s teachers also remember having “homeroom mothers,” or a similar gender discourse of their own. When teachers in my school speak about contacting home, we always refer to calling the mother. If it is known that the mother is not present, clarification of who to contact is necessary, implying that the father is not the obvious second contact person. I have contacted fathers throughout my teaching career, but it is only in specialized cases.

It’s not surprising that I call mothers more frequently than fathers. Though I know it to be sexist, I believe that it is what I have been taught through years of discourse in schools. A major concern that was revealed in my journaling, however, was the obvious racial barriers that were exposed in my reflections. My journaling revealed that I feel much more comfortable communicating with Black parents face to face (during Open House, conferences, or at the grocery store) rather than phone or email. Through my reading of my Open House reflection, I realized how much I rely on non-verbal cues from parents and how much I adjust my speech in response to these cues. The truth is, I desperately seek support from Black parents. When I first meet Black parents, I do experience “White guilt” for being yet another White, female teacher in a racist and sexist system. Tatum (2009) distinguishes between guilty Whites, those who direct their racial feelings inward and focus on the effect it has on their own sense of self, with the White ally that uses this knowledge
to incite change. Aware of the differences of inward versus outward reflections of racism, I want to communicate an allegiance with Black families. In order for me to do this, I have to present my teaching philosophies and myself and read their receptivity towards certain aspects of my own ideas. This is probably why I enjoy Open House or working at the community center so much. However, when I called Marlesia’s mother because of a bullying situation, there are no non-verbal cues to follow. It is not the appropriate context to explain my educational philosophies. The only things guiding our conversations are our assumptions of each other.

Crozier (2001) and Wallace (2013) makes several of these assumptions apparent. Crozier (2001) states that when Black parents express concerns about their children’s’ needs not being met in school, they are often disregarded or criticized by defensive faculty members. Wallace (2013) adds that, conversely, when parents are involved in ways that are congruous with faculty’s vision and values, they are considered to be “good” parents (p. 196). He went on to say that more often than not, the “good” parent is White and middle-class (Wallace, 2013). Teachers often assume that if a parent is not involved, it is because they don’t care rather than considering any linguistic or logistical barriers that might keep them from attending school events (Wallace, 2013). Crozier (2005) points out some assumptions that come from parents as well. He notes that parents of Black children sometimes feel that teachers have incredible power over their children; a power that these teachers do not always use responsibly. Other parents in Crozier’s (2005) study said that they believed teachers were disingenuous, appeasing them to their face while treating their students poorly in the classroom.
The first journal entry reveals how I actively participate in a discourse that creates an assumption about me before I call. Mandated contacts for Parent Contact Logs as well as mandated contacts for discipline referrals create a discourse that is familiar to teachers as well as parents of children who are academically or behaviorally struggling in school. My phone calls and emails sometimes go unanswered because parents are overwhelmed by teachers’ calls at the end of the month, as evidenced by Brittney’s mom hanging up on me as soon as I identified myself as a teacher. The “standard teacher speech” that I spoke of in Journal Entry 1 often delivers a discourse of courtesy with a hint of apathy, and they are often met with the same response. It’s an inauthentic means of communication. Crozier (2005) reports that teachers experience such anxiety about confrontations with parents being met with verbal or physical abuse that they attempt to merely manage parental concerns rather than address them. Though many of my parental contacts made are genuine, purposeful, and successful in terms of making meaningful connections with families, the mandated end-of-the-month contacts fulfill a paperwork requirement, leading to an influx of insincere communications between parents and myself in the last few days of every month. There is an assumption about why I am calling and what I will say that has been well established in the discourse of my context.

The response on the other end of the phone also implies assumptions, and these are the assumptions that I am most concerned with. I assumed that Marlesia’s mother would speak with or respond to an urban vernacular, but that assumption was lost when I called Megan’s parents. My journaling revealed that although I have great relationships with most of my Black students, I still hold many racist presumptions that all of my academic studying or position as a community member has not been able to dismantle. This is further
exasperated by anxiety about the (typically) unpleasant nature of the contact, the inability to read non-verbal cues, and the volatile power dynamic between teachers and parents/community. It seems that when I am most challenged in my *individual power as a teacher*, the assumptions I learned through the discourse of White supremacy seem to prevail.

**Black Student Experience and Issues of Racism in U.S. Schools**

There are vast amounts of literature regarding issues of race and racism in U.S. schools. The fact remains that there are serious achievement gaps between Black and White students (Desai, 2010). The Black–White achievement gap has been well hypothesized, studied, and documented, and yet it continues to be a perennial educational issue (Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008). This gap is much more pronounced in urban areas (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Lewis, James, Hancock & Hill-Jackson, 2008). Ladson-Billings (2007) cites many problems with the semantics of discourses surrounding achievement gaps, particular those that imply that the *students* are not doing enough while ignoring prevalent “gaps that plague the lives of poor children of color” (p. 317). Crozier (2005) also describes a “pathologizing discourse [that] blames the children themselves as inadequate and innately delinquent” (p. 588). Lewis, James, Hancock and Hill-Jackson (2008) add that while researchers cite race as a variable in the data, racism as a factor of Black underachievement is often avoided or dismissed. These authors create a matrix of paradigms used to explain these deficits including (a) a social inequality paradigm model that focuses on social inequities and lack of access, (b) a deficit paradigm that attributes the lack of students’ success to factors specific to the student such as parental values and lower socio-economic class and, (c) a discontinuity paradigm that places the responsibility
(rather than blame) on school agents to rectify any cultural mismatch or lack of culturally responsive teaching practices. Deficit thinking, decreased academic expectations and the implementation of a culturally relevant curriculum constitute some of the most frequently discussed and debated theories/practices regarding White teachers and African American students (Henfield & Washington, 2012).

While many authors focus on closing the Black-White achievement gap, others focus on why it exists in the first place. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) connect racial property to intellectual property and note that curriculum materials and assessment tools are racially and culturally biased. Paige and Witty (2010) criticize educator’s over-fixation with closing Black-White achievement gaps rather than examining how to alleviate the racism that cause these gaps. These authors claim that standardized tests do not accurately access student intelligence or ability and actually help to reinforce stereotypes to both teachers and the students (Paige & Witty, 2010). Davis (2010) also states that reform efforts that target Black students focus too much on teacher accountability of test scores and fail to address the necessary identity interventions that need to take place on both the part of the students and the teachers.

For over a decade I have taught in a school defined by low achievement labels. Additionally, our predominately Black school is surrounded by predominately White, “high-achieving” suburbs. For years, I have heard how students self-flagellating themselves by calling our school the “ghetto school” full of “bebe kids,” etc. The discourses created by community perceptions of the achievement status of our own school have manifested itself in the identities of the students I teach. Therefore, like a handful of other researchers, I think it is important to consider how these labels of achievement get interpreted by the
teachers and students of schools under scrutiny for their standardized test scores. Wright, Standen, and Patel (2010) consider developmental stages, identity formation, and how Black students negotiate their educational contexts throughout their K-12 years. They state various ways that black students have been forced to “intelligently and creatively transform, resist, and respond to their situations” when faced with “complex and critical moments of being excluded” (p 32).

These authors also explore how students use offensive language to respond to equally oppressive language used against them as a way to reclaim a sense of power in the educational arena (Wright, Standen, & Patel, 2010). As students use self-deprecating words towards themselves, they also use it towards teachers. One of the most offensive descriptions of a teacher is to be called a “racist.” When students threaten a self-described compassionate, colorblind teacher’s identity by calling them “racist,” teachers often act inappropriately in response to this threat of confidence in their own identity (Tonshalis, 2010). Tonshalis goes on to point out ways that teachers lash out against racist accusations including punishing or silencing the student, rigid maintenance to what they can control, such as homework and tests, or seeking positive affirmation with other teachers and creating an us-against-them allegiance. It’s as if being called “racist” is as damaging as the racist act. Exacerbating the problem, discourses centered around the word “racist” have become a punishable (or at least silence-able) statement. Davenport’s (2009) findings echoed my own experiences: in almost all cases, teachers seek disciplinary actions against students for calling them racist, but never want to explore why the student(s) feel this way. Mills (1997) explains this failure to ask questions of racism posed by Black [students] as part of the privilege granted through what he refers to as the “Racial Contract.” Mills
(1997) claims that those who benefit from the “Racial Contract” silence anything that opposes taken-for-granted ideas regarding the economic disparities, special separations, bodily microspacing, visual ideologies, and the feelings of subpersonhood suffered by Black students.

Facts and statistics about Kennedy High School supports findings in existing literature. Black males are over-represented in special education and grossly under-represented in our Advanced Placement and gift program. The daily suspension report is always filled with the names of Black and Brown students. These are clearly defined ways to demonstrate racism and White supremacy within our school, however I believe that “facts” and “findings” are much more nuanced that much of literature accounts for. I have difficulty finding literature that accurately describes the complexity of the relationships between teachers and the Black students. I also have difficulty finding literature that describes how practicing teachers struggle with racism on a daily basis. The struggle between a teachers’ recognition (or lack of recognition) of racialized and gendered identity and how it manifests in their classroom practice is an ongoing, painful process. Most literature suggests that racist and sexist practices in classrooms are a result of a failure to acknowledge racialized and gendered identities. I believe more researchers need to explore if these practices could be a result, and maybe even a solution to, a teacher’s acknowledgement of their racial and gender position.

As I mentioned earlier, the students in my classes seem to appreciate my candor in speaking about topics of racial and gender discrimination. Conversations have revealed that many colleagues believe to be colorblind and are not receptive to discussions of race or gender bias in the classes. On the other hand, I welcome these discussions and students
seem to enjoy sharing their stories in my artroom. The following journal entries reveal conversations with students as they directly discuss racism and sexism in their school lives.

**Journal Entries: Discourses about Racism and Sexism with Students**

I absolutely adore the student population of Kennedy High School. They are the reason I continue to practice, study, and fight for educational equality. When I am getting a haircut or oil change and small talk leads to the inevitable response of, “Oh, my. You teach at Kennedy High School? That must be rough,” I always respond with, “the adults certainly provide some challenges, but the amazing kids definitely make it worth it!” If I’m speaking with a non-educator or someone with pre-conceived ideas about our student population, this response using brings an abrupt end to our chit-chat.

Many people in our region hold negative pre-conceived notions of our student population. Our low test scores always make front page news of the county paper. Another front-page report entitled, *Fight School*, painted an image of Kennedy High School that emphasized fear and violence. That particular article has been tough for the school to live down. Because we geographically fall outside of the boundaries of the city of Philadelphia, our sports teams often compete against predominately White, middle-class suburbs and it is not uncommon to hear racist and classist remarks made from opposing teams or spectators. Years of a particular disparaging discourse surrounding our student has been internalized by (what I would speculate to be) a vast majority of the student population as kids refer to themselves and their peers as “ghetto” and “ratchet” when speaking about the school population.
When I was applying to various art teaching jobs in the Philadelphia area thirteen years ago, a high-ranking administrator at another district said to me in regards to Kennedy, “oh, trust me. You don’t want to go there. That place is a whole other level ...” His arrogance actually offended me, but it seemed to be the natural discourse of his community. Many of Kennedy’s teachers were raised regionally, but only a few are graduates of the district. This leads me to believe that some teachers were familiarized to the disparaging discourses of Kennedy before they took positions there and causes me to wonder if these discourses are manifested in practice. According to students’ testimonies, it certainly seems to be present.

Journal entry 4: Students discuss racism and sexism in practice

November 7

Today during 2nd period43 I was working at a table with Joe (10th grade Hispanic male), Davon (10th grade Black male), Luis (10th grade Hispanic male), and Jenn (9th grade White female). Tanieka44 walked by and mention something about me not being here next year. Joe said “are you serious? You’re not going to be here?! Why not?” I told him that I was just taking the year off for a sabbatical and then I would be returning the following year. Tanieka, proud to know about my research, added, “yeah, she’s writtin a dissa-diss-a-somethin. Some big paper or like whole book or somethin.” Joe asked what it was going to be about. I said that teachers often don’t acknowledge any racial or gendered differences from their students, but they often act in response to racialized or gendered biases. I want to make these biases more apparent so they can be something that we talk about. Davon became very interested in the conversation. “I know what you’re sayin. These teachers do be acting racist all the time, but, like, God forbid you ever say anything about it. You know what I mean?” I told him that I was really interested in hearing his perspective and I wanted him to elaborate on what he thought about the topic. He said that he could talk about that topic all day. He said that it’s been happening to him since the beginning of his schooling45. Joe agreed. I pressed him again and told them to elaborate on what they mean

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43 2nd period is a general visual arts class entitled “21st Century Art: Art Past the Paintbrush” for 9th and 10th grade students.
44 Tanieka was introduced in Chapter 2 when I described her downward spiral throughout the 2013-14 school year. See page 84.
45 See “Black Student Experience and Issues of Racism in U.S. Schools” in this chapter.
and what their ideas on this topic are. Davon said that he gets decent grades and stays out of trouble, but he still acts like he “always has to prove myself to teachers. They’re always lookin at me like they don’t trust me. Especially the females. What do I do? Nothin. But it’s like they can’t get past this [waving his hand over his face].” Joe offered Davon a high-five in support. At this point, Luis joined in. “When you say gender, you mean like, boy/girl stuff right?” I told him that I meant female teachers and how they deal with female students versus male students or male teachers and how they deal with male students versus female students. Luis said that he gets along much better with male teachers. (He doesn’t know it, but his preference for male teachers has been discussed at length through emails between the female special education teachers). I asked him what he thought about that and he said that, “**boy teachers are more respectful where female teachers just want to control you.**” (interesting that he called male teachers “boys”). Davon agreed. He reiterated that “all of his teachers” (did not specify race or gender) always assume that he’s doing something bad and he **always gets in a lot more trouble for doing the exact same thing that a White girl might do.**” He said that “the White girls never get in trouble” and that “they can get away with murder, but if a Black guy talks at the wrong time he’s going to get yelled at**46**.” Joe added that when he walks down the hallway with his girlfriend (a pretty, blond, 10th grade White female), teachers always ask him for a pass, but they never ask her-- even though they are walking together! Devon said he could tell stories about this throughout his whole life. “It’s really messed up,” he said. “You just have to fight through it.”

At this point, the bell rang and class was over. I was disappointed, because they enjoyed sharing their experiences and I was interested to hear more. As we put away our supplies I told them that I am really interested in hearing more about their thoughts on this topic and they said but they would definitely want to talk about it again because most people don’t want hear about it. Jenn, a White 9th grade female who usually get straight A’s, remained silent during the conversation**47**.

Though the conversation was interesting to me on a personal and professional level, I have to be careful to not sway the students’ thoughts or put ideas in their head that might be negative or adverse to their success in school. Additionally, I don’t know if I made Jenn feel uncomfortable in this conversation. She is, in fact, the ideal “White girl” that the male students were talking about. I know that they like Jenn and she gets along with all of these boys but I wonder if hearing the conversation was beneficial or off-putting for her.

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**46** This is another example of how students pick up on the “good White girl” and “bad Black boy” dichotomy that was discussed in Chapter 3.

**47** Jenn always participates in table discussions. I hypothesize that her silence is an example of DiAngelo’s (2011) notion of White fragility that creates a defensive move against the stress of racial discussions for White people. Unless Jenn has been given an environment where racial issues are openly challenged and discussed, this topic might be uncomfortable for a teenage White girl in a predominately Black school if she hasn’t come to terms with her own Whiteness and femininity and the privileges it affords her within this context.
Journal entry 5: Students discussing racism in school

February 11

The conversation of my research came up again today during 8th period. Tanieka came wandering in (again) and Jalessa (11th grade Black female) asked her what she is going to do when I am not here next year. Derik (12th grade Black male) said, “you’re not to be here?!” I said no, I’m taking an educational sabbatical. He said, “oh, like to get your Masters?” I said, “no, actually, I’m getting a Ph.D. I’m done with all my classes but I have to take a year off to write my full dissertation.” Jaleesa jumped in, “yeah, Tanieka told me. Isn’t that like a whole book or something?” Derik said, “daaaaaaaaaama! What on earth can you write that much about?” Tanieka said, “ME!” I laughed, but said that Tanieka was sort of right that I am writing it about this place. Specifically, I told him, I am writing about the conversations that I have with people around here and how race and gender affect conversations I have with students, teachers, parents, principals, etc. I said that I am interested in looking at how teachers relate to students of a different gender and race and so I am going to write about my own experiences and observations to help make sense of the situation that goes on everyday, everywhere. I went on to say that I, as White woman, am affected by my own race and gender and I think it’s important that we acknowledge the racialized and gender differences between teachers and students to make for a less racist and sexist educational world. In typical dramatic Derik fashion, he jumped up on the table and threw his hands up into the air. “Yoooooo….. I feel you! There some real racist shit around here.” I laughed at his delivery but asked him to articulate what he meant. After he climbed down from the table, he said, “so many teachers are so racist, but you can ever say anything about that. Black man just gotta take it. Pressed on. Be strong.” (Pounding his chest). Chanise (12th grade Black female) also laughed at his delivery but added, “it do be true, though. Like, a teacher can say whatever, and you can’t ever say anything back because it’s a teacher. If you do say anything back, you get in trouble.” Josh (12th grade Black male) added, “that is true. Very true.” Chanise went on, “but kids also be using that as an excuse to act a fool and that’s not right either. It’s like, that teacher might not dislike you because you’re Black, they dislike you because of the way you act.” Derik added, “but that’s just how Black people act. We’re loud, were proud, and White people don’t like it.” Shonelle (12th grade Black female) jumped in from across the room, “Ummmm … excuseuse me. That’s not how I act. But I do know what you mean. We are treated different. But what Chanise said is right, though. It does depend on the person.” I asked for clarification. Did she mean the different person meaning the student or meaning the teacher? Jaleesa answered for her. “Both. I act how I act because I’m Black. I’m loud. I say whatever. That’s how Black people are. You know, but, some Black people they be actin like they White. You know, all proper and stuff.” I laughed. “So I am all ‘proper and stuff’ because I’m White?” “No, Kirker. You Black. You. Are. Black. I’ve always told you that.” I laughed again. “How am I Black? I am the palest person around!” “No, no. You’re Black. You say whatever. You ain’t got no picks.” Derik added, “that is right, though. You don’t act like most White people.”

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48 8th period is a general arts course entitled “Media and Visual Culture Studies” for 11th and 12th grade students. This particular course was introduced in Sample Journal Entry #1.
“How so? What do I say that is so different?” Derik said, “like, you’re just different. You’d don’t act like you’re so different from us.” “Ha! I still don’t know what this means. Is this a good thing or a bad thing?” “It’s a good thing!” said Jaleesa. Secretly, I felt proud that they said that about me. I don’t know why it makes me feel good about myself when my students say I’m Black, but I take it to be a big compliment.

