

**Conjugating Selves:
Thinking-Making Difference, Whiteness, and Relational Orthographies in Higher
Learning**

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Justin Phillip Jimenez

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Dr. Michael Goh, Advisor

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The way to deal with the asymmetries and violent frenzies that mark the present is not to forget the future. The here and now is simply not enough. Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough.

-José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*

Working on this dissertation was no easy task. As a self-proclaimed perfectionist who labors over the minutiae, I often found myself stuck in many rabbit holes. (Truth be told, these rabbit holes kept me engaged and enriched my thinking). However, all things considered, this project was important for me to bring to fruition. As I pored over my data and experiences, there were so many ruptures of illumination and healing. Invoking Kyla Wazana Tompkins, there is so much beauty when you are keenly attuned to the “refractive effects of language.”

While not described explicitly, the theories, experiences, and practices contained in this project limn the vicissitudes of queer phenomenology of everyday life. Queerness exhorts us to care differently for difference, to feel the intensities of a convivial politics that reveal states of debility, capacity, and disability, and to ultimately demand better than the quagmires of the present. If anything, this project sought to unveil, deconstruct, and reconstruct difference and relationality that moves towards justice and liberation. It is the beginning of many conversations to come. I am motivated by the co-resistance efforts to “seed better worlds” and “grow just futures” (Chiara Francesca).

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ABSTRACT

In this era wrought by neoliberal capitalism and emboldened whiteness, there has been renewed interest in higher education spaces to better engage racial difference and social justice. The character of these engagements, however, have been questioned. Education scholars have argued that institutional and disciplinary discursive practices of difference largely obscure social and political particularities (Ladson-Billings). Meanwhile, scholarship from critical ethnic studies and critical university studies has gestured towards an exploration of the affective attachments that produce unsustainable and harmful structural conditions for people of color (Ahmed, Melamed, Ferguson). To date, however, there has been little work on entangled intra-actions, or the simultaneous constitution of subjectivities and performances, between these discursive and material understandings of racial difference in higher learning. As a result, research and practice endorse a binary narrative either privileging discursive constructivism (looking to what discourses signify as basis for critique) or materialism (looking to how discourses emerge and work). Without adequate analysis of the content that inheres relational/pedagogical events that broach racial difference, including bodies, spaces, orientations, discourses, and objects, we foreclose opportunities to think carefully of the complex ethics and politics of living within the uneven distributions of precarious life.

My project addresses this gap by analyzing the intra-actions of varied becomings (myself and with my students) around diversity work in the present conjuncture of political emergency. Through a rhizomatic (auto) ethnographic and philosophical bricolage with examination of the contexts, processes, and activities of doing diversity work in institutional or disciplinary learning spaces, I argue that many engagements with difference actually do not make a difference, regularly invoking aesthetic distancing (race and racism as happening out there) and reifying sentimental politics and hermeneutical violence. Ultimately, my transdisciplinary research shows that despite good intentions of pursuing diversity and social justice, when engagements with difference are inadvertently aligned with structures that maintain investments in whiteness and the racial status quo, they continue, if not proliferate, the racial inequities already present.

My dissertation consists of three papers to (1) read diversity “conjuncturally;” (2) draw attention to the intra-actions in an education course that produce a white liberalist intimate public; and (3) offer a speculative treatise on the potentialities of decolonial mood work (merging scholarship from decolonial thought and feminist new materialisms) to rethink relationality that is unmoored from white subjection in higher education and beyond. I also offer a creative narrative/parable interlude of a teacher candidate who embodies “Beckyism,” or particular white heterofeminine citizen-subject (can also be used to describe to the “Karen” phenomenon). Here, I provide a stylized fanfiction account that describes the everyday emotional registers and responses of a composite Becky throughout her course of study. Through “progressive” commitments such as equality, and social justice; and sentimental responses to historical atrocities and current social events, these (conditional) protestations made by Becky serve as a hedonistic mechanism for image management that hinges on the exploitation and social death of people of color.

In contrast to research that has emphasized the social construction of whiteness, this diffractive research captures the everyday and ambivalent productions and practices enacted through whiteness specifically in higher learning spaces. I theorize how investments in whiteness and diversity emerge, are managed, and reified when addressing a changing sociopolitical climate. This study intervenes by understanding how the claims of diversity can obscure meaningful engagements with power, historical particularities, and material realities. Also noting their predominance in educational spaces, this project attends to white women and their (im)material labor to shed new light on how contemporary racial and gender dynamics can affect the advancement of anti-racism, social justice, and equity. Moreover, this project challenges the representational coherence of research by employing alternative ways to engage language, voice, agency, positionality, and situated knowledge outside the traditional rubric of qualitative inquiry, empiricism, and data analysis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	VII
CONNECTING DOCUMENT	1
Context and Study	
PAPER ONE	35
Reading Conjuncturally, Messily: Thinking-Making Difference in an Education Course	
PAPER TWO	73
“But I’m Fair, Lovely, and Progressive!” The Ruses of White Liberalism within Anti-Racist Learning	
INTERLUDE	98
The World According to Becky: An Inverse Chronology of Humanity in a Teacher Preparation Program (A Parable)	
PAPER THREE	110
Toward Cosmopoetical Fabulations of Difference and Relationality: A Reflexive Theoretical Treatise on Otherwise Praxes in Education and Beyond	
POSTSCRIPT	132
Diversity in Crisis	
REFERENCES	136

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Virgie's Account on Representation	54
Figure 2. Eve on Identity and Makeup	57-58
Figure 3. Randy on University and Brown Emotions	58
Figure 4. Conceptual Speed Dating Activity Instructions	65
Figure 5. Dyad Work on Master's Tools (1)	66
Figure 6. Dyad Work on Women Redefining Difference	66
Figure 7. Dyad Work on Master's Tools (2)	67
Figure 8. Dyad Work on Santa Cruz Feminist Collective	67
Figure 9. Dyad Work on Women Redefining Difference	68
Figure 10. Dyad Work on Master's Tools and Santa Cruz Feminist Collective	69

CONNECTING DOCUMENT

Context and Study

Introduction

Diversity rhetoric is all too commonplace within the ethos of higher learning institutions. Much of this rhetoric broadly construes diversity as the management of human difference, which often invokes overly feelgood sentiments and static caricatures of people and culture (Ahmed, 2012; K yra, 2014; McKenzie, 2014). In this process of enfolding “acceptable” bodies, as in the case of liberal multiculturalism, there seems to be a symbolic shift towards progress, national maturity, social cohesion, and recognition (Melamed, 2011, 2014; Puar, 2007; Kelley, 2016). The work of diversity in this way necessarily performs a calculated and strategic politics of inclusion on the part of the institution to avoid confrontational impasses that invite critical scrutiny of the disciplinary modes of power, state, and capital (Ferguson, 2012). This preemptive liberal tactic notably maintains a reputed “good and ethical” outlook on life and society premised on optimism and multicultural happiness and ultimately valorizes the liberal humanist subject of the White, middle class, cisgender male as the “normative ontological benchmark.” Though I will also argue that White heterofemininity and liberal feminism, which largely comprises the spirit of the teaching profession, has also contributed to liberal discourses of diversity and marginalization. (Seawright, 2017, p. 177; Berlant, 2011; Ahmed, 2010). The privileging of this subjectivity and optimistic outlook thus undermines other genres of performing humanity (Wynter, 2003) and neutralizes the fraught histories endured by minorities “in the past” because of their ascribed difference (Povinelli, 2011).

Roderick Ferguson (2012) describes the administrative ethos of the neoliberal university as largely cultivated as a response to the insurgence of movements of minority difference (feminist and ethnic studies) in the sixties:

As power has negotiated and incorporated differences, it has also developed and deployed a calculus by which to determine the specific critical and ruptural capacities of those forms of differences. We may call this incorporation of modes of difference and the calculus that seeks to determine the properties and functions of those modes *as a will to institutionality* (p. 214).

In this way, the University carefully regulates the knowledge of difference that is deemed amenable to the administrative ethos and aims. Any confrontational impasse that invokes a crisis narrative, that is, an assault on Western knowledge or sensibilities or a conjuring of the barbaric past, engenders more policing, which is integral to liberalism's self-correcting maneuvers (Povinelli, 2002).

The University can also be described as an apparatus that is not corollary to, but necessarily advances state and capital to facilitate racialization. The Land Grant Mission and the Morrill Act of 1862 exemplify this aim by granting opportunity and freedom for some and not for others. These responses, among others, are reminders of the propensity for a genre of humanity characterized by white hegemony. Race, in these instances, becomes a consequential analytic to understand how diversity has been appropriated and appropriable for institutional control. In his incisive work on race, biopolitics, and black feminist thought, Alexander Weheliye (2014) insists:

Race be placed front and center in considerations of political violence, albeit not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes of differentiation and hierarchization, which are projected onto the putatively biological human body (p. 5).

This position is especially significant given the rise of state-sanctioned violence and policing, anti-black xenophobia, an ontology of fugitivity and the neoliberal carceral state.

Capital exploits life (and death) through accumulation and the persisting ideologies of individualism, liberalism, and the market rationalities of neoliberalism. So, while race has no essence, its fiction has been naturalized. This benefits and feeds capitalist modes of production, as capitalism is sustained when it accrues through uneven human capacities and relationships (Melamed, 2011, 2015; Robinson, 1983). Diversity then, plays up this abstraction and fetishization of race and by association capital to promote anti-racist desires that are inextricably linked to logics of commodification and consumption.

These biopolitical maneuvers and rationalities on figuring the differential have been incredibly pervasive in institutional life and certainly have application in the realms of education and teacher preparation.

How do teacher candidates, teacher educators, and the teacher preparation program as an institution espouse and engage with diversity? What is the relationship among Whiteness, knowledge, and difference in teacher preparation education? What are the possibilities of articulating knowledges of diversity outside the logics of proceduralism and the will to police forms of difference for adaptive state-capital hegemonies? I propose the University's aims to further the ostensive benevolence of institutionality and neoliberal and late-liberal governmentality (Foucault, 2007; Brown, 2006; Povinelli, 2011) upholds a fantasy of the "good and ethical life" without any critical apprehension of the biopolitical mechanisms of the inclusionary order. In other words, through hyper-credentialing, professionalism, order, depoliticization and possessive individualism, discourses and practices of diversity as evoked in institutional life, evade critique of the structural, material, bodily, and historical conditions that are paramount to understanding both the ways in which the character of relational encounters around difference is constructed (Melamed, 2014; Hong, 2006; Manalansan, 2003; Nguyen, 2012; Reddy, 2011; Ahmed, 2000; Winnubst, 2015, 2012; Goldberg, 2015). For this exploration, I use Povinelli's (2011) conception of late liberalism as a specific analytic for the governance of social difference. Povinelli (2011) describes late liberalism as:

A belated response to the challenge of social difference and the alternative worlds and projects potentially sheltered there ... In short, in late liberalism to care for difference is to make a space for culture to care for difference without disturbing key ways of configuring experiences – ordinary habitual truths. And thus to assess care in late liberalism is to assess the capacity of culture as an agent of care (p. 26).

In this dissertation, I draw from critical theory scholars such as Jodi Melamed, Roderick Ferguson, Alexander Weheliye, Fred Moten and Stephano Harney among other scholars, along with educational theorists to explicate the possibilities of thinking and enacting pedagogies of minority difference *otherwise* in teacher education and outside the dictums of institutionality that dislodge the regime of Man—that is male, white, colonial subjectivities—and strive towards convivial and ethical relationality and racial justice solidarity (Wynter, 2003; Puar, 2009; Seawright, 2017).

Courses on diversity in teacher education are highly contradictory and their aims are unclear. They are supposedly intended for students to learn about difference in the service of creating equitable teaching and learning environments. However, teacher candidates mostly learn about diversity in a culturally pluralistic and objectifying fashion that merely acknowledges something interesting worth consuming (foods, festivals, holidays; ascribed characteristics to a culture) thus essentializing student subjectivities in the process (Nieto, 2008; Davis, 1996; hooks, 1992). Moreover, the conflation and overdetermination of race and culture in courses often has teacher candidates succumb to complacency, stoking the white liberal alibi, recusing them from participation from broader sociopolitical processes (Chow, 2002; Puar, 2007, Seawright, 2017).

Additionally, this stoking placates or panders to students' white feelings and interests where issues of difference are but an individual issue of the psyche, rather than a constellation of accrued historical and discursive struggles born out of systematized oppressions (Tatum, 2007; Melamed, 2011; Ferguson, 2012; Matias, 2016). This manifests in many ways, including students who respond dismissively to diversity courses by claiming they have "learnt about diversity previously", or students who admit to disinterest in examining diversity issues because they are simply not interested in working in an "urban context" (Weilbacher, 2012). These courses fail to critique the systemic and structural arrangements that bring to bear on violence and inequity that mark the ways in which people relate to one another in the first place. The current conditions do not lend themselves to this striving towards an ethical relationality.

This study uses a bricolage methodology, comprised of autoethnography and critical ethnography, as well as an archival review and an intervention informed by critical affective studies to explore the hypothesis that the discourses and practices of diversity that often circulate in teacher preparation facilitate the (fantasy of the) good and ethical life presupposed by neoliberal governmentality. Attention to power relations around the allure, representation, management, and transmission of and engagement with diversity will enrich our understanding of the claims staked by multiple actors including teacher candidates, teacher educators, and the institution at large. This approach will also push the theoretical boundaries of "diversity" or "multicultural" education in teacher

preparation further to include perspectives from biopolitics, critical affect studies and Black feminist thought.

Research Problem and Context

Diversity has been broached for decades in the field of education, especially in teacher preparation. Increasingly, debates about diversity within education have centered around more effective methods to teach marginalized youth and the recruitment of more teachers of color (Sleeter & Milner, 2011). Surely, diversity in the terms described previously have been synonymous with racial justice. Critical multicultural education, and through its deployment of various discourses and practices of critical race theory and culturally relevant pedagogy has been instrumental to think about “diversity,” namely the significance of racism and its attribution to inequity. However, the teacher education program, under the auspices of the neoliberal and imperial university, has not been effective in preparing teacher candidates to think through diversity in critical ways that involves an examination of power and difference in a structure (Sleeter, 2012; Milner, 2010, Gilmore, 2002). This is due to a confluence of problems, some of which are due to the nature of the University itself, as well as in the domains of governance and accountability, curriculum and instruction, teacher education policies and programs, and teacher educators themselves (O’Brien, 2009; Allen et al., 2017). These issues contribute to the problems associated with a conceptual framing and prioritization of diversity: precisely that the actions in these domains reflect that diversity does not matter to develop dispositions and sensibilities to critically care for difference, in broader terms, as evidenced by turgid and bureaucratic standards and accountability measures that reduce the learning of diversity to a stand-alone class, checklists, and interpersonal/class management/disciplinary skills (Allen et al., 2017; Parsons & Wall, 2011; Milam, 2010; Sleeter, 2012). This learning is also divested from other coursework, and the sociopolitical and philosophical implications of education, more generally. These factors can understandably cause frustration, consternation, and resistance for teacher candidates and teacher educators alike (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Moreover, in most teacher preparation contexts, content knowledge, or subject matter expertise, is the primary focus which effectively forestalls attention to questions around philosophy and relationality.

Despite the preponderance of curricula and messaging around the ostensive significance of diversity, current exhortations towards diversity propound an understanding of students’ “culture” to identify the ways in which teachers can teach

resonantly to their students' lives, backgrounds, and interests. While this assertion to learn "to and through" diversity vis-a-vis culture may aid in cultivating meaningful relationships with students, there is a possibility that culture can be misappropriated that perpetuates inequities. Gloria Ladson-Billings, an education scholar who has written extensively about critical race theory and culturally relevant pedagogy, states that all too often her framework of culturally relevant pedagogy has been taken up in ways not originally envisioned. Ladson-Billings signals to the *poverty of culture* within institutional and interactional processes of teacher preparation that assert an imprudent conception of culture that pits a dominant, more desirable one (White) against a subjugated, deficit culture (minorities). Thus, aligning with the goals of a culturalization of politics, "a growing number of teachers have begun to dump all manner of behavior into a catchall they call 'culture.' Whenever [teacher candidates] seem not to be able to explain or identify with students, they point to students' culture as the culprit... How do we find a balance between total erasure of culture on the one hand and overdetermination on the other?" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 105). While culture can be an important point of departure, it appears race has been dismissed or displaced in culturally relevant pedagogy, which is antithetical to the original intention set by educational scholars.

The esprit de corps of teaching, namely White middle class, monolingual, cis-females, also often do not recognize their own selves as cultural beings, which also perpetuates antagonistic relationships with difference. Much like the description of the White liberalist alibi, these teacher candidates "see themselves as good antiracists by virtue of their antiracist feeling and desire for diversity" without understanding the accrual of their material and social privileges (Melamed, 2011, p. 37). This conferral of legitimacy, as neoliberalism exercises through "egoistic individualism, self-enterprise, and certain calculative practices" effectively perpetuates differential violences and instantiates new forms of privilege. Many of the issues around diversity in education also signal a compulsion from White heterofemininity to rescue, care and speak for others, impulsively while disdainfully attending to minority difference to fulfill the objectives of White morality through cultural assimilation and self-aggrandizement (Alcoff, 1991; Ortega, 2006; Cole, 2012; Matias & Zembylas, 2014, Matias, 2016)

Historically, teacher preparation programs have had a difficult time creating pedagogies that foreground the notion of inquiry that can be transformative towards helping teacher candidates teach all students, especially those who have been historically marginalized. Teacher candidates seldom have interruptive and meaningful opportunities to critically examine and reorient the enterprises of education and teaching, as well as their own presuppositions necessary to treat students equitably (Kim & Slapac, 2015; Milner, 2010; Valencia, 2010). Through this understanding, by promoting discourses and practices of diversity that have been depoliticized, demobilized, and aestheticized, I propose that teacher preparation programs endorse structural violence in the name of integrative/inclusive politics and supporting the good and ethical life.