The kids continued on to tell stories about how they have been racially discriminated against for a good while before the day ended. I still never got a good articulation as to how I am “Black.” Do the White students think I am Black as well? What would happen if I asked? None of the White students really spoke up during this conversation. To the White students think I don’t act like them? Why do the Black students think that I do? What did Derik mean when he said that I don’t act like him so different from him? Is there an arrogance that I am missing? I don’t speak loud, as Jaleesa said that “Black people do”. But what did she mean when she said that I will say “what ever?” Is it because I talk about race? Is it because I call them out for their immature behavior? Is it because I tell them that I love them all the time? I really don’t know. But I really want to get to the bottom of this, personally and professionally speaking.

Journal entry 6: Talking with students about sexism

Tuesday, January 7

(I couldn’t keep up with the conversation enough to put direct quotes. I took notes as someone changed the argument or the direction of the conversation. Too much to write down during one class!)

Today the students started their presentations in Media and Visual Culture Studies. Rachel enthusiastically volunteered to go first (of course). Her topic was about the objectification of women in media and society (of course). She referenced images in sports magazines and advertisements as well as artwork by Barbara Kruger. She wanted to present how women have to present themselves as sex objects because it is the only acceptable way to present their bodies to the public. She had a bit of a male-bashing and sarcastic tone to her, and the students loved debating the topic. Discussions of gender norms and expectations abounded.

She started off her presentation by showing how sexualized images are the only images in magazines and used some statistics to back it up. She often said things like, “because, you know, skinny is the only option,” or “God forbid a woman doesn’t have perfect make-up on.” Nicole (12th grade White female), in perfect Nicole fashion, wanted to find a way to challenge Rachel. She told her that it’s contradictory for her (Rachel) to present this argument when Rachel fits the stereotype of the perfect, skinny, pretty girl that she is bashing. Rachel said that she is actually not skinny and that she is considered a plus-sized model, by modeling standards. Nicole also said that Rachel has perfect make-up, hair, and clothes and that she can’t argue this point if she is a living example of it. Rachel argued back

49 Avoidance as another defensive technique as described by DiAngelo’s (2011) concept of White fragility.
that it is her choice to wake up at 5 a.m. to start her hair and make up and she doesn’t do it to attract men.

I know I’m supposed to pretend to be neutral, but I can’t help myself from defending Rachel all throughout her presentation because of my own bias. I try to strengthen her points and fill in any missing gaps she has in her feminist argument. I told Nicole that there is nothing wrong with wanting to do make-up and hair, if it's done for the right reasons. Doing makeup as a way to get oneself prepared for the day is different than putting on makeup to fulfill someone else’s expectations or because they don’t feel good about themselves without it.

Sammie (12th grade White female) started up the conversation about Rachel’s look in relation to others. She said that she doesn’t think Rachel is dressing this way to be the sexual object of the boys at the school, since she has a boyfriend and he doesn’t even go here. If she’s not dressing to be sexy, then she should wear what she wants to wear to be what she thinks is ‘cute.’

So I asked- “Is it okay for a woman to wear whatever she wants- as sexy as it is- if she is not intending to come across as sexy?”

Quiesha (11th grade Black female) said that women can wear whatever they want, but they have to recognize the consequences of their choices. She said that if a woman dresses like she’s a slut, then she can’t get mad if people think that about her. Rachel started to flip out, but she was interrupted by Derik. He agreed with Quiesha. He said that if a woman wants to show everything, then people are going to notice. He said that women only dress that way to get noticed and that’s exactly what’s going to happen.

I asked if a woman wears short shorts, it’s not because it’s really hot out, it has to be because she’s trying to get noticed? Rachel jumped it and asked if she has to wear ball shorts all summer so people won’t stare at her?

Derik said that men staring at her is a compliment.

Then the class really got crazy. Myself included.

I asked why men assume that whistling is a compliment (but I didn’t wait for an answer.) Do they really think that some woman is going to chase after them down the street because they are mutually interested? The drive-by whistle is a way to dis-empower a woman because they can be objectified without any real recourse. Josh said that if a woman doesn’t want to be whistled at, then they shouldn’t dress that way. Now a bunch of girls in the class started yelling, but I dominated the responses. I told about how I used get to whistled at wearing ball shorts and a oversized t-shirt when I was 29 years old running down Main Street in [the community of our school]. I wasn’t looking to get whistled at. I said it was so bad that I stopped running down Main Street. Josh couldn’t understand why that would make me stop running there. He said it’s not like anyone actually did something to me and that I shouldn’t let it stop me from doing what I
do. Nicole agreed with him. She said that I was letting them win, and that was very anti-feminist. Rachel did not. A yelling match started to ensue in typical 8th period fashion and everyone was talking over each other and starting side conversations. It is clearly a topic they all feel very passionate about.

I tried to redirect the class back to one conversation.

I said that we needed to get back to conversation at hand. Dressing for one’s self or dressing for men. What is the difference, what is the problem? I also said that I wanted to note that there is nothing wrong with wanting to be attractive to the opposite sex. We are humans. It’s okay and you shouldn’t apologize for wanting men/women to like you. So that shouldn’t be the argument. We should keep the conversation to talking about expectations for women’s bodies.

EJ (10th grade Black male), who normally keeps quiet, said that this was becoming a male-bashing conversation. He said that there is a double standard because we always talk about women dressing for men as if men force them to do this. He said that all women have the choice as to how they dress and it’s not men’s responsibility to take the fall if they don’t like how they are looked at. Josh and Derik applauded. Beatrice (12th grade Hispanic female) rolled her eyes.

I jumped in again (I keep taking over) because I know that Rachel would start a male-bashing discourse and I don’t want her (/my) argument to be lost because she articulated something that would be offensive to the men. I said that 1.) there are certainly expectations for how men are supposed to dress, act, perform in our society and just because we haven’t addressed it yet, doesn’t mean that we won’t. I assure them that there is a whole unit coming up in the spring that will address male’s expectations as delivered by hip-hop culture. Secondly, we (okay, me) are not specifically blaming men, we are blaming those that produce these expectations through images and those that uncritically follow them. I said that Rachel is trying to raise awareness for something that is happening so we can counteract it in our own lives.

Jaleesa asked how are we supposed to know if someone is dressing sexy for himself or herself or if they are dressing sexy because of social expectations? She said it doesn’t really matter, so there’s no point in arguing about this. I said it’s what you do in relation to how those women dress— do you judge them, objectify them, or let them be? She said she lets them be, but you can’t control other people and people are going to judge because that’s what they do. Rachel said it doesn’t make it right and it can’t be an acceptable norm in our society. Jaleesa said it’s not like you are going to change it, though. This has been going on long before these magazines.

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50 At this point, we have not discussed what it means to “male bash” or problematized this statement in the class. The reference of feminists as “male bashers” and the way patriarchal media misrepresented feminists as a way of dis-empowering the movement to preserve their own superiority had not been discussed prior to this class, but was discussed during a later period.
This was a good point. I referenced art history and mentioned how women’s bodies were on display for hundreds/thousands of years before Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition. It used to be done on canvas and hid behind curtains for only men to view. It was 16th century porn. The kids laughed, but I said that this was a true fact. This is not new, but does it make it okay?

Kiah (12th grade Black female) brought up a good point about the women being objectified. She said that a lot of women in today’s porn industry do it because they want to or because they like to and they say it makes them feel powerful. Rachel argued that just because they feel powerful, it is not okay that there is an industry that encourages objectification and maybe even violence towards thousands of women who did NOT choose to be in porn. Shonelle agreed with Kiah (who I think agrees with Rachel, but was just arguing a new point) and said that women are taking charge of their sexuality and they can control men with it now. It was a powerful point—are men mere victim’s of women’s sexuality? Shonelle certainly presents herself as a sexually confident and powerful woman!

I decided to take the conversation for a loop. I brought up Rachel and Devin’s presentation on rape culture and how the way a woman presents herself doesn’t set up any sexual expectation. I reminded the class that everyone agreed that women don’t deserve to be raped no matter what they are wearing. So—where is the line drawn? Do they deserve to be objectified? Doesn’t objectification lead to violent acts against women?

For the first time, the class fell silent. I think all of students were choosing their words carefully. Simple black-and-white judgments are easier to make when they exist in a vacuum. However, when complicated by another black-and-white argument that counteracts their original argument, the students really have to re-evaluate their perspective. The conversation when on, but I think it was more tempered as students chose their words more carefully. They won’t openly admit their opinions had changed a little, but their hesitation to argue their points made that evident. I love classes like this—they have NO IDEA how much they are actually learning from these discussions.

At the end of class, Nicole said that Rachel is too much of a feminist and turns people off. She said that she actually agrees with all of Rachel’s points, but she likes to challenge her because Rachel is too argumentative and too loud and it turns people off to feminism. She said that if feminists weren’t so over the top, they would probably get a lot more support. I know that Nicole is very passionate about gay rights issues, so I compared it to the same thing. Sammie had previously mentioned in class that she thinks “gay rights people are too in-your-face,” obviously upsetting Nicole. I mentioned that this exposure to gay rights issues has only taken place over a few short decades and 100s of years of laws, perceptions, and understandings of gay rights has changed as a result. 60% of voters support gay marriage. If you asked the same question in the 1950’s it would NOT be the same statistic. Noise creates change. Nicole agreed, because it was put in relation to something that she wanted to see change in society.

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51 See Journal Sample #1 in Chapter 2.
Journal entry 7: Talking with students about feminism

Tuesday, December 3

The announcement about the Feminist Club ran again today. I still have no idea who is running this club! Laura (12th grade White female) brought it up during my 3rd period class52 because of the discussion we had yesterday in 7th period. She asked me if I ever found out what I wanted to know about the Feminist Club and I told her no. I asked the other girls in the class if they knew anything about it.

Lizbeth (12th grade Black female) replied with, “I hate feminists.”

I was enraged, but I tried to laugh it off as if what she said was ridiculous. “Why would you hate feminists? Seems like a weird thing to hate.” I didn’t want to tell her what a big feminist I was because I knew she would just want to start an argument with me.

She said, “feminists have ruined the family structure in this country.”

I asked her to elaborate. She said that women being pushed out of their homes and into the workforce has ruined the family structure by taking women out of the house and away from their kids and husbands. She added that women that choose to stay at home and raise their families are dishonored by feminists who do not value the family structure. She associated feminism with anti-motherhood and anti-family. Still, I try to temper my feminist agenda and speak very factually about the topic. I asked her what kind of version of feminism she is talking about and if she even knew about the different waves of feminism. She basically indicated that she only knew of one feminism: the anti-family feminism. I told her that contemporary feminism celebrates all aspects of womanhood, including the roles of mothers and the incredible value of motherhood53. I agreed that second wave feminism was very aggressive and turned a lot of people off to feminism. I told her how a bad image of feminism was ingrained American psyche, noting that this image was produced by the same mass media that the feminists were critiquing. That (negative) image has not left popular culture, even though feminism itself has evolved. I asked her where she got her impression of feminism and she said that she did her senior project on a book that discussed the fall of the family structure and attributed it to feminism. I asked her who wrote the book—she didn’t remember. I asked her how old the book was—she had no idea. I asked her how she did on her senior project and she said she did great. I also asked her if her panel (a group of teachers evaluating senior projects) noted the outdated information she was presenting and she said no. She said that they said it was great. (That is discouraging!) I told her that she should find out more about contemporary

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52 3rd period is a combination of both advanced-level senior art students in Portfolio Preparation and a general art class for students in grades 10-12 entitled “Studio Art History.” The students in this conversation were part of the Portfolio Preparation course.

53 Distinctions between types of feminism are described in the sub-section “Gender Studies” under “Theoretical Research Framework” in Chapter 2.
feminism and how it’s not about “bra burning and man hating.” Feminists today actually celebrate motherhood because they celebrate any path a woman willingly follows. Furthermore, a lot of feminists today actually advocate for men who feel that they need to conform to their gender roles as well. Feminist today don’t fight against men or families—they fight for anyone who feels oppressed because of their gender, sexual preference, race, culture, heritage, etc.” Lizbeth asked me if I was a feminist. Ana jumped in and replied, “obviously!” Lizbeth said, “you’re actually very interesting.” I laughed, “do tell.” She said, “no, seriously, I’m surprised at how interesting you actually are. I never thought that about you, but you are actually a very interesting person. You know stuff. Interesting stuff. I think that’s good.”

I thought she was patronizing me when she said this but later, during lunch, Angela (art teacher) said that Lizbeth came into her class and said, “I think I want be a feminist just like Ms. Kirker.”

It made me smile that I can crack even the toughest nut like Lizbeth, but it was discouraging to hear how she passed (with flying colors, apparently) a senior project about feminism that was so antiquated and one-sided and how little both students and teachers apparently know about feminism.

Reading back on my journal entries related to my students, a few things pop out at me. One thing I notice is how much students are willing to discuss their own stories and express their thoughts about the racial and gender discrimination in their own lives. A late-September entry from my eighth period Media and Visual Culture Studies class showed that when I brought up the topic of racism in television sitcoms, Derik said, “that makes me feel some type of way,” but was unable to elaborate on his thoughts. Chanise added, “I’ve never seen it like that before but now that I see it, I dunno. It’s crazy.” The rest of the class feel silent and the “conversation” eventually ended. I felt discouraged by this lack of dialogue. However, Journal Entry 5 of this chapter shows a conversation in the same class regarding systematic racism in schools that took place in mid-February. During this class, these same students were energetically engaging the topic with myself and each other. Parallel to this development was the way that students from very different backgrounds
formed relationships with each other in my classroom. I also see incredible thoughtfulness as they respond to one another’s perspectives. The students repeatedly demonstrate great maturity and insight as they discuss and debate topics concerning race and gender in my room. It seems to me that this level of insight and criticality is what educators want to see in young adults, so I would think that these topics would be welcome in classrooms.

However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, I am not often given peer or administrative support for letting my students produce artwork that challenges these issues.

I consider the structure of the various conversations. Only one of the four conversations highlighted through these particular journal entries was initiated by class content. In Journal Entry 6, Rachel intentionally presented the topic of representation of women’s bodies, but in conversations highlighted in Journal Entries 4, 5, and 7 happened organically as students talked with me and each other about the things that are on their mind. I never asked them to bring up these topics or brought them up on my own, but I did respond to their statements and questions. I am left wondering how many of these conversations are brought up in other classrooms or social/familial situations, and how they are addressed (or ignored) in these contexts.

The conversations with my students re-affirm my answer to the question, “why art?” These spontaneous discussions that arise during student work time lead to great learning content in the art classroom, a space where students should be allowed to explore ideas that interest them. While students may be learning different technical skills throughout the year, they can use these skills to explore whatever topics interest them. The vast majority of Rachel’s projects addressed various feminist issues throughout the year, and art class provided her a space to express the ideas she couldn’t share elsewhere. As a result, I saw
other students in her class become increasingly aware of feminist issues and also explored these themes in their later work as well. In fact, as I look back on journal entries throughout the year, I can see an increase in students’ responsiveness towards social issues. In the eighth period Media and Visual Culture Studies class discussed in Journal Entries 5 and 6, earlier student projects explored themes of personal indulgence such as reality television or high-end fashion. Later in the year, however, students started selecting more provocative social issues such as sexism, racism, abortion, poverty, etc. I can see the ability to share opinions and stories enhance students’ learning of various social issues.

I also think about my own willingness to discuss racial and gender inequities with my students and how it affects my relationships with different students. It’s easy to pat myself on the back for the great job I am doing in getting students to think about these topics, but I can’t know about how it affects their lives or experiences in school. I am afraid of souring students towards their school experience by highlighting racist/sexist discourse and I’m concerned that hearing stories from their peers can reinforce their feelings of subordination and place them at odds with particular teachers. Would creating tension cause negative effects for the students? And what about the students that remain silent during these conversations? What about Jenn (the White female student in Journal Entry 4), or the White students in eighth period as the Black and Hispanic students discussed racism during class? Of course, I would prefer to think that they were silently reflecting on the conversation and learning about their own privilege(s) and/or bias(es), but that would be far too presumptuous. Did it create a distance or disconnect between myself and these students just as my own high school friends were put off by “over-the-top-liberal” Mr. Smith when he assigned *Black Boy* and *Malcolm X* as required reading for our (all-White)
gifted English class? My White high school classmates didn’t want to discuss race, either, and the experience actually reinforced some feelings of White supremacy. Ultimately, while I’m personally and professionally pleased about the lively discussions regarding race and gender in my classroom, I have many reservations about their effects, and even my ability to facilitate these discourses to maximize positive student learning. My reservations, insecurities, and limitations are discussed further in Chapter Six. In the upcoming chapter, I consider how my own speech and actions often contradict what I believe to be just teaching and how I struggle with implementing just teaching with my own limitations as a White, female teacher.
Chapter Six

Not so Anti-Racist/Anti-Sexist:
Realizations of Limitations

All teachers, much like myself, have the daily challenge of navigating the personal and professional discourses of their school context and determining how they will participate in them. My own speech within the school and my practices in the classroom answer so many questions about my teacher identity. What sort of teacher identity will I live, believe, and practice? Which discourses will I align myself with, and which will I reject? Will I speak up and become an advocate for my beliefs, or will I “fly under the radar” and let my beliefs live through my practices? Will I attempt to change the discourses that concern me, or will I find a way to live within them? How do I participate in these discourses on different levels of interaction (classroom, colleague, administration, community, educational advocate)? How does my position of a teacher alter my own speech and activism in public and anonymous contexts? How does my racialized and gendered positions affect my speech, actions, and expressions as a teacher? How does my teacher identity affect my personal identity?

Unfortunately, sometimes my speech and practices do not necessarily reflect what I express in my teaching philosophy. Sometimes these moments are as simple as being mandated to follow procedures that I find to be racist or sexist. For example, I find the scrutinization of young women’s bodies for dress code compliance to be extremely sexist, but I am mandated by the faculty handbook to enforce all school rules, including the dress code, and I have to send all girls in question or violation to the discipline office for further
objectification. Other times, I am interpellated by discourses that are not congruent with my beliefs. This happens as I am funneled into professional development sessions that are loosely grouped into the category of “specials,” implying that I, along with the subject I teach, fall on the periphery of what is deemed necessary and worthy of specialized attention through professional development. Other times, a need to maintain cordial collegial relationships keeps me silence despite my outrage with the racist or sexist discourses around me. Other times, however, I find myself speaking and acting in ways that are oppositional to my beliefs when I have the freedom to act differently. These are the moments that make up this chapter, and these are the instances that trouble my personal and professional self the most.