I assert that teacher preparation for diversity must involve a critical approach that accounts for histories, vulnerabilities, orientations, and affects to interrogate sociality in more expansive terms. Maneuvers to promote diversity should consider the genealogies of dehumanization and inequity that have inevitably constructed the need in the first place to advocate for difference. Teacher preparation programs should look explicitly at the biopolitical processes inherent in institutionality (especially in invoking the carceral doctrine of neoliberalism) that mediate the dehumanization of certain bodies, namely Black and Brown lives. A clear example to glean from for teacher preparation is the close connections between public schools and prison (Alexander, 2012; Meiners and Winn, 2010). I contend that to address these issues of diversity more capaciously and mindfully, we must take the medium of pedagogy seriously by examining how knowledge and engagements are transmitted, interpreted, and brought to fruition; and in the process, influences how individuals are interpellated, categorized, and given interventions that are based in this type of sorting.

For these reasons, I see the teacher preparation program space as contested terrain, but a necessary site to exercise a transformative, creative and critical experimentation of difference and to imagine the ways education can think about the character of relationships to humanize again, in the common where all can benefit (Hardt & Negri, 2009).

Research Questions

This dissertation poses the following questions: How does a teacher preparation program teach or address issues of diversity? Under what conditions and circumstances are institutionalized discourses and practices of diversity constructed, embraced, and contested? And if, as I will argue, these institutionalized discourses and practices of diversity are inadequate, obscure the relationship between power and difference, and call for anti-racist invocations in the furtherance of social cohesion, how does this further perpetuate social inequalities? What role do current social issues play in informing engagements with diversity, and how do novel forms of collaboration with these actors work against the prescriptive logics of institutionality and to disrupt quotidian representations of and approaches to diversity?

These questions lead to a secondary set of broader, equally important questions that seek to provide a historical and political context for diversity discourses and practices as well as to situate the study within contemporary educational literature on diversity within teacher preparation. How do these institutionalized discourses and practices figure differential inclusion, in other words, how do institutionalized discourses perform a biopolitical production of subjectivity?

To investigate these points of inquiry, I will use a bricolage methodology, comprising of autoethnography, critical ethnography, an intervention using critical affective studies, and an archival review to understand the tactics, rationalities, relationships, and experiences of learning about diversity in the teacher preparation program. I will study how various actors of teacher preparation use diversity discourses and practices towards relational and instructional ends, more specifically to think through transformative learning arrangements for students. I will pay special attention to the ways teacher candidates, teacher educators, and the University at large understand the challenges of diversity and their responses to these challenges.

By examining the tactics, rationalities, relationships, and experiences of these various actors in different spaces (the institution and the undercommons), I aim to learn how diversity is being taken up in ways that advances with the administrative ethos/institutional logics of the University and determine ways to think about diversity otherwise.

Theoretical Significance and Contributions

This dissertation lies at the intersection of various bodies of literature coalescing the fields of critical ethnic studies, gender, women's and sexuality studies, critical university studies, and education. First, however, it is important to situate this study within the interdisciplines to better understand the wider social context in which diversity has been transmitted and practiced. Here, I am reminded of Roderick Ferguson's provocation to think carefully of the established networks of power that have rendered minority difference as appropriable and to think through "[t]he possibility for a generative inequity into institutionality and what they reveal about the co-constitutive anatomies of institutional belonging and minoritized subject formation" (2012, p. 18). *The Neoliberal and Imperial University and Critical University Studies*

The ethos and knowledge products of the neoliberal and imperial university are predicated on the advancement of adaptive state-capital hegemonies and white solipsism (Federici, 2012; Rodríguez, 2012; Ferguson, 2012; Rich, 1979; Mills, 1997). That is, in the case of racial, sexual, and gendered differences, the neoliberal and imperial university is an apparatus constitutive of state and capital that confers legitimacy by strategically making minority difference calculable and commodified, a seemingly virtuous act to include that effectively co-opts difference for the nation-state's own profit and gains.

In *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent* (2014), Chatterjee and Maira describe the increasing surveillance and censorship of knowledge in order to abate any critiques of US imperial and racial projects and law and order. Moreover, the neoliberal and imperial university administrative ethos, participates in the dehumanization of individuals and is not merely complicit with cycles of mass incarceration or military policing, but is actually constitutive of these very actions (p. 114).

The authors outline four areas that contribute to a knowledge complex in which the US has possessive investment in the dissemination of certain knowledges: imperial cartographies, academic containment, manifest knowledges, and heresies and freedoms (p. 13). The complex relationship between power and knowledge is salient here, as struggles for cultural recognition of minoritized difference in the sixties and seventies (liberal multiculturalism) while important to enfold bodies into acceptability, squelched

the radical collectivity and critique of anti-capitalist logics that were part of the original intention to organize. As Jodi Melamed (2016) states: “power’s strategy of affirming/restricting plays out around the call for black and ethnic studies, affirming professionalization while restricting radical reorganizations of knowledge.” The pivot from liberal to neoliberal modes that characterize the university’s administrative ethos is evidenced by tactics that reduce inclusion into “issues of quantification and a reductive logic of calculability.” These tactics are inherently biopolitical and lend themselves to greater social inequalities and ultimately a social death of marginalized populations (Cacho, 2012).

Building tolerance and having access to all the diversity in the world to form a self-enlightened global identity is one of the many aims of the neoliberal university. In *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (2015), political theorist Wendy Brown an example of how neoliberalism tenets and doctrines seep into one’s everyday activities. Focusing on the *remaking the soul* example, Brown focuses on the transformation of universities in the last thirty years as not only profit centers but sites of citizenship development and professionalization. Brown emphasizes this through the college ranking systems that are yearly put out through *Princeton Review* and *Forbes Magazine*. These rankings list the top 100 universities base on return of investment or “best bang for your buck” (p. 23). Instead of being a space of cultivating critical thought and producing social goods or justice in the medical sciences, social sciences, or humanities, universities have become centers of personal investment.

Similarly, Jodi Melamed trenchantly describes in *Represent and Destroy: Racializing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, neoliberalism, and its sharp vicissitudes, is “far more than a purely economic system, is also a world-historical configuration of governance and biological and social life, premised on the belief that the market is better at the state at distributing resources and managing human life” (p. 39). Neoliberal multiculturalism has leveraged the implicit terms of neoliberalism – *open, free market*, and *diversity*, to rationalize and administer knowledges that reproduce racial capitalism. That is, in favor of espousing a narrative of progress that is anti-racist and inclusive, the serialization of human difference and translating goals into economic desires persists. Melamed describes how neoliberal multiculturalism proliferates where

the concept of an enlightened *and* happy citizen seems to materialize. For instance, she argues that literary studies and sanctioned literature were official anti-racisms backed by the state that were intended to produce and construct U.S. subjects as good and enlightened citizens ready to engage in managing populations and circulating global capital (p. 141). This neoliberal multiculturalism leads to the co-optation of diversity in favor of sheer capital while simultaneously stigmatizing those, particularly people of color and queer bodies, who do not partake in a kind of “self-care” of “learning” about racism from books and literary studies. In essence, neoliberal multiculturalism, like racial liberalism, discounts certain forms of knowledge production such as lived experiences.

The neoliberal institutionalization of the university has given rise to a depoliticization of social conditions. Through the invocation of terms such as diversity, openness, multiculturalism and tolerance in the university, there is an explicit repudiation of subverting the status quo. Namely, depoliticization is a strategic move, involving individualism, liberalism, market rationality, and a culturalization of politics to elude critical scrutiny and “involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its historical emergence and from a recognition of the powers that produce and contour it (Brown, 2006, p. 15).

In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), Fred Moten and Stefano Harney demonstrate a need for disorder, disruption, and theft within the university. The undercommons is an interstitial space of study and abolition. They write:

It cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of—this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university (p. 26).

Indeed, to avoid the perils of an enlightened self and still engage within coalitional building and activist-scholarly work, one must always be “on the move” or “on the run” and thus in a type of fugitive status. This fugitive status allows one to be *in but not of* the university. Moten and Harney advocate for *study* in this fugitive space that is not rooted in neoliberal logics of credit and debt. Specifically, this notion of study is

one of creative co-construction and analysis, where learning is organic and meaningful. Moten and Harney foreground this notion of study to conceive of the possibilities to displace the violence of the regime of Man. Moten uses the concept of a toolbox or a toybox (pp. 105-106) that developed in the exchange of lived experiences as well as new formations of using concepts or terms.

In deference to interruptive modes of institutionality as described by Moten and Harney, Ferguson and Melamed, this dissertation research attempts to understand how to glean from *study* and an interstitial space outside “neo/liberal forms of institutional power” to unlearn (Spivak, 1996), imagine and enact new conceptions of diversity otherwise.

Diversity in Teacher Education

Research on diversity in teacher education has gained traction in last few decades. Generally, inquiries on diversity in teacher education have examined the ways teachers can best bridge their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to their students’ needs and experiences and foster equitable learning environments (Ball & Tyson, 2011). This inquiry has addressed preparing teachers on the salience of culture as a set of inquiries that impact learning, and understand the lives of students in and out of school (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2011; Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). It is the esprit de corps of the teaching force –White middle-class, cisgender women – who often need the most support to understand subjectivities other than their own and to traverse and appreciate different epistemic worlds (Haberman, 2010; Hayes & Juárez, 2012; Lugones, 2003). Despite the insistence and calls to think through culture in ways that are generative, most teacher candidates learn or perceive the learning of diversity as cultural logos, essentializing students based on stereotypes (e.g. Black students and the privileging of orality rather than the written word).

Teacher preparation has notoriously had difficulty with promoting critical inquiry and working towards a “multicultural and social justice orientation.” Issues of race, ethnicity and culture often do not get the necessary foregrounding or critical examination (Milam, 2010). These concepts are often conflated or spoken in abstraction, leaving teacher candidates confused or frustrated while obscuring their tangible effects that stratify or dehumanize everyday lives. Compounded with governance and accountability

measures that reduce diversity as commodities only demonstrates how diversity is evoked as rhetorical platitudes towards a self-righteous moral agenda.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is an oft-cited framework to think “to and through” and care about student diversity and social justice touted in much of the multicultural education discourse (Banks, 1997, 2001). Culturally relevant pedagogy is predicated on three tenets: academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. The concept and utility of cultural difference inherent in culturally relevant pedagogies have largely been reduced to “tourism” models celebrating and centering foods, festivals, heroes, and holidays. In her ethnography of an urban high school, Ngo (2010) describes how administrators and educators reifying cultural difference in static and simplistic ways exacerbated social inequities and an overall resistance to multicultural education. Likewise, Nieto (1994) affirms that an approach relegating culture in prescriptive ways and deployed to promote tolerance, protect comfort and the status quo is futile. Ladson-Billings (2011) cautions educators from regarding culturally relevant pedagogy as a self-righteous activity to “do diversity,” and instead, regard it as a stance, or a *being*, to critically develop ways to advance democracy:

For the most part democracy is unevenly and episodically attended to. As teachers they have the responsibility to work toward educating citizens so that they are capable of participating in a democracy [...] They are going to have to commit to democracy as a central principle of their pedagogy (pp. 39-40).

The complexities of race invariably play a role in enacting culturally relevant pedagogy, especially in a US-based context. While there have been considerable efforts of linking race and culturally relevant pedagogy, the theory does not explicitly problematize race and its suffusion in a local-global context. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) offer a critical race theory, in which they suggest the necessary link between race and the subordinated positions imposed on students based on their marginalized backgrounds. Also, included in their discussions is the implications of race and racism in schooling contexts, particularly in the understanding of White supremacy and how marginalized students perceive their identities in these contexts. While the centrality of race is both intimated, yet not veritably examined in culturally relevant pedagogy (Milner, 2017), it is also cautioned that culture in a culturally relevant pedagogy cannot be reduced to merely

race. Advocating for a more intersectional approach that transcends monolithic conceptions of culture is needed.

Since the inception of culturally relevant pedagogies, other scholars have also taken an interest in understanding how cultural difference can be problematized in order to better respond to the complex and dynamic local-global social order and the types of phenomenon produced. These scholars, in many respects, elucidate the need to go beyond the insular and transgress traditional multiculturalisms. In particular, Paris (2012) contends that a *culturally sustaining* pedagogy is a way forward. He says,

[O]ur pedagogies [must] be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence (p. 95).

Paris's stance expounds the importance of reframing the discourse of equity for students of color. Inherent in this orientation is that pedagogies should illuminate the ways in which heritage and community knowledges can be leveraged to concurrently support access to, and subvert, a culture of power (Delpit, 1988). Moreover, this position is contingent on a “creative foregrounding” of these new cultural knowledges to explicate the evolving and complex dimensions of “a pluralist and egalitarian present and future” (p. 93). In another view, McCarty and Lee (2014) describe a critical culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy which seeks to interrogate the activities of neocolonialism and the struggle for sovereignty. They write of the need to denature romanticized conceptions of identity and disrupt dichotomous relationships (e.g. speaker/nonspeaker, urbanity/rurality) that ostensibly mediate a sense of belonging. In their view, a decolonial critique is necessary to renew a culturally relevant pedagogy and “deconstruct essentialisms that reduce the multidimensionality of human experience” (p. 118).

Calls for doing diversity differently in teacher education are resounding. The vagueness of diversity has given way to a rudimentary approach of merely thinking how to best address the demographic imperative. Despite their intent to expand conceptions of diversity and equity, frameworks such as culturally relevant pedagogy have been appropriated, commodified, and reduced to performance measures, siphoning the creative

and critical energy needed to acknowledge and redress processes of dehumanization—oppression, subjugation, and exploitation. It is the failure of diversity (Mitropoulos, 2008) as it is presently invoked that have exhorted critical scholars and other interlocutors in the educational community to think otherwise. This dissertation research thus takes heed from critical insights within and beyond the realm of education to think of experiential and narrative practice to historicize, unlearn, deconstruct, recreate, and move towards a humanizing relational ontology.

Relationality, Critical Affective Studies, and Education

Examining relationality opens ways of understanding the character of interactions to envision possibilities towards ethical solidarity and reckoning with the pluriverse (Lugones 2003). Relationships and the subjectivities contained within these relational encounters are contingent on various intensities, politics, and other established kinships. Thus, these relationships can be questioned and reshaped. As Weheliye (2014) states, drawing from Edouard Glissant (1997):

Relationality provides a productive model for critical inquiry and political action...because it reveals the global and systemic dimensions of racialized, sexualized, and gendered subjugation, while not losing sight of the many ways political violence has given rise to ongoing practices of freedom within various traditions of the oppressed (p. 13).

Weheliye encourages inquiries into the lifeworlds and worldviews. Extending this invitation to teacher education would specifically look at how teacher candidates occupy and take-up subject positions and social locations, not solely to build an individual knowledge of what it would be to be taking up ethical solidarity with students, but to rethink how positionality and relationality are always situated in existing, broader sociopolitical processes that are beyond one's milieu. This rethinking can evince new horizons of taking a humanizing relational ontology seriously.

In *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant (2011) describes the affective investments that constrain the imagination and hamper the ability to think differently about relational patterning. In particular, Berlant provides a trenchant examination of the affective schema by which people construct and attach to uphold the good life perpetuated by the

neoliberal “precarious public sphere.” This attachment to the possibilities where “the very pleasures of being *inside* a relation have become sustaining regardless of the *content* of the relation” constitutes this relation of cruel optimism. In other words, these affective attachments to conditional promises get in the way of flourishing or the desired goals of, for example, attaining the good life.

Berlant suggests this valorization of the good life takes for granted the everyday crises and injury that eventually wear down the subject, and consequently propels them to develop strategies for coping and survival. Berlant turns to affect and aesthetics to interrogate this deterioration of the subject and the everyday maneuvers they employ within unlivable social conditions to enact new genres of being in states of precarity and debility. Berlant’s analysis of cruel optimism can be extended to the social issues of today. While Berlant does not take an intersectional approach in her work, her concept of cruel optimism can be used to understand how difference is engaged, particularly with the kind of passivity employed by the act of tolerance. In a relation of cruel optimism, tolerating difference depoliticizes relational encounters, their containment of histories and “habits of perception,” to “sustain a coasting sentience” and avoids any reckoning with the historical and precarious present. (p. 43). Any invocation that interrupts the neoliberal order or crosses the threshold of what is tolerable or acceptable engenders an opening of discomfort, disgust, or injurious acts.

As Seawright (2017) contends, these relational encounters with difference are inevitably determined not solely through

Reflective efforts—others’ efforts, the spatial setting, our pre-predicative movements, along with many other relational variables come together to define a moment [...] products of cultural habit, which give them a character of, for instance, coloniality, white supremacy, or other forms of oppression that are more readily analyzed at the level of social systems, not intimate social exchange [...] (p. 181).

Seawright’s provocation also opens inquiries into the character of these relational encounters, specifically,

[To] understand a full ethical picture, so to speak, we must push the individual (vis-à-vis the destruction of the sovereign subject) to the background where they

can be seen as part of a whole social situation that is already infused with racial hierarchy (p. 181).

Adhering to the good life and the good tolerant, liberal subject, there comes an appeasing of difference that is overly celebratory and averts conflict. Sara Ahmed, through her work on affect, problematizes multicultural happiness, in its explicit maneuvers to ignore historical traumas and place differential investments on certain bodies in the name of social inclusion.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2004) develops a relational analysis that posits the performative quality of emotions that circulate a series of effects. Through this understanding, emotions delineate the surfaces and boundaries that constitute subjects or objects, individually or collectively, and shape the directions or orientations (moving towards and/or away) of these subjects and objects.

In her chapter, *The Performativity of Disgust*, Ahmed responds to two questions: “What does it mean to designate something as disgusting? How do such designations work to generate effects?” (p. 84). She inquires about the affective qualities of and relations between subjects and objects interpellated as disgusting and those within the ‘community of witnesses’ that are disgusted. She further describes the metonymic power of stickiness and the effects produced by the accumulation of sticky signs. Drawing from Judith Butler, Ahmed probes the performative nature of discourse and speech acts that “generates the object that it names (the disgusting object/event)” (p. 93). Using examples from the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Ahmed demonstrates how issues of identity, otherness, and allegiance—constructed through affect—become embroiled in the maintenance of a biopolitical order that (re)inscribes certain bodies, namely recognized as “Middle-Eastern,” as “non-human, *as beneath and below the bodies of the disgusted*” (p. 97). Returning to the notion of stickiness, a recognition of Middle Eastern becomes associated with disgust, fear, and terrorism. For Ahmed, stickiness is about relationality, “or a ‘withness’, in which the elements that are ‘with’ get bound together” (p. 91). This understanding undergirds her description of how affect, particularly disgust, gets stuck to certain bodies. Stickiness is created through the repetition or citation of signs.