Reflecting on My Own Oppressive Discourses

If you know a teacher, you know someone who has said, “I could write a book …” All teachers have volumes of funny, endearing, and shocking stories to tell. With thirteen total years of classroom teaching experience, I certainly have my share of stories, too. Throughout my graduate school career, I’ve been told that stories of racial and gender discrimination are quite powerful. I’ve become very good at telling these “powerful stories.” If writing this dissertation has taught me anything, I’ve learned that I’d much prefer to tell powerful stories of racial and gender discrimination where others are the subjects.

My journaling didn’t always show me things that I wanted to see. I was prepared to expose gender and racial discrimination in others and I was even prepared to reveal how I respond to these discourses. Even though I didn’t always outwardly respond to others with
the passion I felt in my heart, I often felt as though I was the victor because of my ability to recognize wrongdoing.

However, the act of journaling was more than I bargained for. I wanted to write about how racism and sexism was manifested in the speech and actions of others, and how I responded to it. What I found, however, is that they are also discernable in my own speech and actions. I knew that I had gaps in my knowledge of racism and sexism, but I never realized how much they affect my practices. Forcing myself to examine my own moral, ethical, and professional conflicts proved to be the most powerful, and difficult journal entries I wrote. In the following sections, I show some of my own oppressive attitudes and actions, many of which would never surface if I hadn’t forced my to examine my own self. I humbly present my flaws for the sake of learning through autoethnography.

**Sexism in Practice**

In Chapter Four, I discussed the feminization of the art department due to the high percentage of female art teachers in the district as well as the recent proliferation of new mothers within this department. Perhaps there is a correlation between the feminization of the art teaching staff and the fact that girls are much more likely to pursue advanced level art in our school, but that will have to be left for another study. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that general and entry-level art courses at our high school carry a 50:50 split of female: male students, but advanced student courses typically run with about 90:10 ratio of female: male students. Paechter (2000) notes that boys might be excluded from some areas of knowledge (such as the arts), but since these areas hold little power, these boys do not lose too much. She did not, however, consider how boys might want to have access to these knowledges and are socially repressed in ways that hinder them from living their
fullest life. Sadker (2000) notes that boys are stereotyped into their gender roles earlier and more harshly than girls. Male stereotypes are often a toxic, self-harming roles to perform (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Bey (2014) discusses his own experiences in performing a version of masculinity that was congruent with the values held by his own family and was reinforced by the visual culture of bodybuilding. Bey (2014) reflects on the conflicts felt between his sensitive artist self and the social need to project aggressive versions of hypermasculinity throughout his life as a teenager.

Because of my own history of competitive weight training, I have always been sensitive to the pressures of the male students in my class to perform a version of masculinity that is limiting, normalizing, and inhibits some young men from living the life they desire. Weaver-Hightower (2003) writes about the recent “boy turn” in education and educational research that results from new feminist thinking about gender (p. 471). Willis (1981) writes about how working-class boys (“lads”) live a life of strict social rules and regulations that promote sexism, misogyny, and a harsh resistance to all things feminine, particularly teachers and education. These lads are bound by these social laws and Willis (1981) studies how they perform these roles in their school and social context.

I find myself struggling to create gender equity in my classroom and I notice a great deal of personal conflict ensues when I see how both male and female students are bolstered and oppressed in different instances in my classroom and in my school. From the outside, gender inequality seems to be less of an issue in our school than racial inequality. After all, our school has never been audited for gender discrimination, but I can’t say the same for racial discrimination. Students rarely make claims of sexism against teachers and if they do, these accusations are given very little (if any) response. Even though my
journaling has shown that students are much more aware of gender issues than I originally suspected, it doesn’t seem to carry the outrage associated with racial issues. In many of my conversations with students, they seem to notice gender inequality, but aren’t as particularly bothered by it. Additionally, my students express a wide range of what they deem gender inequality. Gender discrimination seems to be much taken-for-granted and status-quo speech and it, for the most part, goes undetected on the radar of most of the teachers or even the students. The fact that the students don’t make overt accusations of sexism in the same way they do racism demonstrates that they find these acts to be less egregious. Perhaps they have internalized many of the sexist discourses, causing them to not recognize them when they are enacted.

However, when I became aware of how students are situated because of their gender markers and realize that many teachers practice with a “gender blind” (Garber, 2003; Lundeberg, 1997; McCaughtry, 2004, Sadker, 2000, Titus, 2000) mentality, it became easy to point out dozens of acts of discrimination everyday. From the moment the students walk in the door in the morning, girls’ bodies are scrutinized. Not only are they viewed as sexual objects by many hormonal teenage males (and females), they are also judged for attractiveness by their female (and male) peers. To make matters worse, female students are examined by their homeroom teachers for potential dress code violations and called to the front of the room to receive their pass to the auditorium so they can get their outfit approved/disapproved by an administrator. This is all done under the watchful eyes of the other homeroom students. When they arrive in the auditorium, the administrator either “approves” their attire “with modifications” (button up your shirt, pull down your skirt, etc.) or “disapproves” the outfit, forcing them to change into other clothes they might have
in their locker or select a cover-up from a pile of donated clothes they are allowed to borrow. If they are on the “disapproved” list for the day, their name is sent to the entire faculty/staff so the teachers can pull out the names of their students and make sure they are wearing the appropriate attire throughout the day. This often happens before the first class of the day has started.

Throughout the day, gender discrimination is a daily practice. My journaling has caused me to look harder at suspension list at the end of the day. The list almost always has more males listed than females. I have presented some of the subtle and overt ways gender discrimination takes place previously through the stories of Jacquie/James (Chapter Three) and Joe’s experiences walking through the halls with his girlfriend (Chapter Six). However, as I mentioned earlier, I can see how both the male and female are ill-served in many of these instances. This poses a challenge for practice: do I focus on sexism against boys or girls? Obviously, I want to do both, but I found that it’s not as easy as it might seem.

**Journal Entries: Not so Anti-Sexist**

The following journal entries focus on how I both lift up and oppress students of both genders and how challenging it is for me to do both in balance. All students need to be critiqued and praised throughout their educational careers, but I’m afraid I’ve made these accommodations based on their gender as much as their merit. In the first entry, I give one of many examples where I excessively bolster male students in hopes of increasing their success in art class, but I also have to consider the outcome this has for these males as well as the female students in the class. In the second and third entry, I tell about how female students (particularly “good girls”) are equally loosing out because they have a tendency to
fall through the cracks. As a result, their academic needs aren’t always met as much as male students who call for more of my attention. In the final entry, I discuss how my own experiences of womanhood, motherhood, and femininity varies from my students, causing me to question my ability to adequately facilitate controversial or powerful gender-related topics and class discussions.

Journal entry 1: Bolstering male students—Jihaad and Jeopardy

Thursday, January 23 (excerpts)

Today we reviewed for our midterm during 4th period\textsuperscript{54}. During the Jeopardy review game, Jihaad seemed to know a lot of answers. Jihaad is very quiet and his grades are fairly low. He is so quiet that I can’t ever tell if he’s not working out of boredom, apathy, or a lack of understanding. When he was answering a lot of questions during the review, I was please to see that he was actually retaining some information from class.

But my response to HIS responses have me concerned/puzzled/curious. I was so excited that he was participating and answering questions, that I started focusing an undue amount of attention on him. I was looking at him, prompting him, and praising him—perhaps a little over-the-top. “Oooooh! Jihaad is on FIRE!” “ANOTHER right answer from Jihaad!”

If it had been a White female who had been answering all of the questions, I would have acted completely different. In 2nd period, Jenn knew all of the answers. She won the game for her entire team. I randomly selected the teams alphabetically based on last names and she was grouped with Luis, Tanieka, Christian, and Devon. She carried the team and they won the game. I never praised Jenn or even revealed that she was the strongest member of the team (although Joe mentioned out loud, “that’s not fair—they have Jenn!”)

So while Jenn DOMINATED the game in 2nd period, Jihaad got several right answers in a row during 4th period and I acted as if he was the smartest kid on earth. I knew I was doing it at the time and I intentionally started praising other students more so that I could continue to praise him without it appearing too obvious. \textit{I couldn't subdue my praise for him, I had to compensate by praising others more to show some balance.}

Did other students notice my over-praise of Jihaad? Probably. He doesn’t get praised too often in classes, so I’m sure they took note.

\textsuperscript{54} 4th period is a general arts course for 9th and 10th grade students entitled “21st Century Art: Art Past the Paintbrush.”
Did Jihaad notice? Of course. He went from answering a few questions quietly to being a loud participant, talking “smack,” keeping score, and risking a ton of money in Final Jeopardy because he was so confident in himself.

But did this help him, or was it patronizing? He clearly loved the praise and positive reinforcement. But—did it make him unfairly over-confident in his ability to take the midterm without any further studying? Did he feel I was patronizing him? How will he feel if he doesn’t perform as well in the next class or as well as he hopes on the midterm? Will he feel defeated?

What did this do to the other students who were getting equal or less praise? Alyssa, Katie, and Jacquie always give the right answer, but I don’t jump up and down for them like I did Jihaad. Does this make them bitter? Does praising Jihaad reinforce negative racial stereotypes to the “good (White) girls”? Do they think that the “bad (Black) boys” get preferential treatment or more attention?

It’s common in Kennedy HS for teachers and admin to say, “we’re not going to focus our attention on a few troublemakers.” It’s even blatantly and explicitly said during announcements, assemblies, classes, etc. Some of the “good kids” in Kennedy get frustrated that the “bad kids” get all of the attention and focus. It’s true that most teachers spend time working with the kids who need extra help or dealing with misbehavior. But when someone who is typically a “troublemaker” does as good of a job as they do, are they bitter when they get a ton of praise? I don’t want to focus my attention on the needs of the “good, White kids,” but they are students that I am responsible for teaching just as much as the ones who struggle for success. I also don’t want to give them reason to have more bitterness towards their classmates for dominating my attention when they are good AND when they are bad.

Have I become negligent of the “good, (White) girls”? I know that some teachers really cater to these students, but I also know that we do back flips when students like Jihaad impress us. I’m so sensitive to the oppression of Black males in schools that I’m afraid I take it too far sometime.

Are we doing more harm than good when we offer excessive praise to Black males when they perform well in class?

Art class is unique because we have all academic levels in the same class. This typically only happens in electives. I want to make the male students feel like they can be successful in art class because the grades tend to reflect otherwise. But... what does that do to the class dynamic? Can the female students be even more successful if I bolstered their answers? In trying to even the distribution of grades, am I making things worse for the female students? What is my motivation for trying to level out the grade success?

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55 My struggle with negotiating my attention to female students versus male students challenge my understanding of feminist teaching as well as my White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011). Each will be analyzed in the following sections in this chapter.
One thing I do know is that female students still get higher grades in my classes. All of the highest grades are held by female students. Their craftsmanship is typically wonderful, their reflections are thoughtful, and their journals are complete and organized. Male students seem to get more distracted and get less work done, thus bringing down their grades. I see females talk while they work, but they tend to keep their pencils moving. When I see males talk during work time, their heads are up and their pencils are down (and pages often blank\textsuperscript{56}). I don’t know how to redistribute the grades better. I always strive to make rubrics that leave little room for subjectivity. I have wonderful relationships with my male students and it seems to pay off on a personal level, but it doesn’t seem to drastically change grade success. I think I’ve been bolstering male students’ classroom participation for years, but it doesn’t seem to close the gender/grade gap in my classes.

Journal entry 2: Female students falling through the cracks?

February 12 (excerpt)

I think about how the students interact with each other and how they speak about each other in relation to how the teachers speak about the students. Every now and then comments will be made like “oh, you know Jenn is going to do a perfect job on it” or “Maddie is always going to get an A.” It’s never really derogatory or even accusatory. It’s very matter–of–fact. The teachers often speak the same way about these students. I am terribly guilty of making these assumptions as well. I am guilty of sometimes rushing through certain female students journals because I know that they did everything perfectly and I don’t need to spend a lot of time checking over their work. However, I can’t think of a single male student that receives the same leniency. The art teachers know that certain students will make perfect examples of artwork to hang in the hallway and were actually met with the challenge of not displaying all of their work, but rather showing some other student work as well. It’s just assumed. They’re going to do it right.

What does this mean for serving our students fairly? It would be ridiculous to assume that we are serving them equally. But is it even fair?

I think about Maddie, a tiny, outgoing, sweet, and confident White freshman girl. She wears big glasses and rides her bike to school for exercise. She’s an active member of the Christian group and delivers a peppy reading of the school announcements every morning. She has never received lower than a 99 on her report card. We know that she will go above and beyond for every project. We know that she will do the best job. She will always make the exemplar student work. Are we serving her, or is she serving us? Are we challenging her? Is she given room for growth and failure? She wants to learn but I wonder if we give her enough time to help her learn because we are so busy managing, troubleshooting, intervening, etc. for all the other students.

\textsuperscript{56} Kunjufu (2005) speaks to the physiological differences between male and female students that often hinder male students’ school success. See “Racism Against Black Male Students” in this chapter.
Teachers do not treat the students fairly and we certainly do not treat them equally. And I think it is a disservice to both. When we get together to talk as teachers, we complain about the challenges we’re having with the wild, disruptive Black male students. We moan about classroom management issues with these students and how we struggle to get them to sit down and do something. Are we truly educating them and advancing their intellectual growth? That conversation never makes it to the table.

Conversely, we also never talk about truly educating and advancing the intellectual growth of the “good girls” either. We talk about showing examples of their work. We talked about art shows that we should enter their work. We talk about how it’s “not fair” to them to be in the same classroom as “the kids who don’t want to learn.” Actually, I hear a lot of teachers say, “it’s not fair to the good kids.” But what does that mean? Maybe it’s not fair to the “bad kids” either. We don’t seem to be very concerned about what is fair or just or even equal for them.

**But no, it is not fair. It is not fair for any of the students.**

November 20 (excerpt)

This is the lowest turnout of parents we’ve ever had at conferences. As teachers always say around conference time, “we only see the parents that we don’t need to see.” I was surprised to see Diamond (9th grade, Black female student) come in with her mom. I don’t know why that surprised me, but it did. Her mom was very unsatisfied with her failing grade. Maybe I was less surprised that she showed up but more surprised with how she responded to her mom. Her mother was compassionate, yet stern, and wanted to find a real working solution so that Diamond would do better in the future. Diamond, who is usually silent in class, responded to her mom with energy and enthusiasm. We decided to move Diamond’s seat away from her friends. Honestly, I felt really embarrassed. Could the solution really be that easy? I knew that that was the problem with her low attention span, but why didn’t I move her? If it was Tyrik, I probably would have moved him three times by now! But she is quiet and not a real discipline problem so because her quiet academic failing was not affecting my classroom management, I didn’t give it a whole lot of attention. Just move her damn seat! Why didn’t you do this earlier? How hard was that to figure out? We always say, “the teacher didn’t fail you, you failed you”. I think I failed her.

She isn’t the typical (White) “good girl,” but she isn’t the typical (Black) “bad boy.” Therefore, she’s off my radar and into the cracks. If she was the typical (White) girl, you would expect that she is supposed to do well. If she was the typical (Black) boy, you would expect that the disciplinarians and principles and IEP teachers are already trying to

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57 I did not specify White/Black girls throughout this journal entry. As outlined in Chapter 3, “good girls” is often synonymous with White femininity. However, Black female students are often an intermediary between White femininity and Black masculinity and are often overlooked, as described in the following entry.

58 Crenshaw (2014) explores the role of Black girls as the forgotten student in contemporary education. See Chapter 3, “Are there ‘bad girls’?” for further exploration into the discourse surrounding Black female students in my teaching context.
deal with that kid. However, quiet, unassuming Black female students ... they are typically ignored in our school and, admittedly, by me as well.

**Journal Entry 3: When girls’ stories are beyond my scope of knowledge**

January 9

The conversations/presentations continued for MVCS “Propaganda” lesson. Yesterday, Monique (12th grade Black female) and Kevonna (11th grade Black female) presented “abortion” during 7th period and Jaleesa and Nicole presented the same topic for 8th period. Both classes had very different tones to them.

In 7th period, Monique and Kevonna are both clearly pro-life. Kevonna made it clear that she presented the pro-choice side for the project, but she was pro-life in her own opinions. Monique had a strong presentation with great images and artworks. She presented one article that created a lot of conversation. She explained how a group of pro-life activists put their (graphic) propaganda on Halloween candy this year as a way to get information out to families through their young children. As we discussed the power of these images on their audience, the class unanimously agreed that this was wrong and ‘gross.’

In 7th period, there was a much more pro-life tone than in 8th period. Monique is always a strong arguer anyway, and she wanted to present her information like a debate. Nafisah (10th grade Black female), who is typically very quiet, strongly agreed with Monique as well. The strongest counter-argument came from Ma’dy a (12th grade Black female). She kept saying over and over, “it’s easy to say you are pro-life until you are faced with a baby.” I supported Ma’dy a’s counter-argument every time she brought it up because I wanted students to think more deeply about their beliefs that are (or, at least, presented as) very black-and-white. Imani (12th grade Black female) said that there is ALWAYS family to help, but Ma’dy a disagreed. Justina (11th grade Black female) argued that women can be forced into abortions by their parents and partner because she might not have anywhere else to go. I said that a woman should never be forced to have an abortion by anyone. There IS always somewhere to go and support systems in place, but sometimes harsh sacrifices might have to be made—so much so that some women don’t see these alternatives as viable options for their life.

Deja (12th grade Black female) brought up the rape issue (it always seems to come up in this topic) and said that she is pro-life in most cases, except for when a woman is raped. I said it’s a slippery slope determining when rape occurs if a woman decides she doesn’t want the baby. Tirah (10th grade Black female) said that rape babies should be allowed to live because it’s not their fault. Brittney said that they shouldn’t have to live their whole life knowing they are a product of rape. At that point, Imani admitted that her father was a rape baby. I pretended to NOT be shocked and horrified that she (and hel!) knows this, so I calmly asked if it has affected him in any way that she knows of. She said that he was raised knowing that he was a rape baby and that his mother held it over his head all of the time. She said that his name is actually Puerto Rican for “the devil.” She then added that she had a
(half) brother that was a product of rape, but he died at a young age and didn’t ever know his origin. She said her step mom never planned on letting her son know that he was a product of rape and didn’t think it was fair that her grandmother continually reminded her father of his origin. She said that if her father had been aborted, she (Imani) would not be here.