This critical approach to affect is one that can be applied to teacher education to examine the relational investments made with issues of difference. Since relationality is

inherent to teaching, affect can be an invaluable heuristic to analyze the legacies of dehumanization.

Generally, discussions concerning emotions and education have been taken up through psychological and social constructionist discourses that propound the regulation and management of emotions to facilitate effective learning and sustain purported normative and positive social relationships (Zembylas, 2007; Anwaruddin, 2015). Specifically, efforts to promote affective modes of engagement in educative contexts include the development of *affective literacy* or *emotional intelligence* (Amsler, 2001). As Amsler (2001) states, affective literacy refers to the somatic and emotional responses to a myriad of texts; whereas, emotional intelligence centers “on self-control (delayed gratification), identifications of emotion in oneself and others, and managing other’s emotions effectively” (Boler, 1999, p. 62). Taken together, these initiatives seek to elicit the more “internal,” “private” and “natural” qualities ascribed to emotions for a more overt and holistic model aimed to nurture the whole child. While these initiatives have popularized the discussion of emotions as a site of legitimate knowledge and analysis—particularly consumed in a capitalist sense and touting scientific morality with emotional intelligence—they provide a parochial description of the potential for emotions to explain social relations. In particular, the aforesaid approaches do not seriously contextualize emotions as performative, that is, the ability for emotions to produce certain relational effects that are “enacted and embodied in the social world” (Micciche, 2007, p. 1).

In recent years, the social sciences and humanities have drawn on the potentialities of embodied practices to respond to the precariousness and violence brought on by a turbulent global era. In particular, this movement towards affect, or the affective turn (Clough, 2007) troubles the rationalistic proclivities of critical theory by inquiring the ways in which the body is operationalized, affected and propelled into action. Brian Massumi (2015), drawing from Spinoza, writes of the everyday politics of affect, noting that it is:

A way of talking about that margin of manoeuvrability, the ‘where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do’ in every present situation. I guess ‘affect’ is the word I use for hope [...] Affect is this passing of a threshold, seen from the point of view of the change in capacity (pp. 3-4).

While many scholars who are grounded in affect studies write of emotions and affect interchangeably to describe a constellation of the structure of feeling, understanding the connotative nuance is still imperative to note. In *Affective Mapping*, Jonathan Flatley (2008) states: “Where *emotion* suggests something that happens inside and tends toward outward expression, *affect* indicates something relational and transformative. One *has* emotions; one is affected *by* people or things” (p. 12). While this literature review explores the deployment of emotion and affect openly, it is this relational and transformational interpretation constituting affects that guides my dissertation project.

A critical examination of emotions in education that interrogates their performative qualities would allow a more nuanced and robust approach to understand sociality and difference. Specifically, leveraging the affective evaluations accumulated that confer particular cultural meanings, relational investments and embeddedness can aid educators in establishing strategic moves of care and responsibility for the Other (Zembylas, 2012). As Sara Ahmed (2004) asserts:

Emotions are not simply something “I” or “we” have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces and boundaries are made: the “I” and “we” are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others (p. 10).

This quote highlights how orientations and disorientations manifest through affective economies. Ahmed, along with education scholars have begun building on the opportunities of the affective turn to promote models that transcend the overly rationalistic methodologies of critical thought and critical pedagogy that reify a reason versus emotion dichotomy (Ellsworth, 1989). These models seek to instantiate a more rigorous inquiry on the role of pedagogy to attend to difference and social justice, specifically with vulnerability and violence.

Megan Boler (1999; Bozalek, Leibowitz, Carolissen & Boler, 2014) has written extensively on the ethical complexities and transformative implications within education through emotion as both a critical inquiry and call to action to *witness* “inscribed habits of inattention” and examine “how our modes of seeing have been shaped specifically by the dominant culture of the historical moment” (Boler, 1999, p. 179). Boler (1999)

emphasizes the dynamic and radical process of witnessing emotions to uncover “how we view ourselves and our attachments to personal and cultural identities, and to how we view representations of difference” (p. 186). Ultimately, Boler clarifies the deployment of a *pedagogy of discomfort* as a means to incite productive action and construct new meanings of connectivity with others. This pedagogy underscores the examination of established comfort zones and emotional valuations around assumptions, beliefs, and everyday engagements to uncover complicity with hegemony. Discomfort, in this light, is an ethic of critique and deconstruction. In this vein, Michalinos Zembylas has written substantially on the possibilities of pedagogy to promote a *critical emotional reflexivity*, to complicate cultural difference and troubled knowledge, especially for education in post-conflict contexts (Chabuck and Zembylas, 2008; Zembylas, 2012b, 2013, 2014).

The responsibility entrusted to the educator leveraging a critical affective approach to pedagogy focuses on using emotions as a heuristic to promote strategic responses that “minimize ethical violence and expanding relationality with vulnerable others” (Zembylas 2015, p. 8). Emotions help to make the unconscious conscious. In other words, emotions are foregrounded to understand how they are entangled in power and hegemony and create delineations of the Other. In this manner, emotions become a mediating space to explore orientations and disorientations that perpetuate a continual process of differentiation, in other words, an us versus them dichotomy.

Scholars have theorized issues of difference like race and racism through affect. Specifically Hook (2005), Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) have written on the embodiment and affectivity of Whiteness, explicated through Foucault’s notion of *technology* (1977). Technology is referred to as “any assemblage of knowledges, practices, techniques, and discourses used by human beings on others or on themselves to achieve particular ends” (in Leonardo and Zembylas, 2013; citing Foucault, 1977; Hook, 2007; Rose, 1998). Furthermore, technology becomes a mechanism to understand how subjectivities are produced and how affectivity confers particular social values of normativity, inclusion, and exclusion to individuals. Indeed, this technology of affect aligns with Foucault’s concept of governmentality and biopolitics, in which the individual’s body and mind cannot escape government’s disciplining logics or the state’s regulating forms of social control and organization (Foucault, 1977, Leonardo and

Zembylas, 2013). In this vein, their theorization of whiteness as a technology of affect, Leonardo and Zembylas are able to describe how abjection, through the Other, is ultimately created and how discomfort concerning such an inquiry is wielded to preserve “personas that favor non-racism, a form of image management, rather than aligning themselves with anti-racism” (p. 151). Matias and Zembylas (2014) corroborate Leonardo and Zembylas’s exploration, noting that White teacher candidates often abdicate their responsibilities from learning about the Other and project their racial angst on these marginalized students. They further contend that White teacher candidates “us[e] their white racial identity to feign innocence and victimization becomes a process that maintains white supremacy” (Matias and Zembylas, 2014, p. 330).

These inquiries highlight the propensity towards Whiteness as a valorized construct that is politically motivated. As demonstrated by Hook and affective technologies (2005), these accounts contribute to the “*proof of affect*” that creates inclinations toward White subjectivities. He writes:

We may as such assume certain affect-positions (fear, irritation, love) which then become the proof of affect for a given ideological proposition, for a categorical relationship of entitlement, exclusion, belonging, etc. So: that I feel threatened by an influx of immigrants is proof enough of their moral dubiousness, proof enough also of why they—and others like them—should be prevented any rights of access (p. 93).

Emanating from feminist and poststructuralist orientations, critical affective approaches call attention to the “mediating space” emotions provide to explore relational attachments and investments (Ahmed, 2004). In other words, emotions become an important source to critically interrogate positionality, social order, and to potentially endow counternarratives and coalitional strategies of resistance. I will argue further in my prospective dissertation project that a critical engagement with emotions can better respond to the strategic care and responsibility of difference I described.

Emotions invoke an embodied knowledge inextricably linked with the interplay between subjectivity and power. Consequently, this claim positions emotionality as a technology, or a mechanism for operationalization, to interpellate a subject (un)intelligible and their difference with meaning and value. While the role of

emotionality in education is not an entirely novel inquiry, the cultural, political, and philosophical undertones of emotion as intimated in the review of literature above have largely been relegated to support more solipsistic, psychological, and technocratic paradigms, akin, for example, to many practices and paradigms of teacher preparation. A cultural and more critical engagement of affect in the classroom addresses a gap by transgressing the overly rationalistic commitment towards emancipation and male dominated discourse as espoused by critical pedagogy and the insular conceptions of difference espoused by traditional multiculturalisms and often deployed in culturally relevant pedagogies.

Furthermore, this inquiry centers on the potentialities of emotions *doing work* towards ‘thick’ descriptions of striving towards ethical responsibility and relationality. By considering the performative attributes of desire and emotion, I contend quotidian renderings and enactments of difference and social justice can be transgressed to care strategically and politically for all students.

Research Design and Methodology

This study is informed by a qualitative methodology and uses bricolage to generate greater complexity and texture of the interrelationships of learning about and across difference within and beyond the University. The bricolage is a “emancipatory research construct” that uses multiple tools to unveil the taken for granted, and pushes for eclectic, critical and transformative knowledge production (Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, & Monzó, 2017).

Note as the Bricoleur: This project reflects my own thinking-making processes that are not wedded to the strictures of method as learned in traditional courses. I take what I have learned in the various methods courses and have put together something redolent to the transversal, the immanent, and incipient. I find there is an invitation in the bricolage to explore the interstitial spaces that form when a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1960) form, or when new meaning is constructed from unexpected dialectical encounters. This fusion of horizons ultimately acknowledges the partiality of knowledge from an individualist perspective and embraces the communal, heteroglossic, and polyphonic (Lyotard, 1979).

My conceptual repertoire for research-creation is slowly developing, although I have already understood how narrative synthesizes and integrates the multiple interactional positions we occupy. I appreciate Polkinghorne's (1995) comprehensive detailing of how narrative can be conceived, deployed, and analyzed. Polkinghorne foregrounds story as an organizing mechanism and heuristic to build a "schemata of interpretation," or frames of reference (Goffman, 1978). These carefully descriptions and processes of narrative while helpful, strike a little too orderly, maybe a bit too coherent. As an aside, I am compelled to understand the nature of coherence within narrative configuration? Is it clarity? Is it to relay an abiding characterization of self? Is it unity? Is it about intelligibility? Does coherence become an aesthetic criterion for which we appraise the value of the narrative? I subscribe more to the narrative as assemblage, in the rhizomatic tradition Deleuze and Guattari have explicated. That is, looking at stories as not having a particular Western logic of beginning, middle and end.

Also, if narrative also assumes aesthetic and reflective dimensions, how do we best invoke and harness those? I draw inspiration from Maxine Greene (1995) and her charge to release the imagination through aesthetic experiences in order to promote transformation and revel in possibilities to see things otherwise.

Perhaps these questions are unwarranted, and I am unnecessarily digging rabbit holes; however, nevertheless, I believe these considerations help me to be more intentional about how, as bricoleur, I attempt to make sense of the "theory of experience" and transmute these understandings into relevant social implications. Particularly, the enigmatic and creative possibilities that inhere narrative discourse are ones I would like to take on in my ongoing inquiry into the ethical identity formation of teacher candidates as well as understanding the conceptions and enactments of care with pre-service and in-service teachers. Ricoeur's (1980) description of the narrative form as a realm of temporality and social action provides the basis for this inquiry.

Although I have grounded the bricolage with ethnography, the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of bricolage encourage greater flexibility through an emergent design that uses different methods and practices that speak to the evolving and complex contexts and relationships of this study, including my own positionality in the different spaces of which I will be a part. Currently, the constitutive elements of the

bricolage include: autoethnographic reflexive tales and layered accounts, critical ethnographies, and critical theoretical research as method (Matias, 2021) of two educational courses from two different sites. I subscribe to qualitative methods that are more diffractive and less procedural (Springgay and Truman, 2017, 2018).

I conducted this study through two different sites with teacher candidates. Autoethnographic and critical ethnographic approaches were employed. An autoethnographic approach allowed me to share my stakes in the world of diversity and teacher education and contextualize these experiences with participants of my study at large. Autoethnography allows a sharing of evocative, creative, and often confessional accounts that can narratively inquire into power relations (Ronai, 1992; Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Critical ethnography was important to help me arrive at insights that help represent the discourses, processes of participation, and practices established by the sites of participant observation. Specifically, critical ethnography is a framework that advances social change and advocacy (Patton, 1990) and is suitable to this project's aim to transform the ways in which diversity is engaged and redress structural violence.

Data collection methods include individual writing reflections, documents, and conversations. Conversations and observation of two sites: a summer course on school and society at a public university in the Midwest and a philosophy of education course at a private university in New England. I taught both these courses. These sites have been selected because they orient candidates to issues of human difference and practically, were my places of employment. Data were collected in Summer 2016 (for *School and Society* course) and continued throughout the 2016-2017 as and the 2017-2018 academic years for additional research on institutional culture. Data for the *Philosophy of Education* course were collected in Spring 2020, right before the COVID pandemic.

I used the following methods to collect data, each of which offers a distinct approach to generating information for the research questions. *Individual writing reflections* (fieldnotes, memos, journaling) aided in not only capturing and synthesizing learning from a course, meetings, and a subversive space, but will facilitate meaning-making for my auto(ethnography) of thinking about and challenging knowledges of difference. *Conversations* with teacher candidates provided multiple perspectives on the tactics, rationalities, relationships, and experiences of learning about diversity created and

reinforced by the institution and will be compared with the undercommons inquiry space and researcher's own experiences and reflections. *Direct observation* of these courses showed how respondents understand and practice diversity in different environments. Taken together, these methods situated diversity in the broader contexts and theories of the neoliberal and imperial university, "multicultural" and "culturally relevant" education, and relational praxes.

Selection of Sites for Participant Observation

I selected two sites for observation of diversity discourses and practices within and beyond the auspices of the University. The criteria used to select these sites are the following: 1) type of site (one requisite course, the other not); 2) heterogeneity of cohorts (licensure areas); 3) scope of content discussed around difference; and 4) predominately White spaces.

- *School and Society* is a requisite teacher education class for initial licensure teacher candidates, mainly elementary school licensure candidates in the Midwest. In this social and cultural foundations of education course, candidates learn about the significant debates that have influenced the landscape of public education, reflect on their own narratives, and develop their own philosophies of education through teacher identity self-studies and professional activities that link course content to their practicum sites. 37 students, majority of whom identified as White through an initial "interest inventory."
- *Philosophy of Education* is an elective educational course at the private university in New England. Through co-constructed emergent activities on emotion and transformative practices, participants rigorously strive towards ethical relationality and solidarity by confronting fraught histories of dehumanization and analyzing the privileging of certain genres of being human (Wynter, 2003; McKittrick, 2015). Central to this inquiry space is studying the proceduralisms of the institution that contain, mask, and regulate the knowledges of minority difference. 30 students, majority of whom identified as White through an initial "interest inventory."

Data Collection Methods

Individual writing (students and myself), through reflections and memos in the field guided the autoethnography element of the bricolage (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This writing, through my lens as a queer, person of color, and teacher educator provided unique and critical insights to contextualize the self with others (Chang, 2007, 2008; Alexander, 2004, Mitra, 2010). I engaged affects and experiences around diversity, the teaching of issues around difference, and the prospects of guiding teacher candidates through *difficult knowledge* (Britzman, 1998). This meant probing the emotional responses that undergirded knowledge productions and assumptions. I aimed to provide reflexive and layered accounts that integrate theory, data, and analysis (Charmaz, 1983; Ronai, 1992, Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). A document review of course assignments, including but not limited to course texts, questionnaires, reflections, cultural autobiographies, educational philosophies were conducted. Pseudonyms of participants are used throughout this dissertation. Excerpts of student work or conversations were selected based on the emergent construction of my theoretical framings and propositions for each paper (much like the incipient, “in the moment meaning-making” that was activated through various relational encounters). I set to create a bricolage that continuously read space, theory, and time in multiple creative ways.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data (fieldnotes, memos, transcripts, documents, and artefacts) were analyzed using grounded theory to describe experiences substantively and inductively (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). To consolidate and make meaning from emerging codes, constant comparison was employed utilizing open coding, axial coding, and selective coding procedures. Analytic memos, reflexive memos, operational memos, and integrative memos were written throughout the collection process to aid in the writing of the dissertation (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011; Lofland et al., 2006). As bricolage encourages continual feedback looping for increased rigor and complexity through various epistemological and theoretical lenses (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004), the data were read multiple times to explicate the simultaneous multiplicity of subjectivity and its occupation in various space-time contexts (Geertz, 1973).

This research with diversity is invariably influenced by my positionality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), inflected by multiple dimensions as a queer Filipino-American settler. As a scholar-activist committed to redressing social, cultural, and educational inequalities, I consider the data collection and analysis process partial and cannot be divorced from my personal orientations, choices, and interpretations (Britzman, 1995).

The dissertation includes three papers from the data analyzed and a postscript, including a parable previously published in *Surviving Becky: Pedagogies for Deconstructing Whiteness and Gender* (2019). For this parable, I drew from fieldnotes and critical exchanges with colleagues to compose a quasi-fictionalized narration of a composite Becky inspired by my experiences during Summer 2016.

Positionality and Teaching Philosophy

June Jordan's charge towards a more humanizing relational ethos drives my work as an emerging scholar and activist. In this precarious, mass incarceration era where Black and Brown bodies are perpetually consigned to both a literal and social death, the intents and narratives of diversity must be seriously reconsidered. My engagements within and beyond the University of Minnesota seek to re-envision the ways in which difference and social justice are transmitted, discussed, and enacted in teacher education and institutions. The "feel good" and happy logic of diversity is supposedly deployed with good intentions, but has depoliticized much of the historical legacies of dehumanization. Consequently, this disavowal of learning from these fraught histories has perpetuated structural violence. I have worked assiduously as a teacher educator to advocate for interruptive opportunities for teacher candidates to critically reckon with their sociopolitical commitments, life-worlds, and worldviews in the pursuit of ethical relationships and racial justice. The field of education has had great difficulty in bridging the relational gap that contributes to the enormous educational debt of dispossession experienced by far too many marginalized communities. My work attempts to recast caring across difference from mere sentimentality to the acknowledgement of the collective responsibility to restore humanity and "bring back the person."