The class found it tough to argue back with Imani. I think her strong story kept the class with a pro-life bias. Ma’dy, however, always added, “it’s easy to say, until you have to make that choice as a teenager with no money and no family to help you.” I didn’t press Ma’dya for her “story,” but it was clear that her wisdom came from experience (herself or someone close to her) that the other students just couldn’t understand.

In 8th period, there was a very different bias. Nicole was very pro-choice and Jaleesa was very pro-life in their presentations and their arguments. Jaleesa argued similar points as the previous group—it’s not the baby’s fault, there is always family to help, etc. However, the main point was, “if you didn’t want a child, you shouldn’t have opened your legs! If you are mature enough to open your legs, you better be mature enough to take care of that child.” I actually argued against her on this point. I said that teenagers make poor decisions every single day, including “opening their legs” without thought for possible repercussions.

A lot of students agreed with Jaleesa from a moral standpoint, but not from a political one, mostly because of Nicole’s strong argument. Nicole noted that people are GOING to have abortions one way or another—making it illegal won’t stop that. She said that people will be doing it in back alleys and killing women as well as the babies if it is made illegal. (I supported this point with examples of students who tried to do abortions on their own and caused damage to their babies—who ended up being born anyway because their attempts were unsuccessful.) These powerful examples impacted many of the student’s opinions on the legality of it, but not the morality of it. Many students still thought it was wrong, but it shouldn’t be outlawed. Derik argued that the man should have a say in whether or not an abortion takes place, but Rachel quickly shot him down. Chanise admitted that her mother wanted to abort her and decided against it and thought about abortion again when she was pregnant with her brother. She said that she couldn’t live with her mother if she opted to abort her brother. Nicole said HER mother has had five abortions, eight miscarriages, and still has nine kids. She said that her mother is a drug addict and shouldn’t have kids. She said “there are already nine of us. The world doesn’t need any more of my mother’s spawn. She SHOULD get abortions.” This was another class-silencer.

It silenced me, too. Actually, a lot of the student’s stories left me speechless, and this is not the first time this has happened. I think back to the day when 8th period started talking about all of their friends who had been raped; I didn’t feel equipped to handle this discussion. Both conversations fit into the MVCS presentations—presentations that were products of lessons that I facilitated to help students make sense of the power of visual propaganda and it’s effect on our way of knowing the world. I can make sense of it from a theoretical standpoint. I can write about how important these topics are to raise in a high school. I can present at conferences to encourage other teachers to try and press their students to discuss current social issues, but what about when they take the topic and run
with it—and end up running further ahead than you can catch up. How do I facilitate this? How do I know I am helping them by allowing them to bring up painful experiences? I may be the “teacher,” but these young women have far more knowledge about the complexities surrounding these “issues” than I do. I can mediate their websites and grade their presentations based on content, facts, and incorporation of visuals and art, but the **stories** they end up sharing ... well, there’s no rubric for that.

I worry that I can’t teach these female and male student about these topics as much as I would like to think I can. I can help them present organized material and keep a debate going, but when stories stop me on my own tracks, how do I know I am giving them just ice?

My only comfort is that both 7th and 8th period MVCS classes seem to feel extremely comfortable using this space as a place of sharing experiences and perspectives. Both classes had great discussions and they proved to me the power of **stories**. In addition to discussing the rights of women/men/lives and controversial issues, these discussions proved to me the power of autoethnography—particularly in relation to teaching. When the students shared their stories, their peers *learned* a point that couldn’t be argued otherwise. It was easy for them to argue intangible belief systems, but when placed against powerful stories from their friends and classmates, they learned on a level that they couldn’t otherwise comprehend. This is the power of telling one’s story. It makes someone else learn in a way that has so much more of an impact than statistics, facts, assumptions, or perceptions. When the class utilizes story sharing, they learn about each other, grow closer to one another, challenge their own opinions and beliefs, and learn in a way that will change their understanding on a topic for the rest of their lives.

Let’s face it—the students know more about some of these tough topics than I do. How can they still learn if they know more than I do? I feel like the best I can do is allow the students to learn through telling and hearing each other’s stories.

Everything in my research and personal belief systems convince me it is extremely important to engage students in issues surrounding rape, racism, abortions, and sexism. I also strongly advocate for building relationships of trust in a classroom so as to foster open, non-judgmental, and lively dialogue among students. Evidence would suggest that I have achieved this in my classroom. It is clear to see that students are learning through each other’s standpoints, which is, according to Garber (2003), a mainstay of feminist pedagogy. When the students’ conversations continue after class is dismissed or when they ask to continue conversations the following day, I know the students have become deeply
engaged in pedagogy. Even when the students leave class after a heavy conversation with quiet, thoughtful demeanors and private conversations, I know that they are still making sense of the information that was presented to them. Most of the time, I feel these conversations were incredibly successful and I leave the school with a sense of satisfaction. However, my journal entries reveal that feminist pedagogy is more of a challenge than it would appear on paper or to an observer. Though it often yields high rewards, allowing students to take charge of a conversation, particularly one about a controversial matters, can be an intimidating task for a public K-12 teacher, particularly in a school where artworks about these topics are explicitly censored. In addition to the professional considerations of boundary pushing, there is also the task of facilitating a conversation that is suddenly more powerful than I anticipated. Sometimes, during these classes, I feel like I am barely hanging on as a teacher. I don’t care about relinquishing authority; that has never been a concern in my teaching. I’m concerned that my lack of knowledge and direct experience on these particular topics diminishes my ability to make sure that my students are leaving the class with changed minds and hopeful hearts. Though I don’t mind not being an “expert” in my classroom, I do feel some sense of responsibility as a teacher to make sure that my class’s conversations do not hurt or stratify any of my students. My only source of solace is that these conversations seem to continue to happen in these particular classes, so the students seem to feel comfortable sharing and they exhibit their sensitivity as they listen to their peers. Almost every student (even those that are typically quiet) has found a topic throughout the year that has allowed them to open up about their passions, beliefs, and experiences. This convinces me to continue to strive for these types of
conversations, but it’s not enough to shake my uncertainty and feelings of inadequacy when students take conversations further than I ever imagined.

Even though I have days of triumph as a feminist teacher, I frequently stumble as I realize blatant sexism in my practices. My research on Black masculinity in schools has made me highly sensitive to the ways these students are stratified in U.S. education, but I struggle to balance how I bolster these male students in relation to how I might ignore female students. Despite the fact that I try to bolster males, I can’t find evidence of how it pays off. Female students’ grades are consistently higher than those of the male students in our schools’ art classes and all of the advanced level art studios as well as our chapter of the National Art Honor Society is predominately compromised of female students. Once again, I am faced with my own inability to enact the change that I want to see, despite my conscious efforts to do so.

My journaling has shown me that many of the oppressive gendered discourses in our school are incredibly normalized and continue to be reinforced through the speech and actions of teachers, administrators, and students. Unfortunately, I am not always the exception that I would like to be. By the time they get to high school, many of the students’ understandings of their gender roles have been so deeply ingrained that it seems to be second-nature, fixed, and unmovable. Despite all of my encouraging, I can’t seem to produce as many dedicated male art students as females. Conversely, female students, particularly “good girl” students never seem to mind that they are often falling through the cracks. Others go so far as to capitalize on their own invisibility.

Dismantling sexism discourses in a school environment is more of a struggle than one would assume. Even if a pre-service teacher is taught about gender discrimination, it is
not a topic that is often addressed in practice by teachers, students, parents, or administrators. These taken-for-granted assumptions are reinforced through our own educational experiences as well our daily lives as members of this society. I’m convinced with relative certainty that a teacher can’t practice in a traditional, K-12 setting with a total disregard for the gender discourses that confine, shape, restrict, and regulate our teaching practices. At best, we, as teachers, can consciously reflect on our own practices to illuminate sexism in our classrooms and schools. This is not a change that can happen instantaneously because someone studied feminism in college. Rather, it is an ongoing effort that a teacher must employ for the duration of their career.

**Racism Against Black Male Students**

My experiences in teaching and coaching football have left me particularly aware of issues of racism and sexism towards Black male students in schools. The fact that Black male students are over represented in special education, discipline referrals, and suspensions/expulsions in my school and schools everywhere may have more to do with behaviors associated with gender and race than true cognitive ability or ability/inability to behave properly. Boys may be more immature, active, and easily distracted due to higher testosterone levels that lead to shortened attention spans and high levels of aggression, making them less suitable for structured, 45-minute class periods or standardized/IQ tests (Kunjufu, 2005), but this does not speak to their overall intelligence or ability to make sound decisions. It does, however, fall outside of what is perceived to be appropriate behavior in traditional U.S. schools. Davis (2010) points out that teachers and administrators often perceive Black male students to be violent, disrespectful,
unintelligent, hypersexualized, and threatening (p. 149). These attitudes are reinforced by media and perpetuate the notion that Black men can’t succeed in education (as discussed in Chapter Three). Bianco, Leech, and Mitchell (2011) report that many Black male students can recall positive experiences throughout their education, but they were most affected by negative experiences involving racism by teachers and staff. I look to literature that not only explores education’s hand in shaping notions of Black masculinity, but also how Black masculinity is positioned in the society as a way to understand how teachers’ and students’ socialization frames their interactions.

Fanon (1967) also addresses his Black identity as how it is formed in relation to Whiteness. Fanon (1967) discusses how he is only a Black man in relation to the White man, identifying his body from a third person consciousness. Instead of conceptualizing Black manhood in terms of a singular role based on gender, it is situated within a nexus of race, class, and gender relations of power (Price, 1999). Black masculinity is constructed differently than White masculinity in the sense that prevailing definitions of masculinity (power, control, authority) are all attributes that have been historically denied to Black males (Mercer, 1994 in Brown, 1999).

Some scholars, such as Davis, (2010), Fanon (1967), Ferguson (2003), Gause (2008), and Kunjufu (2002) focus on how school systems reinforce White dominance and often even mimic oppressive legal systems that Black males are placed in a perpetual cycle of marginalization. Gause (2008) looks at how Black social structures often conflict with White-value centered institution of education. Gause (2008) discusses the social system that grants power to physical strength, resistance to dominant power structures, and money-social capital rather than academic success or a commitment to student’s future. He
also references media influences such as the NFL’s, NBA’s, and rap/hip-hop industry’s portrayal of the commodity of the angry, violent, strong, body-centered Black man (Gause, 2008). These perspectives echo Billson and Major’s (1993) recognition of the cool pose in conflict with the “uncoolness” of school. Since being good at school is equated with Whiteness, cool pose requires Black boys to disassociate themselves from their education (hooks, 1994; Jackson & Kirkland, 2009; Majors & Billson, 1993). These attitudes of resistance, violence, and anger as only manifested through physical power keeps Black teenage boys as bodily threats in school contexts and never opens opportunities for critical engagement of their place within these settings. However, Gause (2008) and Ferguson (2003) also note that these attitudes often spill over into all aspects of society, including legal systems. Ferguson (2003) noted that even as early as elementary schools, teachers were using young Black boy’s behaviors to help them label students that they believed to be destined for prison.

**Journal Entries: Not So Anti-Racist**

In Chapter Five, I discuss how I participated in discourses of race and gender with my students. In the discussion during 2nd period, my Black male students were very open and willing to talk about racial and gender discrimination with me. Later in the year during my 8th period class, a similar conversation shared even more stories about students’ experiences with racial discrimination and also provided a little more varied discussion on the topic. I was pleased to see how these issues were being considered by these youth as well as their willingness to discuss these issues with me. When students tell me that I’m “different from other teachers” or “cool enough to be Black,” I feel a sense of pride in my
ability to close the racial divide between myself and my students. If an outside researcher was visiting my classroom, they might say I am a great example of a White-ally feminist who is teaching for social justice and using CRT [Critical Race Theory] in practice as I allow my students opportunities to expose dominating discourses that affect their learning environments.

But this dissertation is not written as an outside researcher. Even if someone interviewed me about these discussions with my students, I'm not sure how much I could really convey my successes and limitations under the parameters of the questions they pose. For me, nothing was as honest as the stream-of-conscious writing that took place as soon as the students got on the bus or as I arrived back my home and sat on my bed with my laptop in the late afternoon after a stressful day. As I wrote, my mind wandered to many of the places these conversations could lead, and it often lead me to some things that I didn’t want to (and still do not enjoy) facing about myself. Through this writing, I uncovered hesitations, biases, insecurities, limitations, and feelings of failure that no one else could know about me.

In this section, I reveal three journal entries that I would rather delete, or at least hide in some obscure folder of my laptop. However, despite how these passages might expose my racist and/or sexist biases and/or actions, they are crucial to my autoethnographic work. In the first passage, I will show an outward act of racial and gender discrimination as I actively try to remove students that I have labeled (through both their behaviors and their racial/gender markers) as “troublemakers.” As I hesitantly share the second passage, I expose the personal turmoil and feelings of White guilt that followed an in-class phone call to the Klu Klux Klan and how this experience revealed not only my racial
insecurities, but my insecurities about my relationships with the Black students in my classes. The final passage shows how, despite my close relationship with this particular student, her utterance of the word “racist” sends me into a tailspin of uncertainty and makes me wonder if any amount of research or experience will ever settle these feelings.

Journal entry 4: Above all, Maintain Order

September 4

I already started anticipating problems with my 5th period\textsuperscript{59} class. Specifically, a rowdy group of Black boys. Khalif is also in this class, despite the fact that he already had the class last year. He is going to have to get a schedule changed and I am worried that he is going to cause trouble in the meantime. He is now a 10th grader in a mostly 9th class and he acts somewhat superior to the other kids. Also, he knows that he is going to be removed from the class so he doesn’t have to pay attention or put forth any effort. He commands attention from the other students. Most of the kids couldn’t be bothered with them. They see him as trouble and they don’t want to associate with him\textsuperscript{60}. However, there were a few who think Khalif is very cool. Malik, Eric, Wayne, Bobby, and Jihaad all play into Khalif’s banter and definitely add a lot of their own. All of these boys are loud and want the class’s attention. (I’m not sure if they want attention from me). I am already on guard and anticipating trouble.

In my 7th period MVCS class, I also have some of the same young, loud, 9th grade Black boys that I am worried about (they have been assigned both 9/10th grade and 11/12th grade general art classes). Yesterday, two or three of them put their heads down while I was going over the rules/procedures and the general purpose of the class. Although it is insulting and disrespectful to a teacher to put your head down on the first day, I was hoping that waking up early for school had started to bother them towards the end of the day. However, all of them put their heads down again today while I started going over more specifics about the class. When I went over to their table and quietly asked them to put their heads up, they resisted. Deshawn grumbled that I “need to leave him alone,” Jihaad sat up for a second and then went right back to sleep, and Wayne followed suit. When I was done with my lecture the students had a “getting to know you” activity that required them to get out of their seats. These boys refused. Instead, they stayed their at table and talked only to each other. After school today, I e-mailed the boys’ counselors to get them removed.

\textsuperscript{59} 5th period is a general art course for 9th and 10th graders entitled “21st Century Art: Art Past the Paintbrush”.
\textsuperscript{60} Khalif exhibits habits of defiance and disengagement towards school as an act of rebellion and a way to claim social power in the classroom. For more insight into these habits, see Ferguson (2003), hooks (1994), Jackson and Kirkland, (2009), Majors and Billson (1993) and Willis (1977). Since it’s the beginning of the school year, these habits are rare and command extra attention from peers. These are considered to be extra bold actions in the first few days of school as many students have high expectations for school success at the start of each school year.
from the class with the excuse that the class is only for 11th and 12th grade students. While it’s true that it is an 11/12th grade class, it’s not the only reason for my urgency. There is another 9th grade female who is in the same class. Annayah was in my 9th grade art class last year and actually failed 9th grade (and my class) for the year. She spent some time in a mental health facility at the end of the year and never made up her work. She was also somebody who had a lot of behavioral issues (occasionally in my class, but mostly elsewhere). Oddly enough, Annayah passed the final exam with a 97% without any studying or class review. Despite all of her problems, she clearly learned last year’s material and she was thoughtful and attentive to class discussions. Despite her failing grade, she learned and contributed to the class.

The point is that I did not rush to e-mail her counselor to get her removed, even though she is a 9th grader. There is another 9th grade female student whose counselor also did not get an e-mail from me. I told myself that I would do it tomorrow when I had more time, but the truth is: getting these girls out of the class is not a high priority for me ... Removing the (9th grade Black) boys is. These students are making teaching difficult for me. When students put their head down and show a lack of interest, it is hard to get other students excited about the class. Also, it is simply disrespectful and undermines my role as an “effective teacher”. I am saying that I am removing them because they are 9th graders but I’m happy that they are 9th graders or so that I can remove them.

September 9

Khalif was finally taken out of 5th period. By 7th period today, all of the Black 9th grade male students were removed but the two (Black) 9th grade female students remained. I told the girls that I would talk to their counselors and made sure they were clear that they were taking an 11th and 12th grade class. Both girls agreed that that would be fine. I never really gave the boys the option and they didn’t ask. (I suspect they are used to being bounced around.) I have another student—a quiet, meek, White, 9th grade male student in the class. He has been in the class since the 2nd day and I haven’t really noticed him because he is so quiet. I told him that it was an 11/12th grade class and that I would recommend he switch, but, like the 9th grade female students, I never contacted his counselor. He spends a lot of time in class doodling, but I can’t tell if he’s paying attention. At least with the females, they are actively involved in the discussion. Sean (the White, 9th grade male) keeps to himself. I don’t consider him to be a potential discipline problem, so I wasn’t active in getting him removed like the other Black 9th grade males. He said he thinks his schedule was going to get changed again, so I figured I would let it go and see how it worked out. If he acted differently in class, I’m sure I would act differently about getting his schedule changed, too.

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61 It is not uncommon for “low-achieving” students to have their schedules moved throughout the year. Sometimes they are moved to a lower track or taken out of electives to move to remedial or special education courses. Occasionally, they are removed from classes that they have no hopes of passing to see if they can earn high grades elsewhere. Every now and then, they are switched out of classes because of irresolvable conflict with a teacher or because a teacher demands their removal.
Journal Entry 5: I Called the KKK

January 15

Sooo ... I called the KKK today. During class.
Imani was doing her “propaganda” presentation today on racism. Imani researched racist propaganda, specifically how the KKK and Neo-Nazis distribute their propaganda. Imani opened her presentation with an article about how the KKK has recently been distributing fliers through residential windows and porches. She reported they are putting fliers in Ziploc bags with a marble or pebble (for weight) and launching them into homes in a Midwest community. Being a White, blond(ish), blue-eyed woman from a rural/suburban community, I find myself nervously over-compensating62 (please don’t associate me with them!). Even though Imani has only gotten as far as techniques of distribution (rather than the actual message), I talked about how low-tech their tactics are and how it’s ridiculous to be so antiquated in the 21st century. Imani then showed a news video associated with article that revealed the actual flier. She paused the video so her classmates could read it. The flier gave an 800 number to contact the KKK to hear more about what they do. The students said to call the number. I said NO WAY!

They kept pushing. They said call from the classroom phone—yeah, right!! How could I explain THAT when it showed up on the phone log? They said to call from my cell phone. NO WAY! I don’t what the KKK to have my number! What kind of list would I wind up on!? (A few students joked that they would want me to join because I’m White, but then I’d be kicked out if they found out where I work). They said to *67 my number. I said I don’t trust that. It’s the KKK. They will find ways to figure out my number. Brittney (12th grade Black female) said, “they are passing out fliers in baggies with a rock. I really doubt they are going to figure out how to find you, Ms. Kirker.” Damn Brittney. Good point.

After several minutes of arguing (with Annayah63 being the most excited for the call) I agreed because I was SO SURE the number was no longer valid. I told them—if this aired on the news, I’m SURE the number is taken down, so fine. I’ll call that number. *67-1-888-blah-blah … Speaker phone … Wait … Dial tone (Oh no! Dial tone!?) “You have reached the Klu Klux Klan …” Holy shit. I froze. The class erupted. I almost fell over. Then immediately, everyone (including myself) started the “SHH! SHH! SHHH!!”

“We are unapologetically in support for the advancement of the White race … And counteract the diversity propaganda distributed in schools …” I could only hear parts. I was in shock. The kids were Shhh’ing each other “… If you would like more information send to you, press 1. If you would like to ask a question, press 2. If you would like someone to call you back, press 3. To check the status of your application, press 4 …” Call ended. Craziness ensued. Some were responding to the call in the same shock and horror, but some were just laughing at MY reaction. They joked that I was so funny because I was so scared. I didn’t think my reaction was that shocking--- why were they not as scared as I was? Annayah said, “it’s not like we didn’t know what they believed. What did you THINK

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62 Referring to DiAngelo’s (2011) concept of White fragility.
63 I spoke about Annayah (9th grade girl) in the previous journal entry. Despite her 9th grade status, she remained in my 11th and 12th grade 7th period class until she dropped out of school in mid-March.
they were going to say?” I said I was surprised they even have a hotline at all! The KKK! A hotline! They wanted me to call back. They wanted me to press 3. NO WAY. I've done all I could take. I didn't want to be a repeat caller of the KKK.

Holy crap. What does this mean for me a teacher? A teacher that called the KKK. How the HECK am I going to defend this? They are GOING to tell their friends. They are GOING to tell their parents. What are their parents going to say? How can I, a White teacher, defend myself to a black parent for calling the KKK during class? SHIT!! How can I undo this? “No—I am NOT calling back. No way. I can't even … Hold on … I need a minute.” My visible panicking amused them. So Annayah called back on Raj's phone. The same message on speaker phone to the whole class. I was still in a state of shock. At this point, they were amused, entertained, but not horrified. WHY were they not horrified? How are you all not horrified?

It's just a phone call. They can't get your number. That's not comforting enough. They have a hotline! Kirstin (12th grade White female): “It's not like this is a shock. I'm from Reading. They are everywhere up there. Go to Zern's.” (other students: what's Zern's? Kirstin explained the flea market that sells KKK and Nazi stuff and it's up in “KKK land.”) Some kids want to go there now just to see. Deja: “Call back and press '3’ to have them call us.” HECK NO! What would we SAY to them? Britney: “No, press 4. What's the application process? A blood sample?” I noticed the blond hair/blue eyes/White women (only me and Becky) were the most shaken and least amused. Embarrassment? Naivety? Over-exerting a lack of support to their (KKK) cause? Deja was still laughing at how funny I was about the whole thing. How was she not shocked and offended? I was. I needed to make sure everyone knew that.

Even in this explanation, I need to be over-explanatory. I had it played out in my head—the White—no, pale White—teacher that called the KKK during her predominately Black class. Oh my gosh—they could take this to the news media and it could really be blown up. Why couldn't I try harder to convince a student to do it? I should have pushed Annayah to do it if she wanted to call so bad. No one would question a Black student doing it—but a White teacher—oh shit. OR—just said no! Why did I have to give in to them!?! I am the teacher, right?!

White guilt is running wild. I have to protect myself. If the students or their parents misconstrue the story, I'm toast. Explain this one to the principal? He'd call me crazy. The Black superintendent? Hell no. I could never justify this. It was not classroom responsiveness anymore. It was no longer investigating something alongside my students. It became about race, and protecting myself—as a White woman that DIDN'T have bad intentions.

I got very protective of myself and very nervous. Even when (White) Melissa came in late and asked what she missed, I had to over dramatically tell her that I called the KKK. The kids were still laughing at my response, but it wasn't as genuine of a response this time. I
had to be sure that they were sure that I didn’t find this to be “okay.” That I wasn’t expecting them to answer. That I wasn’t guilty of blatant racism!

The bell rang. I was still nervous. I had to run this by some other teachers for their reaction. Gauge their response. Let them know how genuinely shocked I was in case I need to call on an adult for defense. Scott and Liz were next door. I busted in like I owned the place and said “I JUST CALLED THE KKK DURING CLASS.” Liz asked what would possess me to do this. I told her about the presentation, the article, and the students pressing me to do it. I explained that I didn’t expect the phone number to work. She said that I’m shocked by the presence of KKK because I’m not targeted by them. She then told a story about her dad’s childhood neighbor that was tied to a cross when he was 5 years old because he was Jewish. Whoa, Liz. You are missing the point. This is about race and this is about me. So I kept pressing about MY conversation and MY shock. There was a Black boy in the room that I didn’t know. I needed him to know I was shocked and horrified. Nobody was really paying attention—probably because I rudely interrupted their conversation about healthy eating. I was not getting the validation and support I needed, but it wasn’t a huge deal to them, so that brought me some comfort.

So I called Bill on the way home. Similar motive. You need to know I didn’t intend for this to happen in case you need to defend me later. My own husband! What an elaborate defense I am constructing for myself! It is actually clouding my rationality as I think about it. I recognize it, but I can’t stop it.

It’s funny— I can say I’m not intimidated by the topic of race. The kids say that I’m Black and that validates me to continue to talk about issues of race and racism in society and even our own school. However, this has crushed me. It’s like the school bully getting their butt kicked. It teaches you you’re not so tough. I’m so damn White. Pale White. White in and out. I can say “hype” and “bull” and “jawns,” but when it all comes down, I am SO White and I can’t deny it, ignore it, or explain it away.

January 15

Well of course, first thing in the morning, some kids came in and said, “Kirk, I heard you called the KKK.” I’m sure they said lots of things before that, but it doesn’t matter. Before homeroom even started, Deja brought it up when she came in to deliver a worksheet she was missing. Tanieka chirped in, “Yeah, that jawn was funny! Ms. Kirker be so hype! She was SCARED!”

All I could think about was the other kids in homeroom hearing it. Davaughn was walking by and looked at me funny. Great—now he’s going to think something. I had to think of how to explain this away without being too obvious. You know, without ACTING TOO WHITE. (Because that’s the thing I try to get away from. Being too obviously, apologetically, White. The kids can pick up on that a mile away. They don’t want me to apologize for being

64 My relentless need to protect my role as a self-perceived “White ally” (Tatum, 2009) is explored in the following section.
White—it projects the assumption of superiority.) So—I tried to talk loud enough for Davaughn to hear me as I explained how scared I was, and I didn’t expect them to answer, and I’m afraid of them having my number, and it was all the students’ idea, etc.—my whole defense that I had rehearsed in my head over and over ...

The whole day went by without it coming up again, until 8th period (the other section of MVCS). Nicole, a student in 8th period had attended 7th block yesterday because she says that her study hall is boring (so she attends both 7th and 8th period MVCS classes on block days). She came in and said, “Are we going to call the KKK again today?” Jaleesa jumped in, “Yeah! Let’s call them!” Alondra (12th grade Hispanic female) looked confused, “you ... called the KKK?” Again—now I have to explain the entire story for the students that were already in the classroom. I couldn’t wait until everyone was there. I couldn’t let that information just hang around in the kids’ heads for long—their imaginations would run wild.

(Why do I suddenly not trust my students to trust me? These are the same kids that tell me I’m Black all the time and how I don’t count when they complain about “these **** teachers”—now when I am faced with my own Whiteness, I suddenly don’t have confidence in the relationship that I have built with my students over the past several months. Is the relationship that I have built with them so fragile? Is the racial tension in the school so high that this situation is so fragile? Am I the only one who is fragile and this whole ordeal is only terrifying and tense to me??)

So I explained away ... then more students came in and heard glimpses of the conversation and Derik said (loudly), “You called the KKK?! I don’t know if his tone was accusatory, amused, shocked, or interested, but I didn’t give him a chance. I sighed heavily. “I just explained it to everyone! But I’ll explain it again ... for the last time.”

Any other time Derik comes in late and “misses” the conversation or instruction, I tell him to ask a friend to get the information—I’m not re-explaining the whole lesson because he came in late. However, I didn’t trust the kids to defend me properly. If they left out any details, it could be devastating. (Apparently I’m not as concerned if they leave out details when I ask them to re-explain my lessons, though.)

So now it was time for Kiah and Josh to present their topic on race as well. Josh talked about the KKK’s propaganda and gave very similar information as Imani presented yesterday. He took us to a website with KKK paradigms on it and we picked it apart for how poorly it was written, implying that it was composed by really, really stupid people. Jake (12th grade Hispanic male) kept pushing to call the KKK again, but I refused to do it from my phone. I said I didn’t want them having records of me calling them so many times. Some of the students tried to assure me that “67” is a safe defense, and a few others made jokes about the KKK trying to get me to join. Derik said, “They’d love you and your blond haired, blue-eyed son!” Kiah added that they would try to make Billy the next Grand Wizard. Shonelle laughed that if they found out where I worked, they’d try and burn me, too. They weren’t accusatory or suspicious, they were joking around with me and lightly
poking fun of my fears. I played into it, “can you imagine my application?!” “This photo and the words on the application don’t match up ... there must be some mistake!”

So Jake called again from his phone, on speaker. He asked if we wanted to press “2” to talk to someone directly. I said no. I would need to think of what I wanted to say to them, and the language I would use towards them wouldn’t be appropriate for the classroom. I told them if they wanted to do that, they can do it on their own after school. No one expressed much interest in pursuing it further. It seems that the novelty is wearing off.

The conversation and presentation continued and Kiah explained the differences between the KKK and Neo-Nazi’s. The class ended with everyone begging and pleading to watch “American History X” during class. I said I would have to look at the class schedule for the next few weeks, but I would consider it. The whole “calling the KKK” ordeal seemed to be squashed or forgotten. At least by everyone but me.

I never got a call from an administrator or parent, and at this point, I probably won’t. The kids seemed to find it interesting and humorous. At least, the Black students did. The White students, other than Kristin and Nicole, never said anything about it the whole time. I wonder what the White students got out of it. How did it challenge their ideas on race? Nicole was willing to speak up during class discussions in the topic about the racism at her former schools near Boyertown and Kirstin mildly participated in 7th period conversation, but for the most part, none of the White kids said a word during these presentations. Granted, Brandon, Laura, and Thomas don’t participate often anyway, but Rachel, Devin, Sammie, and Becky all stayed totally quiet. Were they shocked, challenged, offended, scared? Do they agree/disagree? Are they afraid to express their opinions or the opinions of those in their family? I can’t tell what they took away, and I don’t feel comfortable asking just yet. I’d like to bring it up again sometime with some of the White students in candor, but I want to let it die for now.

The Black students were less scared than I was, which surprised me. **It might be my own blissful ignorance as a White woman to not know about the reality of racial hate crimes. I never heard stories of hate crimes growing up in my family, so it’s shocking and disturbing to make it ‘real’ for me.** But maybe it’s more real for my students. Most of the Hispanic students were very quiet during this conversation as well. Some of them didn’t even know what the KKK was and it wasn’t a part of their knowledge of this history of the U.S. (Obviously it isn’t addressed in U.S. history classes in Kennedy HS).

What if (racism/hate crimes) was spoken of in school? What if the history of racism was addressed as part of the curriculum beyond my MVCS class? What would the implications be for myself, as a teacher, and my students?

**The self-indulgence of confronting Whiteness by teachers and using the classroom to do it**

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65 Teachers and White privilege is first introduced in “Whiteness Studies” in Chapter 2 and is further explored in the following section.
What would it mean for the teachers? Would we be forced to confront our history of racism beyond historical facts and dates about slavery (which is barely touched upon, too)? Would we have to confront ourselves in order to teach these topics? But what are the implications for our students? Is this self-indulgent to teach about this?

Maybe it would benefit Whites more to raise issues of Whiteness, racism, and discrimination in the classroom. Would we be using the painful histories of our Black community members as a way to further our own knowledge? Would it create open mindedness, or perpetuate guilt or superiority?

What are the implications for White students when a White teacher confronts racism in the classroom? The implications for Black and Latino students for a White teacher to confront racism in the classroom? How does the classroom composition change these implications?

When I was in high school, an old, White English teacher assigned us to read Black Boy and Malcolm X. He was truly a White ally, but we (students and even some parents, including my own) were so annoyed with him. “He thinks he’s Black.” “He has to be Mr. P.” C66 “Give it a rest, Mr. Smith.” Even though I think I learned a great deal from reading Malcolm X in high school, it was not well received by my all-White class, friends, or family.

Maybe that’s enough, though. Maybe I learned so much from him and his approach to social justice and maybe it had a huge influence on who I am today ... but I never attributed it to him, his class or his teaching. Maybe that reading of Malcolm X lit the fire that was fueled by my Penn State education. Maybe that’s great teaching—to be inspired without realizing it? (Of course, my brother had the same class and went to the same college, and he’s very different in his approach to social justice.)

I don’t know ... I guess I will have to see how this experience taught people by reading their midterms and finals. Maybe I will ask a question about the most memorable experience of the class and what they took away from it and see what the students write. Maybe they won’t even remember... maybe it will be significant to them. The results should be interesting... MAKE A QUESTION IN THE FINAL ABOUT MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT IN CLASS AND WHAT THEY LEARNED TOOK AWAY FROM IT! Was it as significant to them as it was to me?? They obviously didn’t take away what I did. They didn’t confront their professionalism and Whiteness, but they might have learned something. Maybe they learned about themselves or maybe they learned about me. Was our relationship (teacher-student and student-student) strengthened or broken? I may never know ... and the not knowing is killing me67.

66 “Politically correct”
67 My anxiety towards negotiating my intersectionality as a White, female teacher is not intended to undermine the difficulty experienced by the students of Color. I acknowledge that I am still a recipient of White privilege and I am speaking of my own trepidation because I cannot speak to the impact of systematic racism experienced by the students whom I teach.
Journal Entry 6: “Yo, that’s racist!”

February 18

Jaleesa seems to be amused by raising issues of race in my class. I don’t know if she wants a reaction from me or the other students—maybe a little bit of both. She likes to use the word “racist” a lot and is usually looking at me when she does so. Sometimes she does it with a half smile and other times she does it with a completely serious face. There’s usually no rhyme or reason to it—forget that—there is always a reason to it. Any time anything that has to do with “race” comes up, she always responds by saying, “yo, that’s racist!” (I think that I think there is a lack of reason because it is very rarely linked to anything that is actually racist, by my definition68, at all). For example, Rachel made fun of herself and said “Hash tag White girl problems” when she was talking about not being able to get her Starbucks that morning. Jaleesa said, “What? Black people can’t afford Starbucks? Yo, that’s so racist!” I recently told Josie (a 9th Hispanic female) that I have started using corn tortillas for all of my tacos. Jaleesa said “oh I see, you ask her about tacos because she’s Mexican. Ms., that’s so racist.” (The truth is that Josie is nearly obsessed with tacos and tells me about her love for tacos on a daily basis.)

Nonetheless, this has me nervous, curious, interested, and guilty feeling all at the same time. Here I am—someone who researches, studies, contemplates racism all the time. I consider myself to be pretty knowledgeable on the topic. In White circles, I consider myself to be an expert on the topic of racism. However, when a Black child brings up the word “racist,” I know my blood pressure goes up a little bit. Maybe a lot. I don’t know why it gets to me so much—Jaleesa’s a pretty off-the-wall individual. She constantly seeks attention from teachers and peers. There might be absolutely no validity to her claims of racism. Maybe she is just trying to get a reaction because she knows the word “racist” always makes people’s skin crawl. But then again, maybe she knows a lot more about racism than I do. Maybe, despite all of my studying, I don’t know as much about racism as this silly 16-year-old girl from Kennedy HS.

A lot of times, I blow her off because I know she’s being silly. She knows she’s being silly. Sometimes she says that looking very seriously and then smiles or laughs at me. She looks for my reaction. She finds amusement in it. But is she only like this with me because of our close relationship? Does she do this to her other teachers? Am I some sort of exception because I don’t shy away from the topic of race? Or—worst of all—am I the exception because she sees me (the White, blonde, middle-class female teacher) as—heaven forbid—racist?! After all, my appearance is probably the epitome of racism in her eyes and in the eyes of her friends and family. But maybe I’m just reading too much into this. Maybe it’s because she is my buddy and she likes to joke around with me. Maybe she just knows that it is a topic that gets me going. (It’s like bringing up feminism around me and Rachel.) Maybe she talks about it with me because she’s comfortable. Gosh, I really hope so.

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68 See “Definition of Terms” on page 39 in Chapter 1.
Still—it makes me nervous. She doesn’t make me nervous—the word “racist” makes me nervous when it comes from a Black student. (Particularly a Black student who comes from a very different socio-cultural environment then me.)

I wonder if that ever goes away. I mean really—what would it take? A Ph.D.? Is it even possible for a White person to not get nervous when the word “racist” comes up from a Black person? Do I, the White scholar, make other White people as nervous when I say the word “racist”? Probably not as much, but to some extent that is probably true. But then again, there are a lot of White people in my life that seemed to not be bothered by the topic of race because they are so self-proclaimed “not a racist.” Maybe that is a mask, maybe they really believe it. Maybe they seem relaxed in that topic when they are not confronted with that topic (and I mean confronted in the sense of the word confrontation and also from a Black voice).

Just like Rachel said—Hash tag White girl problems.