The University has been a generous and creative hub to develop my curiosity, courage, and conviction towards re-envisioning the ways diversity is engaged. Courses

and symposia in the departments of Curriculum and Instruction, Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, and Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies have underscored how the radical possibilities of critical thinking and critical hope can lend themselves towards transgressing oppressive genres of living. I have taken and shared these insights with teacher candidates to envision the learning space as contested terrain to carefully grapple with competing interpretations and difficult knowledge. This discussion of knowledge provides opportunities to complicate discourses, to recognize their implication in power networks, and to contextualize the material effects of knowledge. To this end, I continually and humbly view the partiality of knowledge by posing to my teacher candidates: *what political purpose does knowledge serve, in what contexts, and at whose expense?*

As a queer teacher educator of color, I have impressed the importance of using narrative to situate our social locations. In teaching courses on the social foundations of education to predominately White teacher candidates, I have consistently used a restorative approach, informed by critical race feminisms, to affirm and constructively unpack embodied politics and knowledges. This arrangement pays special attention to personal narrative as a criterion for meaning and allows one to think through how embodied knowledges influence our daily engagements and perceptions of people. This intentional and intimate activity invariably taps into the emotional attachments of and cultivates new ways of thinking about the historical, structural, and material conditions that mediate the character and content of relationships. As teaching is inherently relational, I find it imperative to move beyond the logics of proceduralism in preparation programs to get serious about appreciating a richer ethical picture of connection.

I have worked with school-university partners to help teacher candidates and cooperating teachers reflect on their practices to reflect equity-based teaching. I have developed and presented inquiry frameworks for teacher candidates and cooperating teachers to examine care across difference. These frameworks center emotions and rhetorical witnessing to approach power, difference, and sociality in more expansive ways. Another key part of these inquiry frameworks underscores taking up advocacy as a lifelong endeavor. With school-university partners, I have been able to engage in dialogue about advocacy for equity to espouse the need to be accountable for the actions

that promote or inhibit structural violence. Having taught this courses in predominately white spaces, I generally know what to expect. The demographics of this course are redolent with the teaching force, writ large in the country: predominantly White, middle class, monolingual (English), cis women from suburbia. For many, seeing a queer person of color helm a course is often a jarring sight.

Teaching Philosophy

As a first-generation college student and queer person of color, the primacy of education was impressed on me during my formative years to not only facilitate social mobility but also enact an ethical/formal responsibility. This moral responsibility invokes the trials and triumphs engendered by imperialist and hegemonic arrangements. I learned to not take for granted/not take lightly these issues that have shaped a historical and genealogical consciousness. I carry this questing disposition and seek to continually ask my students, “What makes you tick?” and allow the varying discourses in class to stoke their curiosities and move towards reflective action. I am an emerging scholar whose work primarily concerns the sociocultural underpinnings of education to help aspiring teachers understand their role as cultural mediators and be adaptive to an ever-evolving social landscape. I draw heavily from hermeneutics and critical theory to illuminate the contested terrain of the classroom, where positionalities and subjectivities collide and coalesce.

Education, especially in a postsecondary context, as a collaborative and discursive site has the potential to support dialectical growth and reciprocal transformation. In this regard, learning occurs through activity and in relation to others. My approach to teaching and learning is inflected by this liberatory paradigm that veritably impels students towards constructively critical engagements with power and knowledge. The relationship between power and knowledge helps to both situate and problematize purported truths and realities casted by monologic frames of reference and unvetted presuppositions. I believe contextualizing learning in this reflexive way contributes to a more capacious understanding and being in the world that can engender meaningful change. I conceive of my role not that of an expert, but facilitator, who cultivates the space of possibility, where different articulations of the Self are encouraged, the

transgressive welcomed, and student funds of knowledge leveraged (Gonzales, Moll and Amanti, 2005).

I recognize the classroom as a contested space comprising of stories-so-far and a multiplicity of perspective (Massey, 2005). I recognize that both teacher and student positionalities are motivated by, and enmeshed in distinctive epistemological and axiological arrangements reified in particular social spaces. Thus, I understand the practices of teaching and learning as inherently political in nature. To traverse such terrain, I regard positionalities in the classroom as ambivalent, that emplacements of identity and knowledge are not necessarily sedimented but indeterminate. Individual ideologies are enriched through discursive moments of interruption. I believe my role as facilitator entails raising the collective's threshold for discomfort. In these moments, I integrate student perspective by eliciting the appropriate questions that can collectively expand worldviews.

Collaborative learning, which is immanent in my teaching, allows for deliberative "controversy," to support perspective taking. I recognize that the appropriate foregrounding will be necessary to ensure students are maximizing these controversies for mutual transformation. The traditional didactic forms of lecture will be supplanted by more cooperative engagements for more immediate, diverse and active conversation. In these settings, technology will also be a helpful tool to optimize learning and curate other learning avenues.

Notions of safety and risk in this space are acknowledged within a symbiotic relationship that is integral to the meaning-making process. In particular, I strive to create a "safe" learning environment redolent of Adrienne Rich's feminist analyses of safety (1985) where, as an inquiry community, we can take refuge in "a place in which we can draw breath, rest from persecution or harassment" while renouncing "the safety of the armored and concluded mind." Ultimately, my praxis as an educator in a higher education context reorients learning from a passive endeavor to a journey that attunes with greater humanity, a process that involves provoking our consciousness and takes seriously an ethic of care, broadly construed, of ourselves and the world.

I imbue in my pedagogical methods an “ethics of openness, reciprocity and exchange” (Keating, 2007; p. 40). Such a sensibility is grounded in the importance of dialogic interaction as a critical medium to author, appreciate, critique, and reconstruct knowledge in multifaceted and multidirectional ways. It exhorts students to address important issues with immediacy and candor. The implications to espouse these guiding tenets are manifold and include honoring student voice and agency and fostering a respectfully tentative and transcultural standpoint. Radical humility (Keating, 2013; Fernandes, 2003) is also exercised in this environment as participants come to realize their epistemological limitations. In this spirit of a radical provocation for conflict, students are encouraged to listen intently and practice *thinking for a change*. Students will begin my courses with activities that lend for self-introspection and storytelling. I contend an inquiry learning is developed through an appropriate disclosure and rapport. Through such community building activities, I hope students remain steadfast in uncovering our individual layers to be enlightened witnesses in the world (hooks, 2003) and support a more ethical praxis.

Teaching as Performative

Philosopher and pioneering queer theorist, Judith Butler in her seminal work, *Gender Trouble* (1990) discusses the value of troublemaking. In the spirit of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Butler contends the ostensible lucidity of social reality must be shaken through a virtuous practice of acknowledging and questioning the configurations of power espoused through discourse. It is important to note discourse in this regard transcends a linguistic conception, specifically, a mechanism of representation that generates knowledge. Schools, as sites of production (Apple, 1996), play an integral role in shaping discourse and mediating the type and way the discourse is regulated. This process is highly political and performative, reifying hegemonic configurations and dominant narratives because of expediency and what has traditionally been considered the norm. I subscribe to Butler’s use of the term performativity (as it relates to the understanding of gender) to describe how “normal” originates from citational acts of power. She states that performativity is “a stylized repetition of acts . . . which are internally discontinuous . . . [so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a

constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief? (Butler, 1990, pg. 141). These acts are rendered intelligible, or legitimized, because of their iteration over time.

Teaching, as both performance and performative denotes not only the act of doing, but rather the embodiment and enactment of these citational acts, and the potential of deconstructing practices of normalization. In the classroom, the teacher wields an authoritative judgment to modulate how content and discussions are facilitated.

Teacher as Cultural Mediator

The teacher, as mediator of culture (Grant, 1977), performs a set of ideologies, which invariably inflect student experiences and identity construction. It is important for the educator to recognize this power ascribed to the role as a mediator of culture. By acknowledging this stance, we, as an educational community can begin to locate power asymmetries and situate epistemological learnings about the complexities of teaching that are inextricably linked with the positionalities and subjectivities that are brought into the performance. Teachers, then by virtue of this notion of performance and performative, can make a deliberate choice to foster discursive sites of contestation that allow for the leveraging of difference and the queering of histories and knowledges. Additionally, queering as praxis can engender what postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha (1994) delineates as a *third space* to continually reimagine ways to bring historically marginalized voices to the center, and reconsider how identities are constructed, contested, and negotiated over time.

I am continually learning that engaged teaching and learning are unequivocally a balancing act. This process may seem a bit tricky and precarious, (e.g. acknowledging difference, but not putting identities into discrete categories), but the whole intention is enacting a praxis that is deeply rooted in continual deconstruction and critique. Teaching makes lucid the constant conflict with culture, and one must be able to understand and leverage it. This acknowledgment is necessary to consider transformative action. My future is predicated on a deep and sustaining inquiry into the intersectional identities my students bring. It is also based on a commitment to the personal narrative and harnessing

its insights into my teaching and learning. I am always humbled to bear witness- the revelations, no matter the magnitude, students come away with and I certainly hope I can continue to imbue the settings in which I teach the potential for meaningful self-reflection and transformation.

PAPER 1

Reading Conjuncturally, Messily:

Thinking-Making Difference in an Education Course

Introduction

The current era of neoliberal obeisance and emboldened whiteness has rendered our relationships defanged of political substance and implication: encounters that can be characterized as fungible, commensurable, notably bereft of acute examinations of power and privilege. With difference situated as a haunting political concept embroiled in complex historical entanglements and material realities meaningful inquiries of and ethical engagements with the Other remain prescient. Much ink has been spilled in educational discourse to provide thicker descriptions of what difference, identity, and culture can mean and what pedagogical methodologies can be employed to bridge what are purportedly known as relationship gaps that have been largely precipitated by technologies of biopolitical surveillance, epistemic disavowal, and white managerialism. However, mapping the experiential contours of teaching and learning about difference, including how instructors and students conjugate themselves within the conjuncture through the interfacing among personal narratives, theories, and affects have not been carefully or candidly examined (much of these accounts are neatly represented).

In this paper, I first describe making sense of the conjuncture, a confrontational impasse that foregrounds the significance of relational skeins, historical particularities, and material realities that constitute the enduring crisis of neoliberal white managerialism. Then, I lay out my observations and diffractive analysis of how education students come to view themselves through a conjunctural approach and the potential contributions such an approach has on apprehending the ongoing processes of debility and dispossession. I conclude by describing the implications of a pedagogical sensibility that takes seriously deep unlearning, impossibility, and the potentiality of the aesthetic, and pushes our relational engagements (both student and teacher) to understand our situatedness in the conjuncture towards the political within social justice projects.

Making Sense Conjuncturally: Living in This Moment, This Impasse

Cultural studies scholars, among other interlocutors, have been interested in the ways different things come together, an assemblage if you will, to analyze relations, intensities, and objects in our entangled existence. The notion of the conjuncture has been

useful in this regard. The provenance of the conjuncture can be traced to Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci and draws upon the metaphor of hegemony to describe a political moment. For Gramsci, it was important to understand the social currents that engendered ruptures, revolution, and crisis in his analysis of the rise of Fascism in Italy. Stuart Hall found resonance in Gramsci's thinking of the conjuncture, particularly in his erudite study of the grammar of Thatcherism. For Hall, the conjuncture was a site "to take in and weave together strands of philosophical and ideological thought, social dynamics and economic developments and think them together with the political terrain of the present" (Grayson and Little, 2017, p. 62).

Hall popularized the conjuncture as a critical theoretical frame that registers a complex assemblage of the historical, economic, aesthetic, ideological, and political forces, as well as the performances and character of these forces on the structure of social relations. As Highmore (2018) describes, "a conjuncture names the configuration of various 'levels' or 'aspects' of life at a particular moment: the political, the ideological, the economic, the artistic, and so on. But more than that it names the peculiar character and pattern that such a configuration takes" (p. 253). Plainly, to read and analyze conjuncturally is to consider how the divergent and often contradictory elements that mediate subjectivities and processes of becoming help us understand a more nuanced relationship to the human experience, a relationship that is not constrained to causal, predictable, totalizing, and commensurable thinking.

A conjunctural analysis then becomes this deep study of living within the multiplicities of an event, how this event endures, and how it can shape collectivities otherwise. In particular, I regard the conjuncture as not necessarily working through a periodizing schema with clear temporal borders, but rather a framing of the accumulation of discursive, affective, and material value ascribed to the unfolding of experience. This thinking is in line with Elizabeth Povinelli, where she uses the term, quasi-event, to detail the progressive degradation of life, and an evasion of ethical inquiry that is often perpetrated by (neo)liberal politics. She writes of the quasi-event as:

a form of occurring that never punctures the horizon of the here and now and there and then and yet forms the basis of forms of existence to stay in place or alter their place. The quasi- event is only ever hereish and nowish and thus asks us

to focus our attention on forces of condensation, manifestation, and endurance rather than on the borders of objects (Povinelli, 2016 p. 21).

These quasi-events can take various forms and resemble what Berlant calls slow death and what Nixon refers to as slow violence. The former correlates with attachments to relation of cruel optimism and “refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence” (Berlant, 2007, p. 754). Whereas, for Nixon, slow death is a phenomenon that is atmospheric and not immediately discernible. He writes of a slow violence as “a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (Nixon, 2011, p. 2).

I see resonances of the term conjuncture with other political or philosophical concepts, such as the *impasse*, in which I foreground specifically in my education courses as a mode of slowing down, to leverage the stuckness of the moment, and to engender possibility. Such a foregrounding necessarily asks for example: *Why, in the midst of apocalypse, do we attach to interventions that are tantamount or even more egregious in its stead? How do we stand in this complex ecology? Why do otherwise modes of relationship premised on interdependence and creative intensities not gain as much traction? How is our thinking-meaning or power-knowledge (Foucault) organized to support unsustainable futures and untenable promises for life? What are the purposes of the aspirational? Whose lives and futures are at stake? How can we organize our knowledge and engagements differently?* As activist adrienne maree brown poignantly observes in her acclaimed book, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017) she writes:

Imagination has people thinking they can go from being poor to a millionaire as part of a shared American dream. Imagination turns Brown bombers into terrorists and white bombers into mentally ill victims. Imagination gives us borders, gives us superiority, gives us race as an indicator of ability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else's capability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone' else's imagination, and I must engage my own imagination in order to break free (p. 18).

Specifically, for those who want to be classroom teachers, these questions and realities about an acquiescence to unjust imaginations are significant to contend with. Pedagogy is not about lip service, but a political and generative site of dialectical struggle. The classroom becomes the stage where the conjuncture, the event, the ontological, the personal, and the political coalesce.

As an important note, I caution the deployment of the conjuncture as a method, not because I want to complicate matters for the sake of theoretical solipsistic tendencies. Also, by no means am I suggesting there are right ways to define or engage conjuncture. But rather, I consider the conjuncture as a pathway or orientation for rethinking the tools we claim to have a grasp of and what they do in terms of capturing or describing emergence, ambivalence, and the transversal that cannot be so easily distilled. In a neoliberal university that attempts to reduce or to make intelligible or commensurable, in order to align with a particular value economy. The conjuncture for me is an opening towards metamodeling that “refuses models, proceeds from the transversal interstices, in the acrossness of what refuses to condemn itself to simple location” (Manning, 2020, p. 3).

I take a cue from political philosopher and artist Erin Manning in her seminal piece on working “against method” in institutional and disciplinary contexts. In other words, methods that are stultifying, procedural, reductive, and colonial to say the least. In my framing of the conjuncture in this “study” and in my work generally, I pose what is at stake in pedagogies, practices, and collective engagement with difference? How do we create new knowledges and processes of thinking-making with difference that in the spirit of some of Manning’s propositions of research-creation: to “dwell in the transversal,” “be speculatively pragmatic,” and, “invent in the interstices” – all in the background of ongoing neoliberal proclivities of fungibility and disavowal. These implications will prove helpful in developing new reading and writing practices of difference that traditionally cohere around discrete events (many times of the past), tactical deployments of crisis, or that are regarded as entities that are simply external to us that can simply get thrown away.

Situating Neoliberalism, Difference, and Emboldened Whiteness

Neoliberalism is an epistemological structure of biopolitical differentiation, capital accumulation, and disavowal (Joseph, 2014; Hong, 2015). It is a technology that promotes distortion, aporia, and willful ignorance. In other words, neoliberalism assesses how lives and subjectivities are incited, constrained, or conferred value for the purposes of extending capital. In what is effectively the “financialization of everyday life,” neoliberalism appropriates diversity and makes it appropriable for institutional control. As Winnubst (2020) examines, “neoliberal difference-as-fungible hollows out the kind of psychic depth and interiority that difference-as-historical traditionally carries, especially as that historical repository is animated by violence” (p. 110). From this standpoint, difference is bereft of substance and character, enabling whiteness to once again be emboldened as epistemological and ontological precedents. Matias and Newlove (2017) examine that we are contending with a moment of “emboldened en/whitening epistemology characterized by perverse re-appropriation of civil rights terminologies—once used to support People of Color—to instead strengthen White nationalism” (p. 921). The co-optation of social justice, difference, and resistance discourses and movements that feign victimization show the desperation of keeping the violence of whiteness intact.

Attending to the desire to move past brutal episodes in history, neoliberalism espouses “anti” and “post” discourses, (post-racialism, post-feminism, post-truth). The ideals of multiculturalism, opportunity, freedom and progress are often invoked to suggest we have entitled access to consume all the diversity in the world and can sustain an amicable, tolerant, and post-racial society. These ideals are part and parcel of the good life, the good society, and the good person and is contingent on a dismissal of a violent past of anti-racism in favor of a more vapidly conceived inclusive, welcoming and non-threatening ethos and community; to not consider uncomfortable feelings and promote the promise of a multiculturalism of happiness (Ahmed, 2007). Neoliberalism provides a “contradictory political and cultural climate replete with idea(ls) of equality, accompanied by an unbending refusal to see the persistence of deeply entrenched inequalities” (Bilge, 2013, p. 407).