Even many months later, I get a little emotional when I read over these journal entries. All of the confidence I have in myself as a White scholar, a White ally, and a White teacher melts away as I face the limitations of my own racial understandings. I read about the causes and effects of racist discourse. I talk openly with my students about discrimination in their lives and in educational systems. I can even confidently speak about racist educational systems from the voice of a White teacher. But I will never truly understand the experience of racial discrimination, and the inability to ever know these feeling leaves me incomplete in my knowledge of the topic. This incomplete knowledge raises many more questions for myself that I might not ever know the answers to. The inability to ever understand a topic that I am passionate about is a painful pill to swallow.

Reay et. al (2007) call out the White, middle class “cultural omnivores” who can “access, know, take part in, and feel confident in” a wide variety of cultural contexts while

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69 Another example of my own White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011).
“display[ing] their liberal credentials” (p. 1046). They even attack White, liberal researchers, stating that

the integrity of the ‘we’ that, in optimistic moments, some of the research team and the people they know like to think we belong to—a particular fraction of the White middle class who both pride themselves on their liberal values and are still basking in the glow of cosmopolitan multiculturalism. (Reay et. al, 2007, p. 1043)

Reay et. al (2007) point out the selfish consumption of ethnic diversity as a way to bolster dominance over both minority groups (through their charitable offering of acceptance) and majority groups (by virtue of their self-subscribed moral superiority). Ultimately, according to Reay et. al (2007), these members of the White middle class are moving in and out of different, more colorful identities and further bolstering their own privilege by their ability to sample disadvantage without suffering from disadvantage. As I mentioned in Journal entry 2, I fear that I am using students’ discussions of racism as a way to further my own understandings of racial disparity in U.S. schools and society. However, I have little doubt that the students benefit from these conversations as well. In addition to learning the perspectives of their classmates, the relationships I have with students and our informal conversations consistently indicated that they appreciate having a space where these conversations are welcomed and encouraged. Nonetheless, I have to acknowledge that I am receiving benefits as well. In addition to learning about racism, I am building relationships of trust and respect with my students (something that I desire for myself). Additionally, I am learning about experiences of racism, but at the end of the day, I return to my dominant, safe role as a White, female, middle-class teacher living in the suburbs and I never have to completely understand discrimination the way the students in my class do. I “learn” about racial discrimination through stories, but I am safely removed from learning through personal experience.
The Comfort of the Colorblind

Paley (2000) and Landsman (2008) wrote critical narratives about their own experiences as White, female teachers and their experiences with racism in their own practice(s). These accounts told of the techniques and mechanisms they used to ignore everything that would create difference from race to religion in order to make their teaching lives more comfortable (Paley, 2000). Both Paley (2000) and Landsman (2008) talked about their efforts to ignore race in class by pretending that all students were either White or non-racial.

Teaching is an incredibly demanding job filled with daily, unexpected challenges, so it is no wonder that so many teachers do not pay daily considerations to the weighty topic of racial discrimination in educational systems. Price (2006 as cited in Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson 2008) contends that many White teachers do not feel equipped to truly understand the social, emotional, or academic needs of non-White students. Therefore, it's easier to teach to the status quo, the ideal student, and/or the student that many teachers embodied in their own educational experiences. Berchini (2014) agrees that many educators believe there is a right way and a wrong way to be a student and teachers seek ways to find ways to handle those students on the periphery with as little grief as possible. The realization of the imbedded racism in these beliefs may be too much for many teachers to face. Yueng, Spanierman, and Landrum-Brown (2013) recognize that self-discovery is a laborious and unpleasant task. Perhaps it is more laborious than many teachers have time for. Kincheloe (1999) notes that shame of racism can be immobilizing to the point that it interferes with the construction of a progressive White identity that is capable of acting in opposition to racism.
I think back to my early years of teaching when I lived in blissful, colorblind ignorance. Colorblindness never caused me pain. The ability to dismiss any racist beliefs or actions excused me from having to consider the painful realities of racial discrimination. I can see why this mentality is so appealing to teachers. The alternative, acknowledging one’s own racist biases or practices, is a troubling encounter. For many years, colorblindness protected me from this experience. Even back in my earliest years of teaching, students would complain about racist teachers. I dismissed these kids; teachers aren’t racist. Racism might exist, but not in schools. Schools are places that promote *multiculturalism*, I thought (without any real knowledge of what the term actually meant). Schools are full of people with good intentions, and *people with good intentions can’t possibly be racist*. This belief kept me safe from many unpleasant realities in my personal and professional lives.

Furthermore, when a student acknowledges racism in a teacher, the wrongdoing is immediately shifted from the teacher back to the student for making such an egregious and unthinkable accusation. A few years ago a colleague told me that she was upset with the a disciplinarian for not responding to a discipline referral she sent for a particular Black boy. It seems that the boy called her a “racist,” and the teacher sent him to the discipline office, coding the referral as 204: Disrespectful Speech to Teacher or Staff. The disciplinarian lectured the boy, but did not assign punishment because he did not use explicit profanity. The teacher argued that the word “racist” should be considered profanity in our discipline code. The teacher felt victimized by the boy’s use of the word “racist,” but never considered the act that warranted the accusation. Furthermore, the (White) disciplinarian supported the teacher by verbally reprimanding the boy. The opportunity to never have to consider
effects of their actions is part of the privilege Mills (1997) describes as the Racial Contract. What is worse about this story is the way that the accusation of “racist” was framed to be as painful as racial discrimination. The veil of colorblindness not only protected the teacher from considering the student’s accusation, but assigned the Black student the role of perpetrator in this situation. However, the teacher didn’t feel pain for being forced to challenge her own identity—she felt wrongly accused and simply wanted the word “racist” to be established as profane speech in her classroom.

Colorblindness also protected me from pain, but confronting colorblindness and White supremacist practices didn’t necessarily cause me a great deal of pain, either. By the time I realized this phenomenon was taking place, I was already comfortably situated in my academic environment. The events that occurred in my school were stories that provided a context for my understanding of Critical Race Theory. These stories and experiences drew me to this area of study because I could relate to what I was reading. But, the experiences that I knew were locked safely away as the past. They were things that I saw and felt, but not necessarily things I was seeing or feeling as a studied in Penn State’s library. I realized that all past-teachers-turned-scholars have a bit of protection from the unpleasant stories of his/her past teacher self: they are in the past. We can learn from them, they will help us understand theory better, but we now know that we will never repeat them since we have bettered ourselves with our academic knowledge.

This identity protection works until the teacher-scholar returns to the classroom as a practicing teacher in the same building, with the same colleagues, and facing the same issues that were present before they confronted colorblindness. When I returned, I heard the same racist discourses of my past. Even though these conversations made me
uncomfortable and forced me to negotiate my place among the faculty (as previously described), I knew that my own practices would be feminist and social-justice oriented. My classroom would be the space that would welcome discussions of discriminations. My academic studies had built up my confidence to be able to facilitate these discussions. This is the confidence that spoke when I said, “sure Imani, I think that would be a great article to show the class. I’m sure it will be a very interesting presentation.”

In theory, professional conversations, writing, and in conference presentations, I can comfortably say, “this is a great topic to raise in the classroom and an understanding of Critical Race Theory allows teachers to facilitate these discussions to move students to greater understandings of their socio-cultural world.” However, when I let the students run the class (as a good feminist teacher should), all the confidence I had built was dismantled. Studying, writing, speaking, or even observing others could not prepare me for the limitations and uncertainty that these teenagers exposed in me. Academia turned the key of my knowledge, but it didn’t completely open the door. There are still so many limits to knowledge that scholarship can’t answer. I think only the direct, critical, and difficult confrontation with one’s own racial limitations can begin to reveal the true complexity of these issues.

Granted, experiences and stories teach a great deal. With ten years of experience living and working in the Kennedy community, I’ve learned an incredible amount about the effects of racist beliefs and practices through the stories shared by my neighbors and students. I’ve learned so much that it’s charged me to examine the topic further through doctoral studies. However, I’ve also learned that stories can only share so much. They can render feelings of sympathy, confusion, or outrage, but they can’t compete with the
emotions stirred up by one’s own lived experiences. That being said, what’s the point of writing an autoethnography? I don’t intend to teach my readers about what confronting racial biases will reveal, but merely provide a sample of what it has revealed to me. It is unlikely that anyone’s students will ask them to call the Klu Klux Klan during class, but a practicing teacher might find themselves removing a group of Black male students from their classroom. The teacher can ask themselves what this exposes about their professional practice. A practicing teacher might also feel uncomfortable when a student says “racist.” What will this reveal about their relationship with their students and their own unresolved issues of colorblindness (or the desire to return to the comforts of colorblindness)? If I didn’t have the confidence that studying Critical Race Theory instilled in me, I might not have the confidence to explore racial discrimination in my classroom. However, no amount of studying, reading, thinking, observing, listening, or considering the stories of other White teachers challenged me as much as a classroom of twenty-five teenagers.
Chapter Seven

Final Thoughts and Conclusion

The previous four chapters of data analysis presented the most prevalent themes of reflection throughout the year of data collection. However, it should be considered that these journal entries that provided points of analysis were embedded within a wide range of issues that were raised. Though they provide a fairly complete understanding of the main issues raised through data collection, my complete journal reveals many more issues and challenges that can contribute to future work and considerations. It also should be noted that I didn’t initially review my data through the themes outlined in Chapters Three-Six. Rather, I re-read my journal chronologically with some general topics in mind. The initial reviews allowed me to re-live the school year and demonstrate how my thinking has changed. I will review this evolution of thinking in the first section of this chapter.

Next, I will discuss the implications for my autoethnographic dissertation and some of the most powerful conclusions that I drew from performing this research. Specifically, I found that practicing art teaching for social justice with a consideration of Gender Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Whiteness Studies within a highly regulated structure has both incredible possibilities and debilitating limitations. I also learned to critique the fantasy of empowerment in relation to the necessary prerequisite of self reflection, despite the difficult and messy work process of these revelations.

As suggestions for further research, I review the need for more teacher-research and an audience to value this work, particularly autoethnographic studies. I also connect this to the current issues of over-generalizing the experience of the White, female teacher in hopes that educators and educational researchers will understand that there is much to
understand from the candid, frank, and honest admissions that are made through critical autoethnography. When teachers’ most difficult stories become authentic rather than apologetic, we, as a field, will be able to move to more profound understandings of theory and practice.

**Reflection of Autoethnographic Findings: Changes Throughout the Year**

When my year of data collection had concluded and my journal was complete, I began the task of re-reading my journal entries so I could begin to sort through my material and organize dominant themes in my writing. I approached this task as a necessary chore to complete for dissertation process, but I was not expecting data coding to be a powerful experience in itself. Re-reading my journal allowed me to re-live the school year on an accelerated rate. In addition to re-living emotional, painful, celebratory and enlightening experiences again, the pace of the re-living experience allowed to me to recognize shifts in my thinking, teaching, and relationships.

After thirteen years of teaching, I’m used to change. Every year we have changes in students, administration, staff, policies, and expectations for both teachers and students. I’ve always assumed my own identity to be relatively fixed amongst these changes. While my classes, duties, and responsibilities changed, the notion of my teacher self as remaining fundamentally consistent was always taken for granted. However, a re-reading of my journal revealed changes not only in my classroom dynamics and teaching practices, but also my own shifting attitudes and beliefs.

I found satisfaction in some changes, particularly changes in my classroom dynamics, my relationships with my students, and my students’ relationships with each other. Earlier journal entries showed a struggle to get students to think on a more critical
level and showed frustration over flat or almost non-existent classroom discussions.

Reading my journal allowed me to witness the evolution that took place as students began “dipping their toes” into more critical conversations. Eventually, they were diving into topics that took us deeper than I was prepared for. I enjoyed reading how my students’ personalities and cognition developed throughout the year as they became closer with each other as well as myself. Jackson (2012) says that students’ classroom engagement increases when they are affirmed and given content and context to address sociocultural issues. He adds that students’ individual and collective identities allow them to build new knowledge based on information they already know (Jackson, 2012). Many of my students later revealed to me that they never realized that they were learning through our talks because it didn’t fit in with their traditional understandings of classroom instruction. A re-reading of my journal entry gives evidence of their growing body of knowledge as well as demonstrates their increasing ability to think and discuss critical matters that was a direct result of becoming a body of co-learners through classroom discussions.

The evolution from wary strangers to groups of kids posing for impromptu end-of-the-year group photos brought joy and satisfaction to my teacher self. However, the changing profile of the class raised some vital issues that equally troubled my critical self. As I look through those end-of-the-year informal group photos, I wonder: who is missing? Often, the students that are not present are the very students that were the topics of my journal entries earlier in the year. For example, I look back to my 4th period 21st Century Art class, decidedly one of my favorite sections of the year. They were easy to teach: cooperative, respectful of one another, and always engaged in the material. But what happened to Jasmine, the Black female student in my 4th period who refused to take a gym
locker? She only lasted about a month in the school before she was transferred to Truman Alternative School. James, the Black male student from my 4th period that wanted to join my 3rd period Art History class was given a 6-month assignment in a juvenile detention center for a parole violation, so he never finished the year. Marlesia Washington, the popular Black 12th grade female student who was making uncomfortable sexual comments towards a White female student, dropped out immediately following the holiday break. Rob, the Black Life Skills student who was threatening (White) Rachel, was sent to alternative placement and isn’t expected to ever return to the high school. How about the rambunctious 9th grade Black male students whose behavior concerned me in early September? Before the end of the first semester, Khalif dropped out, Malik moved back to North Philly, Wayne was transferred to Truman, and Dajon was removed from the class when he was assigned to self-contained special education classes. Eric was arrested in March. Of all the students I mentioned in this particular journal entry70, only Bobby remained in the class, and he failed for the year. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Tanieka was also moved to self-contained special education and spend most of her last months of school receiving in- and out-patient psychiatric treatments.

When I review my end-of-the-year group photos, I smile as I reflect back on my time with the students in the photo. But when I view these photos in relation to my journaling, it is bittersweet. The majority of the students on my September rosters that were, at some point, identified as “troublemakers” (by myself or others) didn’t last the school year. Many didn’t return for the 2014-15 school year, either. As of the fall of 2014, Eric and James remain in detention centers. Tanieka and Dajon have been placed in the same self-

70 Referring to “journal entry 1: Above all, maintain order,” found in Chapter Six.
contained special education classroom where Tanieka claims “she isn’t learning anything because the kids in there are so bad.” Other students tell me that Marlesia is going to try and earn her GED this year, but I don’t know the whereabouts of Rob, Jasmine, Malik, Khalif, or Wayne. They seem to be forgotten by everyone in our school. A distant, bad memory, or dispensable and easily disposable? Meanwhile, Mackenzie has moved on to Penn State, Jacquie is earning good grades in her 10th grade year and Amber is enjoying all the benefits of being a (White, female) senior this year. All of these girls beamed great smiles in their end-of-the-year photos.

Almost every year that I’ve taught at Kennedy, my September rosters are quite full and I struggle to find enough desks and seats to accommodate the amount of students I’ve been assigned to teach. I do this with knowledge that my class lists will fluctuate and I will eventually have a reasonable class size. Until I re-read student names’ in my journal entries from the beginning of the year, I never gave much consideration as to the means of decreasing the extra population of students in my classroom. Where is my surplus of students going? As a teacher, I feel a sense of relief when I finally have enough chairs for each student and I believe smaller class sizes make for more manageable teaching, but I know it is not only the amount of students in my class, it is also who has been removed. I feel guilty for acknowledging that part of the classes’ beautiful transitions from stranger students to respectful groups of co-learners correlates to the gradual omission of the students that caused most of the classroom disruptions (either in my class or elsewhere). Unfortunately, many of my students’ change of placements to special education or alternative placements are direct results of teacher and administrator discourse. Some are subtle recommendations while others are direct results of intentional documentation to
create a “paper trail” that will make a solid case of transfer or expulsion. The very discourse that professional educators, like myself, engage in limit so many children from fulfilling their true educational abilities for the sake of easier classroom management for the teacher. Not only do teachers, administrators, and school personnel need to examine their own biases, but it is critical to examine how they participate in discourses with others and consider the consequences of their own speech and actions on the lives of the youth they serve.

I would like to think of myself as an exception from contributing to any teacher discourse that privileges classroom order over an individual’s education, but my journal entries show me that this is not necessarily true. Though I directly dispute or remove myself from conversations about creating “paper trails” to lead to a students’ removal, I notice a particular emphasis on classroom management in my journal entries earlier in the year. In fact, of the seventeen journal entries I wrote in the month of September, only six of them had nothing to do with issues relating to classroom management, control, discipline, or behavior. The other eleven entries discussed, at varying levels, concerns about student behavior or discipline interfering with learning. It seems that my daily teacher reflection was dominated by notions of domination as I struggled to get particular students to confine, at least on some level, to expected school behaviors in my classroom. Less than half of my October entries touch on these management issues, and by the month of November, I only mention it once. Eventually, my journal entries transitioned into writing that was completely compromised of acknowledgements of the “good girls” and “bad boys” dichotomy, thoughts on conversations about racism or sexism with my students, or contemplations of engagements of discourse with colleagues or parents. I would like to pat
myself on the back for becoming more reflective of the critical issues of racism and sexism in my school context as the year progresses, but I can’t help but notice that the ability to reflect on these matters takes place only after many of the “troublemakers” have been removed from my classroom, thus allowing me to think about topics beyond classroom management. It’s not uncommon (or even unreasonable) for teachers to want classrooms free of distractions so they can focus on teaching and learning as opposed to classroom management. However, it becomes an issue when students are simply omitted from the classroom and the discourse of this removal process is part of the “natural” discourse of the school environment.