Multiculturalism as is often used in neoliberalism abstracts issues of human difference and simultaneously displaces violence onto naturalized fictions, namely race, resulting in new terms of racialized privilege and racialized stigma. To facilitate what is

deemed as good diversity in this schema of neoliberal multiculturalism requires “producing difference as a valorized domain of knowledge and then ideologically correlating ethical, moral, technical, and political stances toward difference with what benefits neoliberal agendas” (Melamed, 2011, p. 43). Neoliberalism, as Grace Hong describes, is a structure of disavowal that facilitates a certain epistemological framing (or knowledge) of seeing or not seeing difference. Through its effects, neoliberalism “abstracts and distills so that hegemonic structures may continue to remain fixed” (Kim, 2015; Ferguson, 2012).

The Conjuncture and Radical Openings for Difference: Beyond Institutionalality

Diversity also maintains its positive valence through neoliberal institutionalality that carefully invites and affirms minority difference and struggles. Notably, the university works to invoke a discourse of community and inclusion that “attempt[s] to enact and produce identity, unity, communion, and purity” where different bodies come together happily and seamlessly without pretense. Diversity “sticks” in institutional life because it is celebrated as an unequivocal good translatable into market values and often enshrined in mission and vision statements. Diversity has accumulative value and stands in for some virtuous cause. However, it is under the guise of diversity in this way that performs a calculated and strategic politics of inclusion on the part of the institution to avoid impasses that invite critical scrutiny of the disciplinary modes of power, state, and capital (Ferguson, 2012). Diversity discourses and practices in the neoliberal university “incorporate difference in ways that do not make a difference” (Bilge, 2014, p. 3) while also attempting to keep difference legible and intelligible through compartmentalizing and essentializing experiences. Following Roderick Ferguson (2012) in documenting the tactics to regulate difference in the neoliberal university: “As power has negotiated and incorporated differences, it has also developed and deployed a calculus by which to determine the specific critical and ruptural capacities of those forms of differences” (p. 214).

What is important to remember is that the neoliberal university is a site for social reproduction that teaches new modes of marketing, incorporating, commodifying, governing, and (de)valorizing minoritized subjects” (Melamed, 2016). In my view, the appreciation of difference in the neoliberal academy is an avowal of whiteness.

Whiteness embraces certain aspects and acceptable qualities of difference. Notably, the university is a site that privileges the white male colonial subjectivities as its ontological precedent. Keeping diversity and its supposedly happy outlook undermines other genres of performing humanity and neutralizes the fraught histories endured by minorities “in the past” because of their ascribed difference (Povinelli, 2011).

As part of this social order that effectively relegates other genres of humanity outside the “sanctified universe of obligation,” (Fein, 1979) the neoliberal university evades confrontational impasses that help apprehend the historical, structural, and material conditions contributing to the ordinariness of debility and death for people of color. As Winnubst (2020) astutely observes, “neoliberal difference-as-fungible hollows out the kind of psychic depth and interiority that difference-as-historical traditionally carries, especially as that historical repository is animated by violence” (p. 110).

For many people of color in the academy, their embodied, “diverse” subjectivities occupy what Black feminist scholars Sylvia Wynter (1990) and Katherine McKittrick (2006) describe as *demonic grounds*. The notion of the demonic foregrounds how people of color, synonymous with the abject, are rendered “outside the bounds of reason” or “too alien to comprehend” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xxv). In the interest of modulating what is deemed representable or acceptable, soul killing, or the pillaging of one’s resources, language, agency, dignity, and humanity becomes widespread in the academy (Schwab, 2010). Despite these realities, the absented presence of these peripheralized subjectivities continues to make an indelible imprint within, or maybe more accurately haunts, the academy.

Given the administrative ethos of learning within neoliberal institutionality, conjunctural impasses are necessary to undo, to imagine, to wade through frictions, if we take seriously more just futures. Learning in this way reflects what Moten and Harney (2013) describe as study. For Moten and Harney, study is not learning about a subject in exclusively formal ways. Instead, it is a practice of fugitivity and a site of protopolitical engagement, in the undercommons. In other words, study is democratized, crafted in relationship, and does not have to be within the university. Study sees the textures of everyday life as a site for generative inquiry without the sanctioning by administrative stridency. Theory is not restricted to texts, but also other forms that are creative and

embodied, and has potential to be therapeutic, decolonial, and liberatory (Christian, 1988; hooks, 1991; Lorde, 1977). This contrasts with disciplinary or institutional strictures that take proceduralism and “intellectual knowledge” as precedent. The late queer performance scholar Jose Esteban Munoz writes of theory as “a mode of utopian performativity, a certain striving that is both ideality and a necessity” (2005, p. 120). Conjunctural teaching and learning insists on theory in more capacious ways, as a practice for world-making and disidentification from the world as we know it. It has both political and ethical implications to situate our relational field and subjectivities within context and power.

Ultimately, as I see it, conjunctural teaching and learning to activate new “lines of flight” that orient us away from the discrete and the predetermined and invites what is not immediately intelligible, or what does not have a form. Reading the world and our roles within it through the conjuncture not only destabilizes binary thinking and hierarchies of knowledge but allows peripheralized knowledges to take center stage. It allows us to attune to our world, to be inveterately curious about identity-within-difference, the relationships we forge and their affective values and intensities. Thus, an ethos centered around the conjuncture keenly witnesses our lived experiences, assemblages, events, structural orientations we collectively organize and the potential futures still in the making.

Conjunctural Teaching for Emergent Sociality: A Transdisciplinary Course on Philosophy and Education

My pedagogical practice is predicated upon a fierce love for the world and for knowledge. I am inveterately curious about how we organize our understandings of concepts that inevitably modulate our everyday practices and realities (see Foucault and power-knowledge). Notably, I have experimented with the ways we can actively center peripheralized knowledges, not merely to acknowledge these “minor” contributions, but to understand what these knowledges *do* in disrupting a relational commons that all too often privileges binary and paranoid engagements, a compulsion to capture and gain, and coaxes a narcissistic desire to get “right” and to move on. As has been intimated, the commons within neoliberalism is a fundamentally anti-relational project.

While detailing the idiosyncratic ways to contextualize the concepts of power, privilege, and difference in an education course is certainly beyond the scope of this paper and my personal bandwidth, I offer a diffractive reading of episodes generated from a twelve-week semester long class that was premised on my interest on studying these concepts in otherwise modes. Diffraction is a key orientation in my dissertation writ large, and to my overall process of being-with the world. Expanding Sandra Haraway's initial description of diffraction as "a commitment to understanding which differences matter, how they matter, and for whom...a critical practice of engagement, not a distance-learning practice of reflecting from afar" (Barad, 2007, p. 90), feminist scholar and quantum physicist Karen Barad refers to diffraction as the following:

It is not a self-referential glance back at oneself. While reflection has been used as a methodological tool by scholars relying on representationalism, there are good reasons to think that diffraction may serve as a productive model for thinking through nonrepresentationalist methodological approaches (Barad, 2007, p. 88).

Barad's conception of diffraction has been taken up by many education scholars interested in new materialist scholarship (Springgay and Truman, Hickey-Moody and Willcox, Bolazek and Zembylas, Murriss and Bolazek, among others). Instead of acquiescing to reflective mirroring, diffraction provides for an alternative orientation, one that advocates for "a relational ontology which is not separated from epistemological and ethical domains –an ethico-onto-epistemological approach" (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017, p. 7).

I understand the great privilege I have as an educator and the significance of pedagogy as a site of necessary dialectical struggle to transgress the orthodoxies of methodological containment. My goal has been to encourage the reveling in the not yet formed, and what I attempt to illustrate is how my students began to expand what we mean by knowledge creation as a response-able act with ethical and political ramifications. More important, knowledge creation was uncovered as an activity that is personal and immanent. The role of theory, inquiry, and philosophy cannot be understated. As scholar-activists of color have implored in their exhortations to deparochialize, and perhaps more specifically to decolonialize knowledge from elitist strictures, introducing an ecology of practice (Stengers, 2005) that embraces

experimentation, speculative pragmatism, hypothetical sympathy and relational witnessing is necessary to incite the *vital*, a life giving force and desire (Bright, 2017; Deleuze, 1997; Barthes, 1975) that long has been abjured by our acquiescence to the everyday movements of power and the relation of cruel optimism. The classroom is where the ecology of practice for learning begins.

On Transdisciplinarity and Disciplinary Decadence

This twelve-week semester long class involves foregrounding transdisciplinarity and renouncing disciplinary decadence (Gordon, 2014, 2016), which is also core to my pedagogical stance. In the spirit of Sylvia Wynter (1990) and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2019), I view transdisciplinarity through a decolonial attitude. Through the rigorous interplay of disciplines, registers, genres, practices, and techniques, transdisciplinarity in this way is not about facilely reading different authors and texts, but rather developing a sensibility and consciousness that:

seeks to decolonize, desegregate, and de-generate power, being, and knowledge. It does so by creating new bonds and relationships between spheres that modernity had helped to separate: the sphere of politics and social activism, the sphere of artistic creation, and the sphere of knowledge production. Decolonial consciousness implies ways of acting, being, and knowing nourished at the intersections of these areas (Maldonado-Torres, 2019, p. 292).

What underscores this sensibility and consciousness is an ethical accountability to interrogate how we make sense of the world through the knowledges and tools we study with; the knowledges and tools that inflict violence, that obscure, that sanction hierarchies, that foreclose other possibilities for being, living, and relating. Wynter and others (Maldonado-Torres, Gordon, and McKittrick) take transdisciplinarity as a technique to bring to the fore the minor (which will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper) that is beyond the bounds of the master's tools (Lorde), or the regime of Man (Wynter). Transdisciplinarity asserts a new domain of inquiry, the demonic grounds, articulated by those in the margins that cannot be rendered by the epistemological and ontological assumptions of whiteness.

As a corollary to transdisciplinarity, the notion of disciplinary decadence has been important in my thinking of education theory. While the field of education by nature is

interdisciplinary, I have not come upon many opportunities for intentional and rigorous exchange of disciplines and inquiries when engaging with power, privilege, and difference. There is still an emphasis on methods and technical proceduralisms, especially in education courses that are meant to prepare aspiring teachers. However, staying with what we know can unwittingly reinscribe hackneyed orthodoxies. Manning (2016) similarly shares these sentiments by philosopher Alfred North Whitehead:

It's that in the organizing of experience for academic study we must become more attuned to how we are contributing to the creation of new orthodoxies in relation to what we understand experience to do. Otherwise, as Whitehead says, "varied freshness has been lost, and the species lives upon the blind appetitions of old usages" (1929, p. 19) [page 59 in Manning].

In a similar vein, Black studies scholar and philosopher, Lewis Gordon (2014) describes disciplinary decadence, or the inclination for disciplines to work within their boundaries. Here, Gordon more acutely writes of the implications of viewing knowledge from one, often conceived as a coherent, standpoint:

This is the phenomenon of turning away from living thought, which engages reality and recognises its own limitations, to a deontologised or absolute conception of disciplinary life. The discipline becomes, in solipsistic fashion, the world. And in that world, the main concern is the proper administering of its rules, regulations, or, as Fanon argued, (self-devouring) methods (p. 86).

Gordon gestures to the adverse consequences of the disciplinary strictures that arbitrate the claims of what constitutes the integrity of the disciplinary knowledge (i.e. what is sociological or historical enough). In contrast to interdisciplinarity that can still work through a reductive purview, where disciplines merely work together with their strictures, Gordon recommends the "more of hopeful route" of transdisciplinarity, "where disciplines work through each other" and work to consider our epistemological assumptions to "move beyond" our traditional schemas of disciplinary work (p. 87).

On Inquiry, Philosophy, and Aesthetics

The course spent a considerable amount of time in the beginning, and throughout the semester, developing together what an ecology of meaningful relationship would look like. Foregrounding relational skeins stokes our collective curiosity of who we are and

what we each bring into the relational container. The first few weeks of class was also dedicated to framing inquiry and philosophy in everyday life. Scholars of color including bell hooks and Maria Lugones were situated to understand the value of critical thinking, specifically theory as a practice of liberation. As these scholars of color offer, theory is a medium for understanding experiences, for world making, and to disidentify from Western rubrics and assumptions that modulate what is of value. Ultimately, by highlighting conceptual diversity from the margins, we become attuned to how, as decolonial philosopher Walter D. Mignolo provokes:

Liberation is through thinking and being otherwise. Liberation is not something to be attained. It is a process of letting something go, namely, the flows of energy that keep you attached to the colonial matrix of power, whether you are in the camp of those who sanction or the camp of those sanctioned (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018. p. 148).

As is my bias in exploring philosophy through everyday experiences, I have found that wrestling with the subtleties of theory and knowledge, including being attentive to what intensities and vulnerabilities they provoke, are beneficial towards generating meaningful concepts and setting up the conditions for more convivial and capacious imaginaries. I borrow the sentiment from Deleuze and Guattari (1994) that the inextricable link between philosopher and concept is significant especially during this juncture of anti-intellectualism and a disavowal of critique as an enduring ethico-aesthetic activity.

The aesthetic plays an important role in this course by giving students license to generate and experiment with concepts, thinking and making more generally, and to speculate futures with rigor and finesse. This “aesthetic attunement” (Loveless, 2019) falls in line with Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic paradigm that “to speak of creation is to speak of the responsibility of the creative instance with regard to the thing created” (Guattari, 1995, p. 107). The thrust of the aesthetic is concerned with the inflection of immanent and emergent processes that affect cultural formations, and the sensuous amenability to the messy materiality of the world.

The aesthetic cuts through rationalistic orientations of knowledge production to compose something new. In sum, regarding the aesthetic as “the affective ballast and

concrete means to induce exuberant futures” (Berlant, 2010) as well as a mode of “promiscuity in lieu of fidelity to field” (Chuh, 2014, p. 132) sets up the conditions to revitalize our ways of sensing the world. This course has sought to direct its pedagogy in this aesthetic manner to assert the organization of knowledge creation in the pursuit of “better desires and better good lives” (p. 133).

The following sections are what I consider “technical junctures” that characterize how the conjunctural is put to practice during the semester, albeit in messy and unpredictable ways. In the spirit of trying not to write about these experiences neatly, but rather in a diffractive way, there may be occasions where activities or processes described may overlap, converge, or perhaps have traces in other episodes. Notably, these episodes attempt to how I, along with the class, instantiate an ecology of practice that supports reading conjuncturally that is, this ethos of experimentation, provocation, rigor, and relational witnessing.

Conjugating the Self: Political Writing and Rethinking Reflection for the Conuncture

We must lay in waiting for ourselves. Throughout our lives. Abandoning the pretense that we know.

The thesis of our dialectic is: I don’t know, and I must study, and search. I must be open to my experience, open to others’ and be willing to abandon what I think in the face of what I see.

William F. Pinar and Madeleine R. Grumet, *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, 1976

“Who am I?” is about (always unrealizable) identity; always wobbling...who are “we”?
That is an intently more open question, one always ready for contingent, friction-generating articulations.

Donna Haraway, *The Promise of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others*,

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Reflection. Self. Other. – A Field Memo

I have always been intrigued by reflection. Curious about how the processes students go through in order to conjugate their multiple facets. In many of these classes, students have a prefigured idea of what constitutes a reflection. Many go through their Rolodex of experiences to describe a particular story they think I am looking for when I “assess” these accounts. Regurgitation. Coherence. Sameness. Projections, Transparency. Culture (what is this?). Comfort. Many White students either express consternation about having to disclose their whiteness (anodyne enough so as not to cross the acceptable threshold of disclosure to trigger alarm), or are peeved of yet another redundant assignment. While not said explicitly, the looks on students’ faces when, yet another reflection activity is assigned is also noteworthy.

Reflection. Self. Other.

I have always been intrigued by reflection. An account of oneself seems to evoke a revolting feeling. What else am I supposed to write about? The looks of incredulity and tiredness, and the deep groans say it all. For BIPOC, I can sense some excitement, yet feeling a bit concerned about whether or not they need to perform some sort of “coerced mimeticism” (Chow) that may have defined much of their writing on self, culture, and society. Being a cultural liaison. Being a sort of spectacle case study. Hyper/in-visibility (Rankine). Fodder for trauma porn. Pressure to comport with normative ideals yet wanting to dismantle them. How might we go beyond the veneer of proceduralism, of acceptability, of comfort in definitive knowing? How might we transcend discursive thinking of the self and other? How do I carefully account for the multiple discourses that affect material realities? How do the students see me as their instructor? How might this affect how much they wish to tell? What brings to bear on my reading of my students’ accounts of self?

Reflection. Self. Other.

I have always been intrigued by reflection. What do all these questions do? Plurality. Spaces. Intensities. Charges. Are we willing to be disturbed? Are we avoiding what haunts us about what we don’t know? How do we commune with our becomings through the curricular encounter/event and beyond? Is everything an event? How do we not act with haste that paradoxically plays with both distance and closeness to read our subjectivities? Plurality. Spaces. Intensities. Charges. Change.

I consider writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2003). Writing is not just merely putting down words, but rather it is an encounter to make and unmake. It is a process that is sensuous. The ability to affect and be affected (Massumi, 2015, p. 3) is how I try to frame my writing practice, and something I have tried to encourage in my classes. It can be a little unsettling to introduce writing in this way that undoes linear structuring or hyper-focusing on a topic, but I try to emulate processes in my classes that are emblematic of what we experience in our everyday lives, pondering what does it mean to live in the interstices, in the transversal. Discovering power and difference emerges from this rhizomatic experience of learning, from the middle. Writing in this way also can help us analyze “inscribed habits of inattention,” or the ways in which we attune to certain intersubjective interactions, such the relaying of senses or emotions, in ourselves and others (Boler, 1999, p. 16).

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Judith Butler examines the moral and ethical quandaries of narrating our subjective experiences. Butler contends that we are always haunted by the always already opacity of our subjectivities. She writes:

Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others, suggesting that these relations call upon primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization. If we are formed in the context of relations that become partially irrecoverable to us, then that opacity seems built into our formation and follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency (p. 20).