Many of my colleagues, including myself, left the 2013-14 school year thinking that it was one of the most challenging years we’ve had in a long time. Not including my first year of teaching, it was definitely the most challenging year I’ve ever had. Fights and truancy problems seemed to be everyday issues. On top of these problems, increased pressure from federal mandates to promote high test scores continues to give teachers in schools labeled as “low performing” or “under performing” little freedom to make informed decisions about their teaching and deprives them of a sense of professionalism (Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliot, Guttenburg, & Kamii, 2006). For as long as I can remember, Kennedy High School’s standardized test scores have earned us labels associated with “under” or “low performing,” placing years’ worth of pressure and scrutiny on its faculty. Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliot, Guttenburg and Kamii (2006) also note that low-performing urban schools and districts fail to give teachers the support they need to carry out these

71 “Troublemakers” here describes the label that has been assigned to students by school personnel. I use quotes here to signify that I understand the way these students are made subjects of teacher discourse, but not to say that I agree that these students are, in fact, troublemakers.
mandates. Their findings certainly echo the experiences of many of Kennedy’s teachers. Last year, teacher attrition and satisfaction hit an all-time low, resulting in many teachers leaving and many more taking part of a large-scale grievance against the district for unworkable conditions. For me, the unreasonable paperwork requests and lack of discipline code enforcement that troubled many teachers were mere inconveniences in relation to the trials experienced through the act of journaling. After my initial reflections focused on classroom management, my journal entries started reflecting on the experiences of my students and how I listen to and participate in various oppressive discourses. The more these entries exposed sexism and racism in practice, the more rage was expressed through my writings. Gradually, my writings transitioned from individual antidotes to critiques of our entire school policy, to the long-term social effects these policies have on students and the community. The action that comes about as a result of this study follows the reflection, analysis and conclusion processes. With this information and findings, I have positioned myself and my readers to understand the result of one’s own biases and discourses on educational policy and students’ lives. We— both myself and my readers— have the responsibility to bring this information to colleagues, employers, professors, and educational policymakers to bring attention to the way we communicate with students, each other, and communities as large.

Discussion

A crisis is a turning point, a moment when conflict must be dealt with even if we cannot resolve it. It is a tension that opens a space of indeterminacy, threatens to destabilize social structures, and enables a creative uncertainty (Reinelt, 1998 in Holman Jones, 2005, p. 766).
Journaling allowed me to finally give a direct and concrete context to all of the reading and researching I've performed over the past few years. It has allowed me to make sense of what I’ve already known and experienced, and also revealed new knowledges. Holman Jones (2005) says that autoethnography leads to a triple crisis of representation, legitimization, and praxis; resulting in the play of: how much does the scholar know, how does he or she know it, and what can he or she do with this knowledge in the world? How do we share what we know and with what effect? (Holman Jones, 2005).

The effects of my research have already revealed itself through my on-going practice that took place during the research period. The transition to passively listening to Amber’s accounts of rule-breaking to actively seeking an awareness of Mackenzie’s exploitation of privilege are a direct result of writing about the topic over a period of several months. However, the implications for my work reach much further than my own classroom practice. By illuminating discourses that appear in my school, I am also framing many conversations that take place in schools everywhere both as a way to invite scholars into the daily conversations of educational life to give a better understanding of “the personal, concrete, and mundane details of experience as a window into understanding relationships between self and other or individual and community” (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 766).

Through these seemingly mundane accounts, prevalent teachers’ attitudes, values, conflicts, and ethics become more visible. For the practicing teacher, an example of self-examination can lead to a teacher’s own transition in their teacher identity and practice as the injustices and oppressions in their own teaching context can be revealed through the process of a focused, year-long journal. Additionally, an encouragement to explore the colorblind and/or genderblind discourses of their own classrooms/schools can lead to
more just schools if large groups of teachers begin to alter the way they communicate to and about the students they teach. For the pre-service teacher, a sample of a teacher’s daily moral conflicts as situated in, with, or against administrative mandates or regulations can provide a sort of case study as they prepare themselves for ethical tensions in their own careers. Holman-Jones (2005) charges authoethnographers to capitalize on complicity of writing and create texts that allow their readers to be implicated by engaging the audience on location and forcing readers to create their own texts. I will address all three audiences (scholars, practicing teachers, pre-service teachers) when I discuss implications for practice and personal/professional development by exploring the crises of living with and within structural confines and my fantasies of empowerment.

**Empowerment within structure: Limitations and possibilities**

In 2003, Stuhr’s invited lecture at the National Art Educational Association National Conference acknowledged pre-service and practicing teachers’ hesitations to implement provocative lessons in their own public, K-12 classrooms, despite their acknowledgment of these lessons’ importance for social learning. Rolling (2003) notes that many art teachers “are caving to the pressure to produce standardized art students,” despite the teachers’ intuition to defy measurement and rules (p. 25). Hallquist (2008) echoed these sentiments, showing that interviews with art teachers reveal fears of decreasing administrative support or even losing their job, resulting in the creation of off limit topics and placing the concerns of the audience (school community) above the concerns of the artist. Many scholars, including Stuhr (2003) focus on the theoretical support for continuing to push boundaries of art education into areas of social injustices. Hallquist (2008), writing for the
audience of practicing teachers, offers practical advice to work within administrative regulations by suggesting artists’ statements to give context to student work and differentiating between silencing student exploration and censoring student displays. I would argue that an art teacher is not only limited in how they allow students to create or display their work; they are also restricted by the dominant discourses exercised in their school community and administration, potentially silencing, hindering, or limiting their educational epistemologies. Wegwert (2014) speaks to a teacher culture of fear that is constructed around discourses of cautions and consequences between colleagues and administrators and is heightened by media’s general assaults on education. It’s difficult to truly appreciate these fears, restrictions, and pressures without current, relevant personal experiences.

I live in a space of constant conflict between my ethical beliefs as a teacher-scholar and the limitations that are created by discourses of professional practice. It’s the same battle that wages between my academic self that tells me to continue to push boundaries with my pragmatic teacher self that tells me to find a way to quietly exist within these boundaries. I am not satisfied with subtle or quiet resistance. My husband observed that the stress of last year’s school term became increasingly visible as the year progressed. He also noticed an increase in my expressions of frustrations with my administration, greatly in part to my feelings of my own inability to resist the injustices that I was writing about in my journal. Smith (2013) says, “essentially, we are all guilty of being a part of this machine whether by turning the oppressive gears ourselves, by ‘buying in,’ or idly sitting by for fear that we are only a powerless individual... Do we allow ourselves to be trapped in a reality
that is riddled with injustices, using the excuse that ‘I’m just one person?’ The real question is, ‘who am I?’” (p. 41).

My work doesn’t provide a sample of exemplary resistance or empowerment. My conversations with colleagues and administrators simply demonstrate my own negotiation between my moral and ethical beliefs and my need for self-preservation. My privilege as a White, female teacher protects me from having to consider the impact of my ethics or my desires for belonging. To answer Smith’s (2013) question of “who am I”: I am a teacher-researcher who is presenting what is unapparent on the surface to my teaching and scholarly colleagues. I am showing the nuances of my manipulations and negotiations in a sexist and racist structure that has employed me for over a decade. My resistance might not empower practicing or future teachers to change their own school structure, but it acknowledges that their ethical struggles exist in others. I might not be able to write a story of action to legitimate social justice, critical race, or feminist pedagogy theories, but I demonstrate how it lives daily in a teacher’s mind and practice to illuminate the effects of teachers’ beliefs on their practice so that educational stakeholders, teachers, and teacher educators can begin having difficult conversations regarding the effects of their discourses.

Stuhr (2003) acknowledges that

the reality is that rarely are any social changes accepted full scale in institutional practice. I have heard that the most one can hope for in implementing social change is a corrosive action at the edges of such institutions, which slowly, over time dissolves the whole. However, public schooling has been reported to be an extremely difficult institution to change (p. 312).

I am still uncertain about my ability to make a significant change in the institutional structure of my school. However, I am hopeful that my scholarly work will start conversations about the complexity of a teacher’s racial, gender, moral, and professional
identities and how they may come to play in the context of U.S. public K-12 schools, opening the door for more discussions of how teachers can enact change and practice a critical social justice pedagogy within the limited boundaries set forth by their institution’s structural systems.

**The Fantasy of empowerment verses the un-glamorous work of self-reflection**

Ivanshkevich (2013) discusses the fantasy of empowerment in her work with girls who are in trouble with the law and whose life experiences are dramatically different from her own. She found challenges in suspending her judgment, helping the girls look beyond societal labels and stigmatizing experiences, and coming to terms with her own pedagogical fantasy of their empowerment (Ivanshkevich, 2013). I consider my own pedagogical fantasy: the first movie inspired by the true story of an art teacher, Jessica Kirker, as she recognized and eventually stopped all racist and sexist discourses in her high school. The movie would follow similar formats of popular Hollywood teacher films such as *Dangerous Minds* (1995) and *Freedom Writers* (2007); I would initially struggle with the school’s restrictive ways, but I would gain the support of my students and, together, we would fight and overcome all injustices. I would be hailed a hero and all of my students would go on to enrich society in meaningful ways. The whole empowering and inspirational story could be told in an hour and half Hollywood production. Like most Hollywood-produced stories about education, the teacher remains the central figure where the students play supporting roles that serve to give validity to the educator’s greatness.

Fantasies of pedagogical empowerment are dangerous because they often assume expertise, innocence, and infallibility in the teacher and a needy inability in his or her
students who seem to exist on the periphery. In fact, these fantasies seem to conflict greatly with feminist pedagogy that allows for students to take an active part in their learning and recognizes the politicalness of teaching (Buffington & Lai, 2011). In reality, I've found that empowerment is possible, but it is much messier and difficult than a fantasy would account. Realities of pedagogical empowerment are riddled with challenges, failures, and uncertainty.

As I seek empowerment through dismantling racist and sexist discourses in my school, I had to examine the discourses and my interactions with them. Bell (2002) uses Feagin’s (2001) concept of “sincere fictions” to refer to images of White merit and moral superiority that shape the views and attitudes of many Whites who profess colorblindness (p. 237). She calls them “sincere” because those that espouse them truly believe themselves to be colorblind and non-discriminatory, but she simultaneously calls these professions “fictions” in that they ignore the enduring realities of racism in the U.S. in favor of optimistic tales of social progress that bolsters White decency and goodness (Bell, 2002, p. 237). Bell (2002) adds that while White teachers are professing their own innocence, they are closing out possibilities of analyzing and changing school practices that may disadvantage students of color in favor of a passive support of an unjust status quo that perpetuates White privilege.

In accordance with Bell's (2002) beliefs, I am not, in any way, professing innocence. My tale is, in no way, an optimistic tale of social progress. Rather, my work demonstrates the pain, guilt, uncertainty, disappointment, and hesitation that can come with analyzing one’s own practice and speech and recognizing how it aligns to the status quo discourses of his or her environment. We can't work on the behalf of others until we can free ourselves
I can’t take on racist and sexist discourses in my school until I establish my own place within these discourses. Doing so, however, has been an ugly process. One day I find myself living out my fantasies as my students tell me I’m an exception to the racist/sexist teachers in the school, proclaiming our allegiance and securing my own identity as the empowering art teacher. A week later, a conversation with a student or parent leaves me asking myself, “am I racist? Am I sexist? How racist and/or sexist am I?” Despite my teacher fantasies to write a dissertation that proves my ability to help students overcome all oppression, my teacher tale is not that uplifting. When life experiences are partial, fragmented, and constituted and mediated by language, one cannot tell their story in any complete way (Holman-Jones, 2005). Rather than telling a story of a realized pedagogical fantasy, I have sought to expose the challenges, conflicts, and crises created by exposure to racist and sexist school discourses and begin to demonstrate the range of possible choices one can make in a world of possibilities. I have come to accept that my work as a social justice oriented art teacher is still a work in progress. Ballengee Morris, Daniel, and Stuhr (2010) and Desai (2010) say that social justice in art education is a process and a goal guided by democratic social goals and values that seek to change the unequal distribution and access of resources that hamper equal participation of all social groups in society.

Lee (2013), Delacruz (2011), and Hafeli and McConaughy (2010), explore teachers’ hesitations and restrictions that inhibit this type of practice. Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliot, Guttenberg and Kamii (2006) identified teachers’ concerns for maintaining their own teaching values when confronted with conflicting views held by those around them. They noted a lack of freedom to make informed decisions throughout their workday, leading to a
lack of professionalism and drop in confidence of their teaching values (Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliot, Guttenberg & Kamii, 2006). Additionally, these teachers noted that building and district support often came in the form of workshops that were superficial and did not challenge dominate cultural values (Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliot, Guttenberg & Kamii, 2006).

Without collegial, school, and district support, is it even possible to create learning opportunities that challenge the dominant school and community culture in a forty-five minute class period per week or nine weeks per year in artroom? And, if not reinforced, will these beliefs created by the art teacher dissipate as they encounter other teachers, parents, friends, and community members through the course of their lives? Tatum (2009) says that to failure to give students an education of hope is the prescription for despair.

*How can I have a pedagogy of hope if I am insecure in my own ability to enact change in the relatively small context of this high school?* Although I previously stated that my teacher tale is not one of optimistic social progress, I do find some hope in many of my stories. Despite the fact that our Guerilla Girls posters were removed from the school walls, a lesson emerged within my lesson that taught students about the power of their voices against dominant discourses. At the end of the year, several students commented that their ability to cause a stir with their artwork resulted in one of their most memorable experiences of their freshman year. My Media and Visual Culture Studies classes developed from shy strangers who were troubled, yet silent, during lessons that exposed racism or sexism in popular culture to having lively debates about critical social issues and sharing powerful personal stories that had profound effects on their classmates’ (and teacher’s) attitudes and assumptions. Throughout the year, the flash mobs, environmental art displays, and
large-scale installations throughout the school challenged my students’ ideas of the power of art, images, and voice. Though my students’ artwork was often censored by administration, it first attracted the attention of their peers as well as many other teachers in the school and exposed ideas and approaches that are typically silenced in our particular school environment. Despite the fact that many of my colleagues were troubled by my classes’ flash mobs and installations, there were several teachers that not only supported my work, but commended my ability to make steps to shake up the status quo. Granted, the steps I make are small. Every time I take a step, I feel the heavy pressure of resistance against my action. It might slow me down, but it hasn’t stopped me yet. And although my story is too messy, unresolved, and fragmented to be made into a Hollywood movie, I do have hope in my ability to create change through my work as a teacher.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

My scholarly fantasy/[reality] wants my work to expose a sample of the racist and sexist discourses in schools for those who are not privy to these contexts, reveal examples of the moral and ethical conflicts that teachers face amidst these discourses, show the limitations of my own understandings and the moral conflicts these limitations create, divulge some of the structural and institutions discourses that alter teacher practice, and demonstrate various ways of navigation, participation, and manipulation of/in these different discourses. By understanding how students are positioned through teacher discourse, we can begin to understand some of the mechanisms of systematic racism and sexism in our society. Though I have previously stated that I don’t want my work to be a “how-to” guide to teaching or performing autoethnographic teacher research, there are
contributions that my work brings to existing literature. Additionally, this study opens up sites of possibility for future research. One goal is to encourage scholarship to re-consider texts that generalize the experiences of White, female teachers of diverse students. I hope the detailed accounts of my varied experiences show that racialized and gendered knowledges fluctuate and evolve. Furthermore, a teacher’s advancing knowledge might not necessarily lead to evidence of dramatically different practices, as institutional boundaries are often exercised over teachers that conflict with their social justice agendas.

A second goal would be for the encouragement of teachers who experience these moral tensions surrounding the racist and sexist discourses and practices of their school to share their experiences as well, so as to open up broader discourses among those who study race and gender in the classroom as well as with those who create or implement limiting structural regulations. In doing so, White, female teachers may be able to change the discourse surrounding teacher education and practice to acknowledge the complicated and ever-evolving nature of a teacher’s identity. There are various spaces for this process to take place including in-service professional development organized by teachers themselves or outside facilitators or through professional development opportunities provided through graduate courses or professional conferences. By networking in these arenas, teachers can work together, share experiences and ideas, and begin to seek avenues for large-scale changes in local and state teacher training requirements.

A final goal for my work is to show the range of influence of performing critical autoethnography and demonstrate the advantages for teachers, teacher-researchers, and researchers to perform this type of study. The following sections outline details of my goals for further research considerations.
Generalization of White, female teacher experience

Throughout my doctoral studies, I have read many works that imply White, female teachers are often ill-equipped to successfully teach diverse students (Bell, 2003; Cosier, 2011; Delpit, 2006; Donaldson, 2009; Howard, 2006; hooks, 2003; Watkins, 2001) and the fact that White, female teachers are still failing to meet the needs of students that are different from themselves shows that there are many gaps in our understanding of how to adequately prepare the teachers for multiculturalism in their pre-service and in-service careers. What has been missing from all of these works, however, is the acknowledgement of the wide continuum of how equipped or ill-equipped White, female teachers are over the course of a day, school year, or their teaching careers. Where would I fall on this continuum? If these authors visited my classroom, what assumptions would they make about my ability to teach diverse students? To an outsider, I think I might fall anywhere on that continuum depending on the conversation, the class, or the day. And in truth, my position can fluctuate daily as well. Therefore, in reality, it is impossible to accurately say if a White, female teacher is or is not effective in teaching their diverse students without a deep assessment of their beliefs and practices over time. Lowenstein (2009) warns against generalizing all White, female, pre-service teachers as deficit in their diversity knowledge. Understanding the dangers of generalizing students is common knowledge in educational research, but I fear that practicing teachers are often over-generalized as well. Therefore, I want to warn against making generalizations about all White, female teachers without knowledge of the regulatory discourses that limit their ability to teach what they know to be right and just. Furthermore, work with practicing teachers needs to be honest, non-judgmental, and give proper acknowledgement to the complexity of the social and
professional contexts of a teacher’s environment and the care they take to navigate many different types relationships within these spaces.

Adherence to an administrative mandate that is known to be sexist and/or racist (such as enforcing a sexist dress code or repeatedly assigning low-academic achieving Black male students to a general technology education courses) may come with great ethical conflict, but fear of losing ones position, family’s livelihood, healthcare, and retirement security are powerful motivators for acquiescence to these unjust policies. Additionally, I would posit that many teachers might feel conflicted by discrepancies in their practice and personal values, but have trouble finding the time and resources to fully begin to understand what’s creating their feelings of discord. I have the choice to leave teaching, but I wonder how much change I could enact from the outside. If I do stay, how much pushing back can I do before I am deemed insubordinate and forced out? Am I willing to lose my own livelihood to prove a point? More importantly, would the change I created be worth it?

Prior to my own doctoral studies, I knew there was a critical element missing from my teaching that would help me address the injustices around me, but I wasn’t afforded the opportunity to dig deeper into issues until I sold my house, left my job, and pursued my own academic inquiries. However, my position as a single woman without children afforded me the opportunity to leave; a rare privilege that many of my colleagues with families do not possess.

Granted, my research has shown that conversations with colleagues would certainly imply everything including colorblind/genderblindness to outright, explicit racism and sexism in many of my co-workers. I am not, in any way, trying to justify or even de-value
the oppressive nature of these discourses. Throughout my career, I have been guilty of making definitive evaluations of teaching colleagues’ practices and identities as overtly racist or sexist and I am not excusing these acts of oppression. However, I am saying that many teachers are very calculating in their attempts to be socially accepted by their colleagues and maneuver through institutional mandates, all while still considering their racialized and gendered position as teachers of diverse students. Researchers need to be aware of these conflicts so they can pick up on subtle cues that might reveal the true complexity of the teacher’s gendered and racialized identity and beliefs.