Butler suggests that our narrated accounts will always be partial and incomplete. She takes a cue from Levinas in that our subjectivities are inevitably linked to the Other. Our understandings of Self are predicated on this intersubjective interaction, with the constant struggle to re-form ourselves into being, that is, this coherent and transparent representation. Butler goes on to say:

My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I can devise no definitive story. I cannot explain exactly why I have emerged in this way, and my efforts at narrative reconstruction are always undergoing revision (2005, p. 40).

I will mention that, especially for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, an opportunity of giving an account of oneself is often not possible in the climate of anti-Black racism and white epistemic violence. In the foreword of *The Logic of Racial Practice* (2021), George Yancy lays out the realities of being denied subjective legibility:

It is to live a life where the meaning of one's being has been confiscated and phenomenologically returned as a site of feculence, dirt, the unclean, the stained...So I move through white social spaces marked, indelibly, with the curse of Ham, where I'm always already guilty of some crime, where *I am*, ontologically, a misdeed, an offense and offensive (p. viii).

With this argument that giving an account of oneself will ineluctably be partial and potentially can be ignored, how can we encourage critical encounters of the Self and Other that provoke the intra-action of multiplicity, space, affect, discourse, and materiality, destabilizing coherent representations? In other words, how can we help cultivate a diffractive reflexivity that situates “subjects and objects such as nature and culture [that] are not fixed referents for understanding the other but should be read through one another as entanglements” (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017, p. 116).

Certainly, I am not disavowing the potential of the theoretical significance of reflection or reflexivity generally, but I am interested in revitalizing their de rigueur utility and questioning the claims of reflection or reflexivity do especially in education contexts. Are we approaching the activities of reflection or reflexivity teleologically, and if so, what their goals? How have reflection and reflexivity lost their educative rigor? In their current form, do we encourage confrontational impasses that open ourselves up to all that is out there, and what is not immediately perceptible that may mediate our processes of becoming? Are we afraid to encourage processes that can undo us? What might all of these considerations *do* for us? Particularly when we spend time in education courses preparing aspiring teachers or any student to be “reflective practitioners,” it becomes incumbent for us as instructors or teacher educators to think about the processes in which inquiry is a cornerstone. Alluding to the diffractive reflexivity described by Bozalek and Zembylas above, Hill (2017) similarly avers shifting the paradigm of reflection to diffraction in her work on teacher identity and inquiry. She claims that currently, “teachers are encouraged to develop a stable, often essentialized ‘self’ that permeates

their professional identity” (p. 9). This understanding presupposes there is something pure about this identity. A move towards a diffractive orientation has potential to disrupt this tendency for a stable identity.

Given the concerns I addressed around facile or recycled reflections on self, other, and society, instead of the traditional cultural autobiography often assigned that would recount pre-existing and pre-figured ideas, I thought it would be much more beneficial for students to engage in political autoethnography, a genre and form of cultural work to think through, to *become with* (as opposed to being imposed by) the theories, critiques, and lingering questions relative to their everyday lives. Johnson (2019) affirms that as a genre, “autoethnography reveals an encounter of vulnerability in which subject positions of self and other are not always-already mutually constituted and hierarchically construed” (p. 2).

Students were invited to think about how neoliberalism and emboldened whiteness in its multivalent forms affected their subjectification and psychic life. I intended that attuning to quotidian practices would evince “lines of potential that a *something* coming together calls to mind and sets in motion... pressure points of events or banalities suffered and the trajectories that forces might take if they were to go unchecked” (Stewart, 2007, p. 2). This attunement of the everyday and what we make ordinary would uncover diffractive insights connecting the past, present, and future.

The parameters of the assignment insisted on using different genres of writing, including images, drawings to focus less on descriptive documentation, but rather on their process to attune to open up to the excess of experience, or “a way of being in the world that is open to experimentation and is (in)tension” (Springgay and Truman, 2018, p. 87). Springgay and Truman continue to describe a politics of worlding potential that foregrounds incipency in their WalkingLab project, describing that “this liveness, or incipient subjectivity of a sense-event remains open, incorporeal, virtual and exists in a time that is always past and always about to come, but never happening” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 87). In the uncovering of everyday phenomena, my intention was to encourage my students to facilitate both movement and attunement across and between connective abstractions, qualities, and events. In other words, the curiosity to “bring [these phenomena] into view as a scene of immanent force, rather than leave them

looking like dead effects imposed on an innocent world” (Stewart, 2007, p. 1) exhorts a more active engagement with the world, the theories we generate, and the abilities to shape our responses.

As I have frequently observed in my teaching and general interfacing in education courses, many (white) students often pronounce of the afflictions that pervade the world through an extrinsic orientation, acknowledging that injustice is certainly there, but observing their situatedness and the world from the sidelines (Manning, 2019; Hartman, 2008, p. 7). I would argue that such a seemingly passive engagement (seemingly with “good” intentions), perpetuates the ontological nihilism that suffuses our culture today. Certainly, I do believe in the critical role that pedagogues and instructors play as a contact point where connections of experiences, and the deleterious effects of ideologies such as neoliberalism and white supremacy can be explored. However, there is much more impact and possibility to approach life differently when we witness the “scenes of subjection” firsthand and slow down the tendency to render our making and thinking as automatically coherent, commensurable, totalizing, or representational. It is only through our attention to collective processes and attachments that become our everyday existence that we can begin to undo and imagine our knowledge and engagements with power, privilege, and difference capaciously and otherwise. The following are student examples of political autoethnographic tales, astutely witnessing the everyday. Instead of systematically categorizing their stories, I leave them to speak for themselves, as much of the data or excerpts of political ethnographic tales presented. In my adherence to post-qualitative analysis, my hope is to think with them as opposed to imposing on them:

Rory (White)

With all this said, there is, whether it is right or wrong, a lot of guilt that comes along with feeling so down about all this. That is because, for the most part, all of what I am upset about is afforded to me out of a great deal of privilege, and there are so many people that are struggling so much more because of this pandemic. I have it so easy compared to others, and this whole time I’ve been very conscious of that... And that doesn’t come from wanting to self-affirm ourselves as good people and self-aware of our privilege, but from the genuine sentiment that we

feel guilty feeling as unhappy as we do. Because of this, it's been a difficult battle the past few weeks tugging and pulling on different feelings: allowing myself to feel what I authentically feel, and making myself be constantly aware of the implications this pandemic has on others that are so much more severe. I realize that these ideas are not at all mutually exclusive, just that finding that balance is certainly a challenge at times.

Confronting inequity is a moral issue to me. I fundamentally believe that inequity and mistreatment of other humans is morally wrong, and it disturbs me that my quality of life comes at the expense of other people. I realize this sounds superficial, but I believe it at my core! In order to make my commitment to equity deep and genuine, I must critically look at systemic inequity around me all the time. This gets a little bit into Pedagogy of the Oppressed territory - we cannot truly be liberated until we become aware of our oppression. Because I'm drawn to education and teaching, I believe I can uplift marginalized students and simultaneously assist students in understanding and leveraging their privilege by implementing a culturally responsive curriculum. I don't mean this in an icky, self-serving, savior way - our collective liberation is intertwined, so it is my job to leverage my positionality to facilitate social change. That's the hard part.

Virgie (POC)

There's always shifting dynamics and conditions with every incremental change or brief moment of connection/love/trauma, and I find myself moving past things very easily in lieu of "the next big thing" without simmering in that brief moment enough.

i have yet to grapple with why i don't rly feel too connected with tasc or asian america in general outside of the usual "they're mostly an east asian space" critique but i think at some point being asian american did not feel like as much of a prominent identity for me ? i get the importance of the asian american label (naming the unity of our struggles) and am in support when it's politically important. but yea i do think the label/identity filipino american is more encompassing of my agenda politics and political life/struggles and where i want to put my energy towards. like historically speaking we have many diff migration patterns and are an american neocolony which ofc trickles down to our lived experiences. which for me i think dictates which agenda politics i feel more committed/connected to aka anti imperialism and transnational justice that maybe transcend the usual asian american narratives. boba liberalism i guess. i also do not wanna hear about media representation (though it's v important especially for children and many marginalized folks !! identity politics still important to an extent) lol. and not to reduce the asian am justice movement to that, like we know there's many many rad folks rallying under the asian am blanket/label. and fight against housing injustice and anti-asian violence and deportations and etc for local and national communities and they're v important. and asian am studies def important to me and opened me up to larger understandings of justice, and in many spaces it's more integrated with third world studies and broader movements that i think a lot of contemporary asian am spaces neglect

maybe another part of it for me is the american part lol i don't feel as scattered or diasporic as folks do and feel relatively anchored by my access to and personal direct history with the philippines which is a large privilege. i do recognize the political importance of identifying as asian American to combat the perpetual foreigner narrative and assert that yes we do actually belong in this country, and we have these united struggles of having war imposed on our motherlands and our lives here in the US, and we are constantly rendered invisible and racially triangulated between the white and black binary. but that political importance sometimes feels limited beyond US-centered identity politics (though identity politics are important in understanding yourself and situating yourself against any movement you're affiliated with) and it feels constraining to an extent i think. i think yea it's mostly the US-centric thing (angela davis calls it slumber) that's evident in asian am circles that generates some personal disconnect with me and i know that's not the case for many folks who for them asian america is a solace ofc and one of the only spaces within their proximity that they feel at home in. maybe i am just being condescending with some of these trains of thought lol

Figure 1. Virgie’s Account on Representation

Instantiating the Minor, Working through the Middle

It is to take seriously that we must come to knowledge differently, beyond the strictures of colonialism, beyond the “instruments (or categories) that we study with.” In this we would accompany Wynter, who, in Mignolo’s words, “seeks to undo the systems through which knowledge and knowing are constituted” (Wynter, 2015, p. 106).

Erin Manning, *Toward a Politics of Immediation* (2019)

"If the world is made white, then the body-at-home is one that can inhabit whiteness" (153).

Sara Ahmed, *A Phenomenology of Whiteness* (2007)

.....
A Field Memo on the “Minor”

The minor isn't really minor at all. I refuse to be othered, to be abject, to be transgressive. Though, can these significations be reclaimed? Is becoming minor a form of ethics for us to adequately efface the palimpsests of coloniality? I think about how we are reliant on current forms of knowledge to transgress violence. Clearly, this hasn't been very helpful. If pedagogy is a site of humanization, where we learn what it means to be a human in this world, what might we do to instantiate refusal of dominant scripts and bring peripheralized knowledges to the fore? What are the ethics and possibilities of theorizing and world-making that is not endorsed by the regime of Man? How might we harness the notion of a resistant liveness that transgresses solipsistic engagements with the world? What might disidentificatory processes that countervail the matrix of power look like in our learning and relational encounters as we work within them? What might the effects be for students who are modulated through the lens of fetishized difference? What might we learn from minoritarian politics and practices? Is suspending judgment and perspective taking enough?

Deleuze and Guattari (1986) describe a minor space in terms of a minor literature. More generally, they posit three distinctive elements of the minor, including: “(1) deterritorialization or subtraction from the dominant order, (2) the connection of its agents to political immediacy, and (3) the potential within it for taking up of whatever is at hand and creating new assemblages” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986 in Secor and Linz, 2017. p. 568). The minor space is invariably about taking that impasse seriously, or what has been described as this interstitial space of indeterminacy and potential. This impasse that can be framed as integral to conjunctural reading that necessarily works within to witness and break down the cruel attachments that wear our everyday lives and to generate new forms of living, even through this nebulous sphere. Berlant (2011) notes of occupying the impasse, clarifying the relation of living predicated by ongoing debility and crisis ordinariness: “This impasse is not too comfortable, though: there’s queasiness in the air. Normative idioms of power and distinction are almost entirely outside of the frame, and yet hover everywhere” (p. 249). The activities within the impasse to instantiate the minor has been of consequence to this course.

For queer and performance studies scholar Jose Esteban Muñoz, teaching minoritarian knowledge is imbued with love. Love, in this regard, is not about sentimentality, but a recognition of the disidentificatory processes minoritarian subjects engage with in order to perform both legibility and resistance. Pedagogy is the space where renderings of the impossible become vivified, where the tensions of self and other collide, and where “[t]he need to produce minoritarian knowledge is a mode of utopian performativity, a certain striving that is both ideality and a necessity” (Muñoz, 2005, p. 120). As current movements seek to denounce critical race studies and whiteness studies, particularly conservative, right-wing pronouncements “to defend nefarious aims while sapping precious university funds to host and protect trolls and their un-rigorous, unfounded...racist, sexist, homophobic, and colonialist diatribes” abound, we must insist on minoritarian knowledge production even in its “failure” to take root within neoliberal institutionality (Shomura, 2021). These sensibilities of refusal and failure that inhere minoritarian knowledge production is strategic as it “turns on the impossible” and “imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 88).

Author Cathy Hong Park writes about the minor feelings that are generated by neoliberal expectations of the good life and the contradictory realities minoritarian subjects face. In an interview, she expounds on this notion of minor feelings to think through her experiences as an Asian-American:

Minor feelings occur when American optimism is forced upon you, which contradicts your own racialized reality, thereby creating a static of cognitive dissonance. You are told, ‘Things are so much better,’ while you think, Things are the same. You are told, ‘Asian Americans are so successful,’ while you feel like a failure....When minor feelings are finally externalized, they are interpreted as hostile, ungrateful, jealous, depressing, and belligerent, affects ascribed to racialized behavior that whites consider out of line. Our feelings are overreactions because our lived experiences of structural inequity are not commensurate with their deluded reality (O’Rourke, 2020).

Recognizing the importance of affect to minoritarian knowledge production, the course sought to understand how minor feelings are regularly managed and contained, and how their supposedly “ugly” or “bad” qualities are insurgent in the ways they

illuminate deluded reality. It is not surprising then that the affective management spurred by neoliberalism has given rise to “atmospheres” of boredom, anxiety, depression, and despondency (Anderson, 2021, 2016). Following Sianne Ngai (2005), the course attempted to study how these so called “ugly feelings” are “interpretations of predicaments”—that is, signs that not only render visible different registers of problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical) but conjoin these problems in a distinctive manner...posed by a general state of obstructed agency” (p. 3). Often dismissed as something private, irrational, or in excess for those occupying the periphery of white humanisms, this class also foregrounded analytics of affect as subversive knowledge to situate and challenge technologies of control and normative forms of collectivity.

On working through minor feelings in particular, Eve and Randy provided the following aesthetic renderings (excerpts):

Eve (POC)

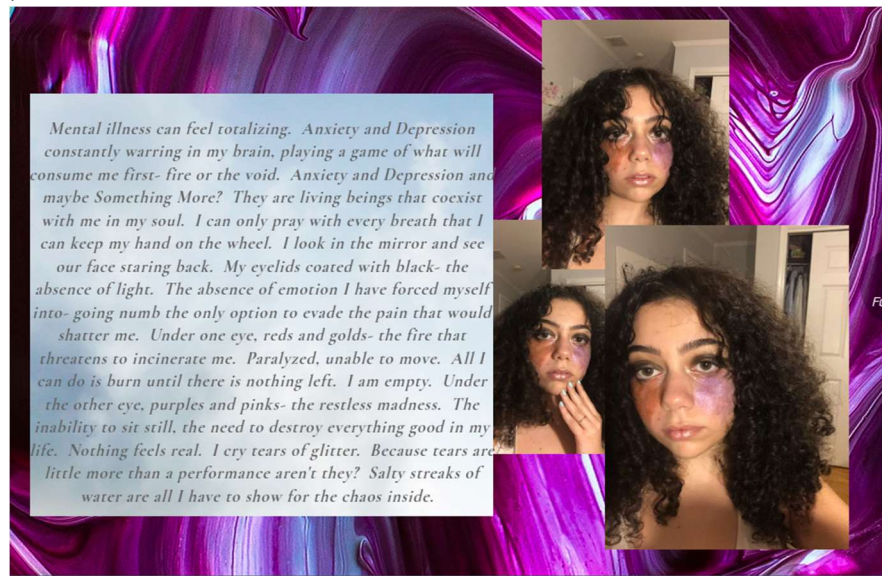




Figure 2. Eve on Identity and Makeup

Randy (POC)

<hr/> <p>UNIVERSITY</p> <p>more than \$80K</p> <p>here to get “educated”</p> <p>what are we learning?</p> <p>who are the teachers?</p> <p>diversity just for show</p> <p>no real commitment</p> <p>we know of its flaws</p> <p>inauthentic and unsafe</p> <p>yet we bow to it</p> <hr/>	<hr/> <p>BROWN EMOTIONS</p> <p>when brown people feel,</p> <p>we are alienated</p> <p>told to use just facts</p> <p>so-called “criminals”</p> <p>considered irrational</p> <p>must be our own fault</p> <hr/>
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Figure 3. Randy on University and Brown Emotions

As I was simultaneously observing, teaching, and reading student assignments, I also became increasingly interested in how reading conjuncturally about difference as I have described above bore out of this understanding of the *minor* and employing

rhizomatic learning that is, from what emerges in the middle and the outgrowths, as well as the transversal. Erin Manning discusses about orienting our pedagogy in such a way to organize around knowledge otherwise:

To think study transversally involves a rethinking of the concept of thought itself. Thought is reoriented toward the incipency of the event at hand, toward the inquiry of study, refraining from delimiting it to existing academic definitions of intellectuality. Where else does thinking happen? (Manning, 2015, p. 208).

Inherent in my pedagogy has always been the significance of citational politics and to examine, with my class, the scholars, ideas, and modes of research that we circulate. However, I never considered how this practice of elucidating citational politics directly impacted how we orient ourselves in the world. The conceptual difference afforded by knowledges from the periphery, instantiates the minor: that is, “[t]o subtract a minor space from the dominant order, to connect ourselves to an immanent politics, and to see what sorts of tools we might find in that space...” (Secor and Linz, 2017, p. 568). Instead of being quick to represent and capture difference in neat and often, depoliticized ways, my goal was to keep students attentive to the continual makings of power, privilege, and difference.

A citation becomes a political act, its movements that iterate, reproduce regimes of truth. Ahmed states this cohering of citations to form a discipline is part of the “techniques of selection, ways of making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and others not even part” (Ahmed, 2013). By paying attention to the “reproductive technology” that is citation, the traces, the memories we choose to record through citations, we legitimize the minor and instantiate a commitment to scholars displaced by the institutional regime of Man.