**Teacher-researchers’ voices and an audience to listen**

In today's data/evidence-driven, paperwork-inundated educational climate, is it possible to give teachers a chance to think about their racialized and gendered beliefs? Hopefully my work shows that although this is a long and difficult task, it is absolutely necessary as evidenced by how much my own racialized and gendered understandings made their way into my professional discourses and practices. However, given the lack of administrative support for the topics explored in my work and over-emphasis on standardized testing, I don’t foresee a professional development program featuring a workshop on racialized and gendered educational discourses. (Even if these topics were addressed, I don’t think they would be adequately introduced in our typical three-hour session time). Nor can I conceive of time during the school day that can devote adequate time to these issues. Today’s teachers have many demands placed upon them. College letters of recommendations, coaching positions, chaperoning duties, parent contacts, IEP and 504 meetings that take place before or after school, and musical/theatrical
performances to attend consume so much time beyond the planning lessons, preparing materials, and grading student work associated with the role of teaching. Many of my colleagues express the need for practical knowledge that will help them become more effective and productive over heavily theoretical and on-going deconstructions of their identity. *Who has time for that?* This task seems particularly tedious when media and visual culture has already provided explicit directions of how to act through stories that express concrete, positive images of colorblind and genderblind teachers.

As I previously mentioned, we can’t work on the behalf of others until we can free ourselves (Milner, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial to engage teachers in their own identity work, particularly teachers of diverse students. But where does this engagement take place? If it’s not done during the confines of the school day or introduced during professional development, graduate studies might be the next appropriate venues. Unfortunately, neither of my Masters programs ever seriously addressed these topics, despite the high enrollment of White, female teachers in these programs and the universities’ proximities to a large, diverse, major U.S. city. Doctoral studies are unobtainable dreams for many teachers with families to care and provide for. So where is the opportunity to discuss these ideas?

I support the work of other scholars that suggest pre-service teachers need to be introduced to challenges and benefits of critical self-examination (Cosier, 2011; Klein, 2003; Lee, 2013; McDonald, 2008; Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011,) identity exploration (Adair, 2008; Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliot, Guttenberg & Kamii, 2006; Bell, 2003; Chizhik, 2003; Knight, 2006; Marxen & Rudney, 1999; Smith-Shank, 2000) and deconstruction of normalizing discourses (Acuff, 2013; Briggs & McHenry, 2013; Chizhik,
If these skills are developed before entering the classroom, I believe more teachers will be able to recognize the racist and sexist discourses in their surroundings and they will be better equipped to confront them. A teacher cannot rely solely on school- or district- provided professional development to challenge or inform their education paradigms. Most Masters’ degree programs only last two to four years, a relatively short time period compared to a whole teaching career. The professional development and learning has to come from within, and it is the role of the teacher to consider their own identity in their professional environment. These skills must be developed in undergraduate and graduate programs by professors that truly understand the intricacy of one’s teacher identity in relation to their surrounding discourses and how these discourses define, shape, and regulate their practices and beliefs to begin to show teachers ways to break away from discourses of oppression.

In the field of education, the failure to theorize the complexity of teachers’ desires and the process of resistance and conflict that characterize the learning of difficult knowledge of self –implication is a major theoretical oversight (Kellington, 2002). I agree with Kellington’s (2002) statement with my own literary observations. It seems that there are so many publications that unproblematically celebrate and essentialize the stories of the empowered teacher, the social justice teacher, the feminist teacher, or the critical race teacher. Likewise, many theoretical works speak generally about deficits in the knowledges, understandings, or practices of pre-service and practicing teachers that do not recognize the complexity of their position. My work demonstrates my own conflicts for the 2013-2014 school year, but this one story is not enough to understand the full range of gendered and racialized discourses that are discussed in schools throughout the United
States. Scholars need to work with teachers to produce more work that shows the conflict and challenges of teaching combined with the teacher’s own critical reflections of their decisions and actions so that those that who write and study education can begin to understand the complex nature of a teacher’s identity.

The need for more critical autoethnography

Rollings (2003) argues for the relevance in pursuing a “messing around with identity constructs” (p. 38) and keeping the “self as the instrument” (Eisner, 1991, p. 33 in Rolling, 2003). While some may argue that autoethnography can be self-indulgent (Denzin, 2014), I believe that it is valid to use the self as the instrument if you are using yourself, your experiences, and your knowledges as a way to take readers to a place where they couldn’t otherwise travel on their own (Toyosaki, 2012). Holman-Jones (2005) says that autoethnography needs to be explicitly written to “stage arguments, embody knowledge and politics, and open an community to itself and the world in ways that are dangerous, visceral, compelling, and moving” (Dolan, 2001a, p. 62 in Holman-Jones, 2005) as a means of moving readers to social, cultural, and political action. I agree with many of the authors that make the argument for the power of critical autoethnographic work. Moreover, I think this work is particularly important for the field of education, particularly art education.

Art education draws in many educators concerned with expressions of experience, emotions, remembrances, and social/cultural/political beliefs. Art teachers are familiar with using their own self as the subject of their artwork. However, based on my experiences, traditional, public, “low” or “underachieving” K-12 schools are typically motivated by standardized test scores and other quantitative data. As a qualitative-minded
person, I find the lack of experiential relevance in educational discourse to be troubling. I see race and gender discussed as identity markers for score reporting, but my students are not represented as individuals with unique stories to report. In fact, one professional development session grouped teachers together to build sample course schedules for students based on their state standardized test scores, gender, race, and primary language. Personally, I believe a student’s art journal and reflections (or any other qualitative data) to be a much better source of information for course scheduling, but I was a minority in this notion. In a room full of English and math teachers, the art teacher’s objection to the activity was met with silence and stares.

I think of Audre Lorde’s work, *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House* (1984). Though she was talking about the work of women scholars challenging dominate male discourses that advocate for mere tolerance of women’s differences, the notion can correlate to the study and practice of art education. Art education researchers need to create bodies of work that speak to our areas of expertise: expression, emotions, experience, and personal/social narratives. If our artwork can speak to these aspects, our research should as well. By introducing more critical autoethnography into education and art education research and demonstrating its usefulness in research and practice, we can begin to dismantle the dominant discourses that favor quantitative over qualitative and student/teacher statistics over student/teacher stories.

**Autoethnographic Summary**

It is to oneself one comes to practice the autobiographies of self-shattering, revelation, confession, and reconfiguration. Self-excavation precedes the self-understanding, which precedes self-mobilization, although any rigidly linear conceptions of self-reflexivity necessarily reify subjectivity (Pinar, 2004).
I began my K-12 teaching career in 2001 as an energetic, enthusiastic, and optimistic White woman from a rural and homogenous suburb. When I began teaching at Kennedy High School in 2002, my optimism manifested itself in my own well-meaning and tragically ill-informed identity construct of a White savior for poor, Black children. The discourses of my school, however, conflicted with my own educational philosophies and I had a hard time understanding the source, cause, and various outcomes of this discrepancy. Furthermore, I was oblivious to how these discourses were re-constructing my own educational philosophies and practices as I became further embedded in my role of a teacher within this particular school community. Instead, I believed this discrepancy of my beliefs and school practice remained a problem due to the incorrect values of everyone else.

Initially, I wanted to look at pre-service teacher preparation to understand why teachers continued to use racist and sexist practices, despite the scores of research that evidenced its detriments. It seemed to me that college-level education programs were not preparing new teachers for environments such as Kennedy HS. However, when I returned to my teaching context after two years of doctoral studies, I noticed that the younger teachers often exhibited the exuberance I once saw in myself. These problems were not necessarily the direct result of young teachers’ ignorance, but an entire dominating discourse that was revealed through conversations, policies, and practice. Nevertheless, I was hopeful that my new knowledge would create immediate change as I challenged these dominant discourses and exposed their racist and sexist flaws. Once again, I could be the savior.

My return to teaching did not bring the revolution I had hoped for. Within the first few weeks of school (maybe even the first few days), I felt my rebellion getting silenced and ignored as it was dismissed as academic blather. It felt eerily similar to my first-year mentor telling me to throw out everything I learned at the university because my undergraduate education was out of touch with the reality of teaching. It is not uncommon for novice teachers to be coached by veteran teachers to ignore their philosophical beliefs in favor of practical matters on classroom management (Wegwert, 2014), but I thought my status as a veteran teacher should have granted me some leniency to explore what I have been researching. Conversely, it seemed that when I resumed my position amidst the completion of my PhD, I was supposed to return only to resume the normal operating order. Challenges to the status quo were not warmly received. I piqued the attention of a few social-justice oriented teachers, who advised that our pedagogy must be practiced under
the radar, so as not to attract the attention of “the powers that be.” One of these teachers told me that “if [administration] knows what we’re doing in our classrooms, they will find a way to stop it. Go ahead and bring these [social justice] topics up with the kids, but know that [administration] doesn’t trust in our ability to do so.” He went on to describe instances where he facilitated acts of student resistance that resulted in strong lectures, subtle threats, and the thwarting of future actions (similar to demands on me to request prior approval before hanging socially-oriented artwork).

Still, in those first few days and weeks, I still considered myself to be the enlightened one whose personal discourses and practices would emulate the kind of teaching I have been reading about for the past two years. However, as the months drew on, I felt the same discouragement that I experienced in my early career. This time, I had a secure knowledge of the situation, but felt powerless to change it. These teachers don’t get it. These administrators don’t get it. They are wrong, I am right, and yet they refuse to listen to me! It never occurred to me to take a serious look at what I was saying.

I performed a critical autoethnography. Boylorn and Orbe (2014), Ellis and Bochner (1996, 2000), Denzin (2006, 2014), Holman Jones (2005), Jewett, (2008), Miller (2005), Rolling (2003, 2008), Tedlock (2000), and Toyosaki (2012) taught me how. In this study, I examined my own role as a participant amongst the dominating racialized and gendered discourses of my school environment. I studied how I (a White, female teacher) navigate, participate, and manipulate gendered and racialized discourses throughout the school year. I also examined the dominating discourses and practices of my school as I considered how my own educational philosophies and critical pedagogies were restricted by educational authoritative powers. I sought to demonstrate how my own values are compromised by
institutional structures as a way for researchers and future teachers to understand the complexity of teachers’ decisions in the classroom.

I was not prepared for this study to examine myself as much as I would be examining my role within a particular school. However, as the study was conducted, I learned about how my need for collegial support and fears of isolation lead me to participate in racist and sexist conversations in ways that I didn’t respect. Furthermore, despite the fact that the school year brought about incredible revelations in my classroom, there were more instances of racist and sexist practice in my own classroom than I ever expected to witness. This was supposed to be a study that implicated others, not myself.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated the complexity of gender and racial identity constructions and how these identities are positioned in educational institutions, particularly as exhibited in a White, female teacher of diverse students with a focus on Black students. Bell (2002) notes that these constructions are not individualistic, but supported by an entire social fabric, particularly reinforced by homogenous communities and the media. The faculty at Kennedy School District is a relatively homogenous community as well: most teachers are White, middle-class women. Kennedy HS, like many public schools, teaches about Civil Rights and the Women’s Movements as a past event in American history; implying that racial and gender segregation and discrimination ended in the 1960s and 1970s and these identity markers no longer matter. I posit that many teachers have also been taught that these are not contemporary issues, reinforcing the notion that race and gender inequalities are not worthy of much consideration. Combined with ambiguous
notions of multiculturalism (Chung & Miller, 2011, Pawley, 2006) that often shows up in schools as marketing of tolerance (Desai, 2010), most school parties believe that these institutions are free of discrimination. Despite the growing body of evidence that suggests many White teachers are continually oppressing Black students, and particularly Black male students, most continue to claim colorblindness and genderblindness, closing off conversations that implicate teachers’ part in racial or gender stratification. But whether it is acknowledged or not, teachers act as gatekeepers and have the power to do as much damage passively as they do actively (Bell, 2002).

In reality, evidence shows that Black students continue to be overcorrected, ignored, isolated, and underserved by White teachers in U.S. public schools (Milam, 2008). Specifically, Black male students are over-punished and marked as troublemakers (Davis, 2010, Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Ferguson, 2003, Morris, 2005) and assumed to be deficit in knowledge (Bianco, Leech & Mitchell, 2011; Fanon, 1967; Henfield & Washington, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), while White female students serve as the benchmark for the ideal student (Bettie, 2003; Ferguson, 2003; Kunjufu, 2005, Walkerdine, 1994). As Black students, particularly Black males, continue to be over-punished and over-identified as special education (Kunjufu, 2005), they often receive care and resources that they don’t necessarily need, resulting in a negative effect on their own self-esteem (Schweik, 2009). At the same time, those proving the educational services are bolstering their own sense of superiority and benevolence (Synder & Mitchell, 2006). In my year of observing/journaling, I never heard of any faculty, staff, or administrator raising the possibility of sexism or racism in our school’s practice. Conversely, many instances arose where these same parties defended accusations of discrimination that came from students
or their parents. This homogenous community of teachers has seemed to form an alliance that armors itself under the veil of colorblindness and genderblindness, placing its membership further into opposition to its diverse student body. The *us-verses-them* mentality is clearly defined both by age and position, and also gender and racial markers. Though not every teacher in the school is friends or even friendly with one another, dominant discourses “those crazy/wild/out-of-control kids” position teachers as a common group that represents the Other: stable/grounded/in-control. No matter where we fall on the continuum of racist and sexist practices, the dominant discourses maintains the assumption of innocence and well-meaning on the part of the teacher or administrator, protecting us from ever having to do the challenging work of self-reflection.

Though I remain committed to working for social justice through gender and racial equality in school discourse, policy, and practice, this study exposed my own weaknesses as I fell in order with many dominant discourses, despite my own educational beliefs. This speaks not only to an individual’s conflict as they become negatively influenced by the discourses around them, but to the strength and immovability of these discourses when met with oppositions from individuals. Perhaps this can explain why so many universities prepare art education students to teach with social issues in mind, but these rarely get translated into everyday K-12 practices. Teacher education programs ill-prepare inexperienced teachers to critically respond to contexts laden with teachers’ fears and pressures associated with workplace socialization (Wegwert, 2014). However, knowledge of the powers of dominant and oppressive school discourses over an individual can only help our future. If researchers, pre-service, and practicing teachers come into these discourses with a better knowledge of their force and ability to silence opposition, then we
can begin to prepare a better strategy. It is not simply enough to teach future teachers about social justice art education, help them in recognizing their own gendered and racialized positions, and guide them to consider their identity as a teacher in relation to their educational belief statements. This must be combined with the construction of strategies that teachers can develop for themselves to help prepare them to navigate and maneuver through the seemingly immovable discourses and practices that they know to be racist and sexist.

The influence of these obstinate discourses and perceptions are strong because they exist far outside the boundaries of school walls. Beliefs are imparted on us daily from our families, communities, televisions, and our Internet (Smith, 2013). Teachers’ in-school and out-of-school autobiographies influence their curriculum and relationships with students (Kellington, 2002). Likewise, students’ personal histories and experiences influence what they bring to the classroom. When teachers and students come from different backgrounds, teaching and learning styles may clash; often to the detriment to the student. Culturally responsive pedagogy allows students to explore local knowledges and practices and allows them to learn in culturally familiar ways (Gay, 2000, Lai, 2012). The incorporation of feminist pedagogy encourages collaboration while dismantling teacher authority, allowing students and teacher to work simultaneously for social change (Buffington & Lai, 2011; Garber, 2003; Keifer-Boyd, 2007).

The artroom is the perfect space for welcoming pedagogies that are responsive to cultural and gender differences. The content of an art class gives the perfect space for considering one’s own representation in society. Jackson (2012) recommends that art teachers confront images that reinforce stereotypes with consideration of their historical
and cultural context to aid in the development of students’ sociocultural awareness while simultaneously affirming the life experiences of their diverse learners. In the 9th-10th grade contemporary art course that I teach, the majority of the curriculum focused on the work of women artists, artists of color, and issues of representation. In my 11th and 12th grade Media and Visual Culture Studies course, we looked at visual information throughout U.S. society to uncover the messages produced, and the effect these messages have on our identity as well as how we come to understand others. Popular U.S. media produces visual narratives that imply certain values and beliefs, even if these beliefs are unrealistic (Zander, 2007). Throughout the course of the school year, many of my art students learned to confront, challenge, and consider dominant social discourses through new, more critical, eyes. For most of my students, this was the first time they were exposed to these concepts and I believe the empowerment they derived from my coursework played a part in fostering many strong interpersonal relationships with my students. Though I find comfort in all of the various instances where students affirmed that I am the exception to their notions of the racist/sexist teacher, I know that my work is not done nor does it grant me innocence and exemption from continued self-exploration. As I use art and visual messages to teach them to situate themselves in dominant social discourses, I am still considering how I situate myself within dominant school discourses as I negotiate my role as a teacher with my own personal values as a critical race/feminist/social justice teacher/scholar. As long as I am an educator, this work is not over.

This dissertation study didn’t merely teach me something, it changed me as a teacher, researcher, and, potentially, a future teacher educator. Had I ended my K-12 teaching career after my two years of doctoral coursework, I have no doubt that this
dissertation would be a very different study. I would be able to continue to implicate *other teachers* (those racist and sexist teachers) with my own teacher identity safely protected. I could say I “could have/ should have/ would have” done things differently in my past career, but I would never have to face the challenge of living out those statements. Perhaps the most crucial element of this study, and the aspect that will set it apart from other studies about racism and sexism in school discourses and art education, is what was revealed through the implication of my own scholarly and teacher self. The opportunity and burden this brings is not afforded to most teachers-turned-scholars, but it will surely inform my practice for the rest of my career in art education.
References:


Coloma, R. (2008). All immigrants are Mexican, only Blacks are minorities, but some of us are brave: Race, multiculturalism, and postcolonial studies in U.S. education. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 24*, 32-46.


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**Education**

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**Recent Conference Presentations and Publications**


2014 Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference: *Are we all failures? The discursive positioning of art education in under achieving schools schools*, New Orleans, LA.


2014 Pennsylvania Art Education Association Conference: *Deconstructing ‘Natural’ Identities in Arts-Based Settings* (co-presenter: A. Pfeiler-Wunder), Seven Springs, PA.

2014 International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry: *Visual Methodologies and Teacher Learning: Qualitative Inquiry and Teaching Complexity* (co-presenters: S. Nolte, C. Hanawalt, J. Hyatt), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, IL.


**Leadership Positions and Awards**

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