In an activity on tracking our intellectual kinships, students discussed the breadth and depth of scholars and schools of thought, Jess, a white student, commented that she never considered the people that were cited in her classes. She just blindly accepted what was assigned thinking they all were somehow established in the disciplinary canon: “I think about how did I ever go without reading these scholars or activists of color? If we don’t know these perspectives exist, how can we envision different worlds?”

Tammy, a student of color commented on how powerful for her it was to think through that her disciplinary knowledge around STEM was largely organized through “seminal” texts that were unquestioned. She goes on to say:

[T]hroughout most of my schooling, I never questioned why certain authors were more visible than others. I took the information we were given for granted. For research in particular, there is the culture of always having to include the most “prominent” authors...

However, Tammy cautioned that in some of her education classes, she derided what she thought as “forced difference:”

“I also get how many of our professors are trying hard to make community happen and to also diversity the curriculum. But it doesn’t seem very genuine... There is a descriptive display of difference and then we move on... These readings become tokenized in some way, and we don’t think about how and why they were written.”

Surely, my role for centering, producing, and teaching minoritarian knowledge is not to somehow impress liberal politics of empathy especially for white folks, or what Glissant writes about “of putting oneself into another—acting as if anyone can experience and everyone should act as if they could experience this cavity of being in Relation.” This putting yourself in another person’s shoes adopts a frame that you can somehow wholly understand the Other’s experience, by manipulating it to your way of knowing. This act only reiterates passive or righteous empathy that does not seek to engage or challenge the epistemes that undergird difference.

Speculating Futures and Queering Relationality

For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

Audre Lorde, *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House* (1984)

In a politics attuned to emergent difference, we must begin instead in the midst, where force has not yet tuned to form. In this middle, where the event is still welling, there is potential for new diagrams of life-living to be drawn.

Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (2016)

Can things really get better? The afflictions of death, suffering, debility. These aren't metaphors to profit from. We're not naïve. The neoliberal and racialized academy wants us to be professional and abide by their metrics. Is there life outside the bounds of this anti-relational racial capitalist world? Are we able to sustain ourselves even while remaining "strategically duplicitous?" (Manning) How do we *be* together?

Being in relation together, witnessing, and developing a coalitional consciousness was part of the course's aim to understand our entanglements in a toxic and violent world, and to proceed with political interventions for repair and transformation. Certainly not a naïve hope, but rather one that takes seriously the ideas and theorizing proffered by those who are afflicted by death and dispossession the most. A major theme drawn out from closely reading and engaging with texts from mostly people of color with decolonial and queer orientations was how to think of theory as activism. In other words, not to sequester theory in the inner sanctums of the university, but to "do" something meaningful with it, especially in their roles as aspiring scholar-practitioners. *What do we do with forgotten stories? Historical legacies that haunt? How shall we write about identity-in-difference, not a subjectification based on stable categories, but based on the relational encounters and intensities from others? How might we take up a relational ontology seriously that works to align with minoritarian projects?* Each class we meditated on these questions and what it would mean to address them as a group. Students remarked on the importance of setting the conditions of relationality, and extended this broadly to education:

Sarah (POC)

I think relationality is an important framework for working across differences because having a full understanding of our diverse social and historical contexts enriches our learning in the present. It helps us think in

more unproblematic and useful terms about current issues; It enlarges our imagination of reality in the present, and helps us think of solutions creatively, and in more expansive ways. When I think about a relationship gap in teaching and learning contexts, what jumps out at me is the fixed identities of teachers as authority figures, bestowed with all the knowledge and power, and the student as the permanent receiver. In most classrooms, these fixed notions are challenged and negotiated. However, their existence already limits knowledge production and learning to a large degree. Students and teachers are more often punished for taking chances and exploring the learning process.

Tom (White)

I understand relationality as a framework for understanding the myriad ways in which I can be connected with others. As a framework, it offers me an impetus for viewing and building relationships with others with a more appropriate understanding of how our personhoods are aligned in vision, values, and practices. Relationality invites me to come into the process of working across difference with a more precise awareness of myself (how I am coming into the space with respect to my emotional state, identities, social position, etc.) and a willingness to be open to the differences that others bring, while forefronting the opportunities for authentic connection. I *definitely* see a relationship gap in education especially in the realm of higher education. Though I feel like I can connect with specific professors more authentically in college, the gross majority of my classes do not feel like communities in and of themselves...Relationship is something hard to do when you feel the weight of the world on your shoulders.

Tamera (White)

I am learning through this course that relationality means being conscious of our positionality and relationship to others situated in the context of society. All of our relationships are influenced by the institutions and

cultural norms we live among. None of us exist in a vacuum. Relationality is a very important framework when working across differences because we need to be conscious of the factors that impact our relationship with someone in order to work across differences. There is always a power dynamic that needs to be interrogated and if that power dynamic is not discussed and challenged, hierarchical systems of oppression reproduce themselves. Our actions directly impact the relationship we have with someone. I definitely think that there is a relationship gap in education. We rarely discuss the position that different people in the classroom are coming from.

I have witnessed the disillusionment (and I have certainly experienced it) of students wanting to do something meaningful that upends the status quo but feel too intimidated by the magnitude of violent influences such as neoliberalism or emboldened whiteness, among others. Theorizing in the middle (invoking the rhizome and the transversal), as suggested previously, addresses these challenges head on by occupying the unknown, lingering with the emergent, and depicting what could be. Instead of stopping at the discursive limits of texts, we employed speculative pragmatism, or a visionary pragmatism that bestows a largesse of creative potential. Taking Lorde's powerful dictates that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" and "we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals, and because of this we stand to be fractured from one another and ourselves," we proceeded to expound on possibilities to transgress the master's relational patterning of difference. We were also inspired by Gordon and Gordon (2016) on Lorde's exhortation by leaning towards minoritarian knowledge productions, namely the decolonial project, to transcend the hegemony of white humanisms and "building our own houses of thought" (p. xi). This, along with the reality to remain "strategically duplicitous" in this climate of neoliberalism and emboldened whiteness.

During a class session entitled *Queering Relationality*, we expounded on the difficulties of forging a coalitional consciousness and reading our engagements through a "faithful witnessing" orientation. According to decolonial scholar Maria Lugones (2003):

To witness faithfully, one must be able to sense resistance, to interpret behavior as resistant even when it is dangerous, when that interpretation places one psychologically against common sense, or when one is moved to act in collision with common sense, with oppression. Faithful witnessing leads one away from a monosensical life. One ceases to have expectations, desires, and beliefs that fit one for a life in allegiance with oppression.

Whitney (White) was intrigued about this notion of faithful witnessing and shared her connections she was making in the course:

I am encouraged to think deeply about our role in the social change ecosystem. With one's understanding of their role in this ecosystem one can better understand where and in what situations they are best suited to show up and help as an ally in resistance. A practice I want to develop and undertake is to be more present and observant in my body, not only is it important to be aware of what is happening around you so one can be a faithful witness, but also, I think it is important to feel and notice my bodies reaction to these events. Knowing what sensations are in my body during the time of being a witness I think will help me to understand and learn what I need to do as an individual after witnessing an act of oppression or resistance.

We have emphasized centering and listening to the experiences of (black, brown, and indigenous bodies) who are (in America) the ones who have been most oppressed. However, our discussions unveiled that just centering is not enough, because centering the experiences of BIPOC can often involve them having to re-live their traumas just for the sake and learning of outsiders. Having BIPOC continuously experiencing their trauma is not a fair way for us to relate across these differences in experiences. Instead, as we have discussed, it is important for the outsiders (in most cases white-bodies) to seek out this learning on their own so they can come to the conversations and relationships with a real understanding of the differing experiences that will better facilitate reaching across them.

As a result of trying to figure ways of “complex coalition building,” (Figueroa, 2020) we also closely read *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House* and *Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference* by Audre Lorde, and *Building on “the Edge of Each Other’s Battles:” A Feminist of Color Multidimensional Lens* by The Santa Cruz Feminist of Color Collective. In dyads, students “think and make” together by engaging in a close reading/conceptual mapping technique I adapted from the SenseLab (2020) and Massumi (2015). Students take a passage to read together and meditate on the “minor concept” that undergirds the text, and then engage in a speculative inquiry, an immanent thinking-making together in the moment to account for various trajectories. Students then creatively depicted their conceptual mapping through a visual representation. The instructions for the activity were the following:

Conceptual Speed Dating (15 min per round, 5 min break in between)

1st – Lorde: *Women Redefining Difference*

2nd – Lorde: *Master’s Tools*

3rd – Santa Cruz

Adapted from [SenseLab](#), Manning and [Massumi](#)

1. In your dyad, choose a certain section and a minor concept for each of the readings to analyze
 - “A **minor concept** is a lesser known concept that a reader is less likely to think they already grasp and understand, a concept not typically focused on in the dominant literature on the topic and less likely to carry with it the heavy baggage of pre-existent knowledge” (Massumi)
2. Ask yourself these questions, staying close to your chosen text:
 - How does the minor concept help make the text and help it mean what it says?
 - What does the concept do and how does it do what it does compositionally?
 - What other concepts co-occur there? Do they go off on their own trajectories?
 - Where are those other trajectories leading?
3. Create a diagram/visual representation of all your “thoughts in the act” without trying to polish them for academic purposes. *How might you take these speculations to their pragmatic limits?* You will present and e-mail these to Justin.

Figure 4. Conceptual Speed Dating Activity Instructions

Below are dyad examples of thinking-making in the encounter, and how the various minor concepts gesture towards a disavowal of the status-quo, of regarding power and difference, perhaps differently:

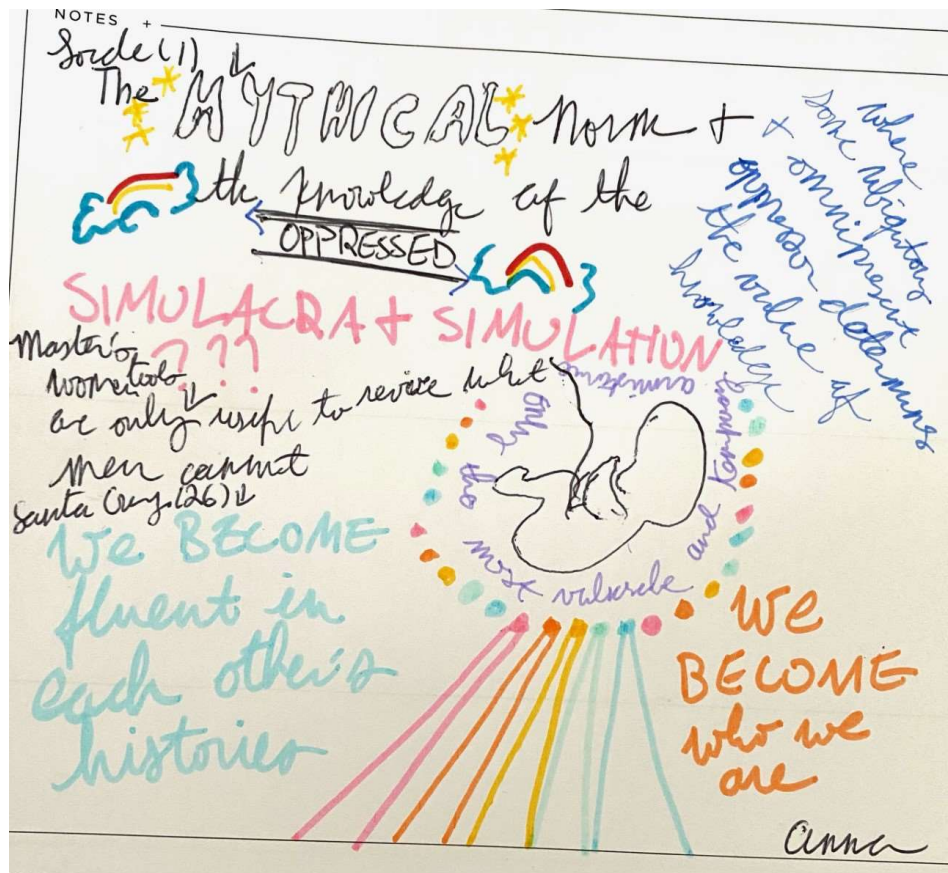


Figure 5. Dyad Work on Master's Tools (1)

AGE, RACE, CLASS AND SEX: WOMEN
REDEFINING DIFFERENCE P.5



Question 1
 Heterosexism limits the effectiveness of Black women as a collective community
 ↓
 By fracturing the self-image, self-conception, and outward performance of their gender or sex identity, heterosexism prohibits the power of strong, confident and capable Black women from coming into their own



Question 2
 In the paragraph it's first introduced, it links the term to white women, showing a pattern in the "feminine" experience. BUT in the paragraph after it shows how this concept affects Black women in a much different way
 ↓
 intersectionality: internalized homophobia, (power of) Black men, etc



Question 3
 Differences between white women and Black women, "terror of the Black male attack", un-Blackness, anti-male dependant, fear of social change
 ↓
 Leading back towards how this creates a huge divide between Black women and themselves and their communities

Figure 6. Dyad Work on Women Redefining Difference

**THE MASTER'S RULES
WILL NEVER DISMANTLE
THE MASTER'S HOUSE** p.2



Women nurturing women = redeptive
 Women & maternity = only social power
 allowed to women
 ↓
 Women are only allowed this power in
 order to fix and heal what men have hurt
 and destroyed



Links back to community and how
 "differences" were made to divide us
 ↓
 what is the self-identity of a woman if not
 something that exists to further divide her
 from the "community of women"

Figure 7. Dyad Work on Master's Tools (2)



**BUILDING ON "THE
EDGE OF EACH
OTHER'S BATTLES":
A FEMINIST OF
COLOR MULTI
DIMENSIONAL LENS** p.30



Multiplicity
 - "our interconnections also allow us to acknowledge our
 collective responsibility for global inequalities."

- "The emphasis is on maintaining multiplicity at the point
 of reduction—not in maintaining a hybrid "product," which
 hides the colonial difference"



Not a spork (which hides what it means to be just a fork or
 a spoon and the history and conceptions that come with
 that), but a camping fork, spoon, and knife that click
 together to carry, but act and are represented as individual
 and autonomous, sometimes working amongst each other
 to get things done

Figure 8. Dyad Work on Santa Cruz Feminist Collective

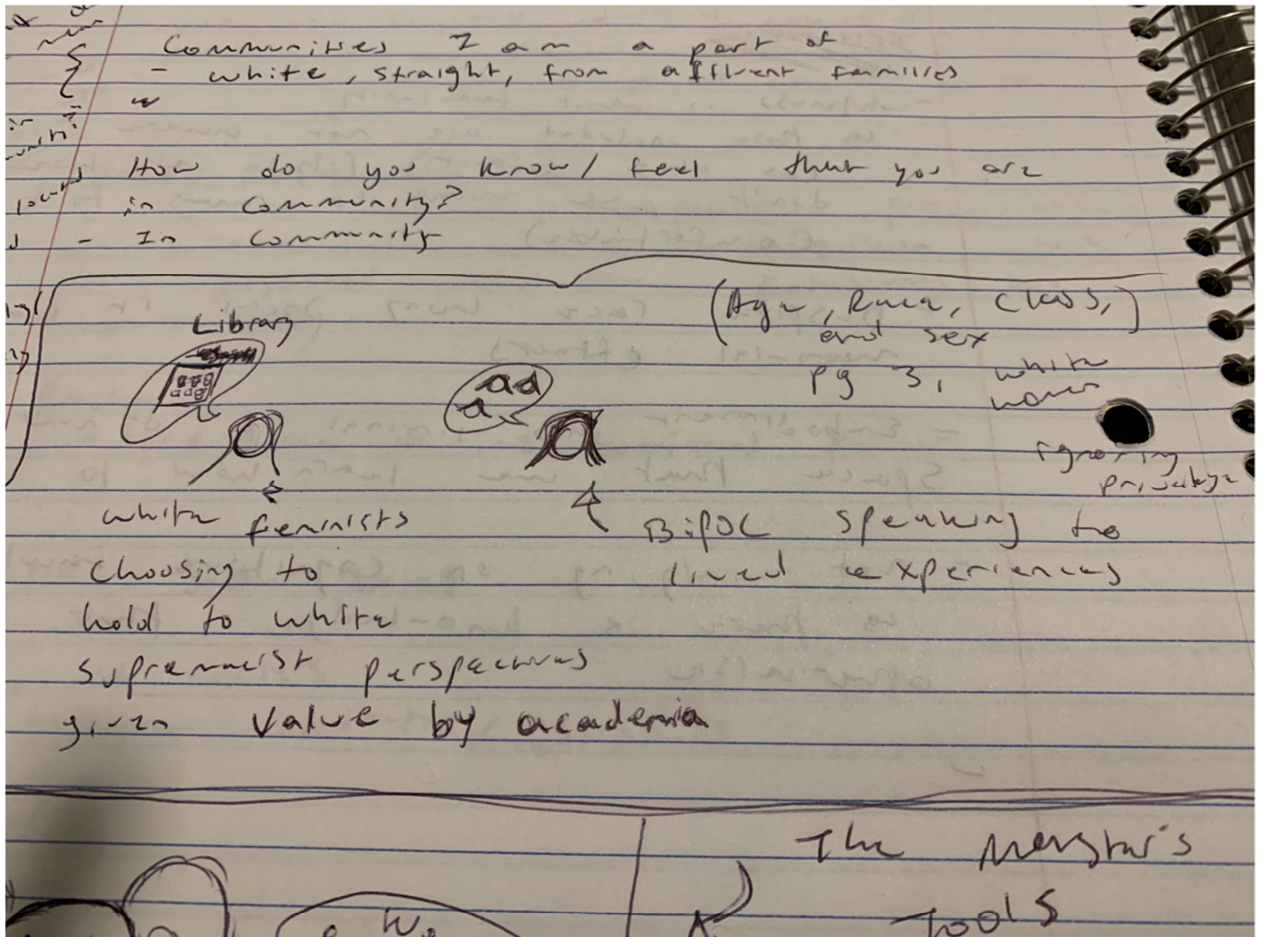


Figure 9. Dyad Work on Women Redefining Difference

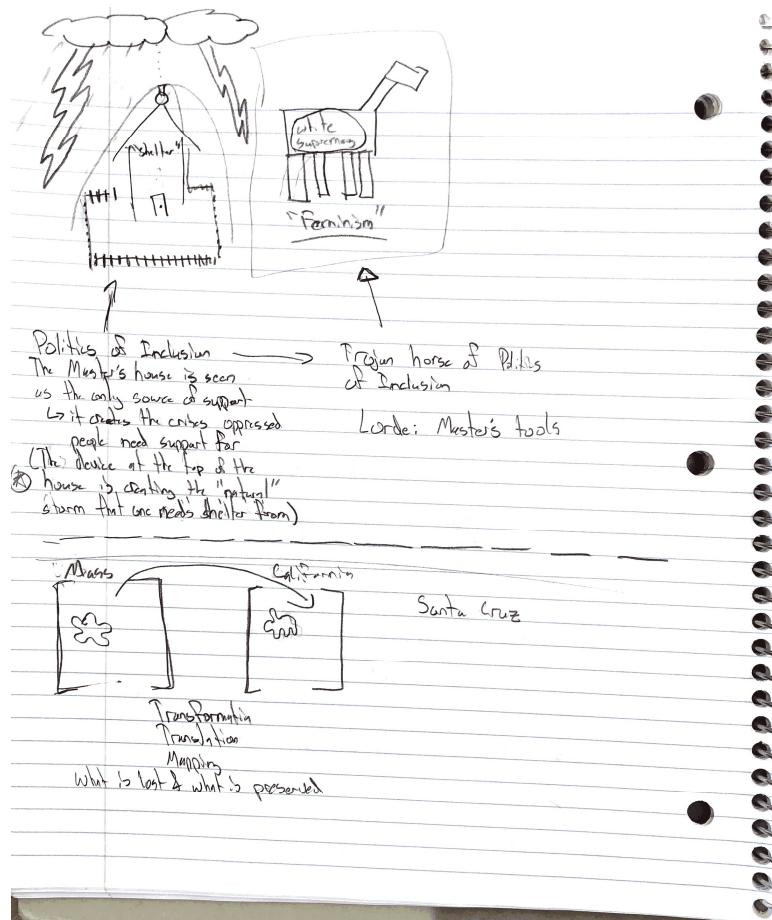


Figure 10. Dyad Work on Master's Tools and Santa Cruz Feminist Collective

These renderings share what may not be normally ascribed value in our dominant genealogies of of difference and relationality. Rory shared that in his dyad and discussion of Audre Lorde's *Age, Race, Class, and Sex* how he has seen this play out in everyday life:

White women (like the Karens) do not recognize privilege, and strictly adhering to hegemonic value structures when considering if POC perspectives are considered "valid." It is insular. White women for example may only considering the theory formulated by white feminists when listening to a woman of color theorizing on her lived experiences, which perpetuates ignorance.

Conclusion: Immanent Politics and Response-able Praxis

How then shall we understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter? How to understand what is entailed in the practice of meeting that might help keep the possibility of justice alive in a world that seems to thrive on death?

Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), p. x

Part of situating the conjuncture is to be perceptive to ordinary life around us. This often gets lost when we spend most of our time reading totalizing narratives or abstracting from the sidelines. Theory is occurring all around us. As Sara Ahmed writes in *Living a Feminist Life*, “the personal is theoretical” (p. 10). I believe that reading the conjuncture is to carefully implicate ourselves within the systems in which we participate and to create worlding potential and “break with customary modes for organizing history and to devise other ways of reading beyond the given presumptions of a rational, synthetic system, a developmental teleology, or symmetries of cause and effect” (Lowe, 2015, p. 90). In this course, I have also been careful to not “impose a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power” where we might not take a serious look at what we want to accomplish in relation to the study of difference (Mahmood, 2005, p. 9). We may unwittingly reprise or enfold difference into the project of neoliberal multiculturalism. Difference is not a totalizing concept, and this course has attempted to provincialize it in nuanced ways – to carve moments of confrontation of how difference is employed, to what ends? Pedagogy is central to this task to create new knowledge and to dissent to prefigured ways of engagement. In many ways, this course formulated an archive, or

a repertory of traces of collaborative research-creation events. The traces are not inert, but are carriers of potential. They are reactivatable, and their reactivation helps trigger a new event which continues the creative process from which they came, but in a new iteration (SenseLab, 2016, p. 6).

Acknowledging the vicissitudes of the human experience, conjunctural teaching as analytic in this precarious sociopolitical climate affecting education offers a more capacious and liberatory approach to apprehending the intersections of history, identity, difference, and social justice. Racism, settler colonialism, neoliberalism are not crudely

relegated to the past. Their effects are not vestigial, but enduring. These phenomena are occurring now. I situate conjunctural thinking, looking in and out of various domains, as a mode to elucidate the historical present and the differentiated strains and extractions that come out of neoliberalism and emboldened whiteness that produce insufficient comparative analytics of difference. The techniques we experimented in this course: conjugating the self, instantiating the minor, and speculating futures and queering relationality became a “response-able” pedagogy, where “the yearning of justice, a yearning larger than any individual or sets of individuals is necessarily about our connections and responsibilities to one another” (Barad, 2007, p. xi). I have illuminated that teaching through the messiness of the conjuncture, necessarily underscoring context and power and rigorously crafting worlds otherwise, devises meaningful speculative and political interventions that can help education students be more accountable to the projects and people of whom they serve.

Rory (White)

This course pushed me out of my comfort zone and into some crises, especially in regards to my privilege...I was always very aware that my lived experience is vastly different to a lot of what we read and shared. There are a lot of emotions that come with thinking critically about my own privilege and about oppression today. It can be an uncomfortable topic. I certainly feel guilty, for being ignorant or not considering this privilege at points in my life first and foremost. I feel of course awful for the trauma that others have endured and continue to endure that I have had the privilege of being unaware and ignorant to. I feel like my problems are very small compared to others. But like this class and so many of our readings have pointed out, this uncomfortable crisis of unlearning and relearning is where real progress and learning happens. I feel that I've gotten much better at listening to others, considering the experiences of others that I might have been unaware of before, understanding the oppressive and systemic political structures that work against so many, and making it less about myself, in effect trying to decenter my whiteness and other forms of privilege. I think before, when confronted with privilege, I felt badly and tried to assuage those feelings, instead of sitting with

them and thinking critically about my emotions, the implications of them, and the emotions of others... Of course, there's so much more that I can do...

Eve (POC)

Even though we cannot escape neoliberalism or the pressures of academia, this class was a space in which we could be honest and vulnerable about our struggles. I used this class to inform my own teaching practices and give my students the space to be honest about how they are feeling and how they are managing school this year. Even though I don't have much of a choice about teaching within a larger structure riddled with oppression, I can make conscious decisions in my own classroom to make my students feel seen and help them align themselves in resistance to systems of oppression.

My hope is this paper provides a glimpse in the ways I, along with my students, help shape proclivities not towards mastery of the many interpellations of power, privilege, and difference, but attitudes or sensibilities that disrupt univocality. It was by no means comfortable or perfect, but an attempt towards genealogical exploration and epistemic capaciousness.

PAPER 2

“But I’m Fair, Lovely, *and* Progressive!”

The Ruses of White Liberalism within Anti-Racist Learning

Introduction

Performances of white liberalism and sentimental politics abound in the current sociopolitical climate. These include taking (often) ostentatious stances towards anti-racism (e.g. public declarations on social media for their support of Black Lives Matter) or well-meaning attempts to distance themselves from overt violent acts of whiteness/white ignorance enacted by other “bad” whites to prove their commitments to anti-racism and social justice. In this paper, I foreground how a white liberalist intimate public is created and sustained. This paper details the characteristics of this public through moments in a requisite teacher preparation course on the social and cultural foundations of education. Through an examination of incidents, conversations, and artifacts, I expound these characteristics including facile conceptions of self, criticality and care, self-righteous practices of witnessing, willful ignorance, and misplaced advocacy for those on the margins. This paper draws on a subset of data from a critical ethnographic project examining diversity in a social and cultural foundations course for teacher candidates.

White Liberalist Subjectivities

I begin by sketching the contours of a white liberalist identity. I detail some of these characteristics (teacher positionality, care, witnessing, and advocacy) generally in this section, but will explicate them in greater detail as they are reflected in the data of a teacher education course with predominately white students. Throughout, this paper argues that “diversity” is a fecund site to analyze the conjugation of whiteness and neoliberalism, and the affective maneuvers this conjugation has that influence engagements with difference.

The appeal and instantiation of a “cool” liberal or progressive identity is characteristic of this neoliberal age, that somehow, we have managed to disaffiliate from contentious issues such as race and gender that interfere with national progress narratives and ideals of equality, tolerance, inclusion, and multiculturalism (Winnubst, 2015). Certainly, liberalism and liberal identity are inflected in different ways and adumbrating the genealogies and particularities of liberalism are beyond the scope of this paper. I do

take inspiration from the ideas of liberal governmentality (the ways in which conduct is regulated) vis-à-vis Elizabeth Povinelli's (2011) argument that the *modus vivendi* of liberalism and its attendant projects produce regulatory ideals that decry savage histories in an apparent self-reflexive catharsis. This governmentality is key to how liberal identities can be interpellated.

While my intention is not to essentialize liberal identity, I am drawn to the various pronouncements of inhabiting a white liberal identity and the disjunctions between pronouncements and the performances that that supposedly aligned with a cognizance of power, privilege, and difference. In other words, I am sensitive to the postures of “wokeness” that inheres this subject position when grappling contemporary social justice issues (usually in an oppositional way) that confers *de jure* status of an intellectually and morally superior subjectivity. Following Matias (2016), Williams (1954, 1961), and Barrish (2005), I conceptualize white liberal identity as a “structure of feeling,” or the variable, emerging and ephemeral relations in which quotidian social life is experienced. My goal of examining white liberal subjectivity is to “illuminate the structured conditions of possibility that subtend the forms they have taken and the principles by which they were established and organized” (Chuh, 2014, p. 128). By sketching the possible ways white liberal subjectivity is constituted, we will better apprehend the intra-actions that forestall critical engagements with difference. Moreover, the examination of white liberal subjectivities bears significance on the demographic imperative in the landscape of teaching, as the US teaching force is mainly comprised of white women educating an increasing number of students of color.

In *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, Rey Chow (2002) describes the *white liberalist alibi* as one who “excuses a critique of one’s own power manipulations [...] which is not a conservative, racist formation bent on extermination, but rather an insidious one proffering an innocuous inclusion into life” (Puar, 2007). Here, Chow examines this alibi as a project of the ascendancy of whiteness, one that links the violence of liberal and ostensibly benevolent deployments of multiculturalism to biopolitical schemes that allow for rampant exploitation of the very subjects that are enfolded in projects of diversity. Ultimately, the management of different bodies and subjectivities become the focus of these liberal projects, evacuating

acute analyses of power and historical legacies of oppression. Likewise, the administrative ethos of the neoliberal university reflects these, as Ferguson (2014) writes about diversity as avowing whiteness.

In a similar vein, Zeus Leonardo and Michalinos Zembylas (2013) examine the construction of a white intellectualist alibi, or the efforts expended by white people “to project a non-racist alibi for themselves to maintain equilibrium” (152). As Leonardo and Zembylas argue, the bifurcation of “good” and “bad” subject positions, and by pitting these two positions against each other, whiteness enacts a political ruse of feigned reflexivity, a move that erases any vestige of wrongdoing by continuously displacing structural violence and racial inequities “out there” and relegates racial concerns as an individual issue of the psyche (Kelley, 2016). Furthermore, a concern to occupy the good position is more concerned with “for[ging] personas that favor non-racism, a form of image management, rather than aligning themselves with anti-racism, a political project” (151). This will to ignorance effectively obfuscates implication and complicity in white hegemony. Avowing a disaffiliation from acts of violence is what Robyn Wiegman suggests reifies “the hegemony of liberal whiteness” (2012, p. 153) that, despite a hyper-reflexivity on moves that promote or impede projects of racial justice, the endurance and reach of whiteness persists, regardless of its aims. As a result, the

[D]econtextualized incorporation of critiques of white supremacy blended into a soothing field of white noise that obscures the analysis of the historical endurance, reach, and flexibility of white power, and maintains the centrality of whiteness as an agent of change, hope, and futurity (Rault, 2017, p. 4).

To understand how the white liberalist alibi becomes a durable figure in the teacher preparation course, I also draw on Lauren Berlant’s conception of the *intimate public*. While I do not expand on this exclusively, I find the ways in which the dynamics between institutions and the development of identities through the public is worth noting. Berlant (2008) describes an intimate public as

[A]ffective and emotional attachments located in fantasies of the common, the everyday...a space where the social world is rich with anonymity and local recognitions, and where challenging and banal conditions of life take place in

proximity to the attentions of power but also squarely in the radar of a recognition that can be provided by other humans (p. 10).

I argue that the cadre of millennial white women in a social foundations of education course I taught instantiated an intimate public that positioned themselves as “progressive social change activists.” These change activists supported either Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders in the 2016 US presidential election. These self-proclaimed do-gooders for social justice were also “passionate about teaching urban youth” and were evangelical in their belief that teaching was their calling. Their obdurate beliefs and testimonies that championed social justice and a better future were, however, eclipsed by their sanctioned ignorance. Through class discussions, interviews, and artifacts, I establish how this intimate public reinforced practices that recused them from engaging with “difficult knowledge” relating to whiteness and difference (Britzman, 2003; Zembylas, 2014). The affective attachments of what is seemingly about a humanitarian effort to secure social justice that circulated in this intimate public were premised on protecting the coherence of this liberal identity and forgetting the connections that inhere this identity. In other words, this identity was bounded by an exemption from scrutiny and politics. This identity production refuses to account for any complicity. Affronts to their seemingly “good” commitments or efforts towards reflexivity and correction threatened this coherence which ironically foreclosed critical opportunities to confront their ignorance. Ultimately, while their pronouncements suggested a fierce repudiation of injustice generally, an agnosia, or inability to look at phenomena systemically and to develop a vocabulary to better apprehend context and power rendered their progressive orientations ineffective and violent.

The Difference that *I* Will Make: Conceptions of Self, Criticality, and Care

Patricia and Meagan were adamant about their desire to be “good and critical role models,” “positive influences,” and “an inspiration “as teachers. During the first few weeks of the course, we situated what it meant to be a teacher in a changing sociopolitical climate, acknowledging the preponderance of social issues afflicting marginalized students today. At this time, Philando Castile, a Black man was shot by police. This white intimate public they belonged to concurred that “change” needed to happen and were quick to offer suggestions to a fix turgid and broken educational system. Many

enthusiastically proffered bridging the relationship gap between teachers and students, creating a platform for justice as it pertained to schooling, and redressing social ills. Harkening from their own philosophies and connecting what they learned in previous education courses taught by predominantly white faculty, they believed that teaching cannot be divorced from the political, and that this often posed some difficulties and discomfort in taking “professional risks” due to a fear of not doing something in a correct way or being reprimanded by their school administration. The following accounts from Patricia and Meagan underscore the thrusts of their desire to teach modulated by making a difference and advocating for others.

During the first few sessions, Patricia spent most of her time recounting her experiences as an attorney and described how she was proud to advocate for others. She presented these written comments in class:

I cannot describe how proud I am to have been the one to have had the honor of being the one to have stood up and gone to bat for them, even the ones charged with/guilty of certain crimes...It was my job to help my clients tell their stories and to ensure that their stories were also heard. I see my role as a teacher to give attention to all of my students and all of their stories and giving a voice when they don't advocate for themselves.

Specifically commenting on what she wants to do in the classroom, Patricia stated that she wanted “to gain more concrete, definite, back pocket tricks” to connect with her students. During a class session discussing personal motivations for going into teaching, Patricia presented in class about her mission “to give students the world:”

The thing is, that I love Great Lakes Schools (for all its troubles).” Like ever since I first walked through its doors on the way to my first day of Kindergarten, I knew *that* to be my mark on the world. I wanted to be the one to save Great Lakes Schools and to save the children who grew there by being the teacher that mattered, that cared, that differed, that made them different. They are my martyrdom...I just love Great Lakes Schools – I love the idea of it. It is a romantic and naïve idea, but so what? You don't decide who or what you love, you just do... I'm glad I found my calling.

Likewise, Meagan expressed how she envisions her role as teacher to be “effective” at reaching her students, while learning more about educational injustices, and working to make a positive impact on her students:

We need more empathy in the world today. I was shocked about the shooting of Philando Castile. I feel guilt. In light of the shooting of Philando Castile, I want to make a difference by considering those who come from different cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. I hope I can be an effective teacher by recognizing my own privilege and understanding how I can erase some of the disparities that exist between people of different diversities in our society.

Patricia and Meagan situate themselves as the exclusive arbiter of positive change in their role as a teacher. While they intimate their desire in shaping change, their conceptions of impact and advocacy are predicated by their image as do-gooders and being the right person for the job. Moreover, they do not explicitly discuss their whiteness and the implications their material embodiment of whiteness may have on interpreting the world. As Patricia and Meagan informally chat during class, they are excited about the prospect of electing the first woman president (Hillary Clinton) and excited to be a part of history. Being right by their estimation, includes witnessing acts of oppression and declaring of what needs to be done and learned on a personal and a societal level. This form of testimony ostensibly validates their difficult emotional responses and acts as recuperation. While well intentioned, these conceptions of advocacy and impact are contingent on abstraction, an appreciation about ideas, rather their material implications in the everyday. For Meagan, she expresses her shock and guilt in the murder of Philando Castile and believes ways to redress the injustice is to be more cognizant of her privilege in order “to erase disparities.”

Ironically, Meagan’s understanding of privilege cognizance obfuscates how instances of the subjugation of Black lives occur in the first place. Her cognizance seems to be a feigned reflexivity in order to achieve a kind of placid imagination of equality that can be experienced by all. This cathartic practice as feigned reflexivity creates in what can be deemed as an “aesthetic distancing” from deeply understanding herself as an implicated subject in a complex constellation of historical and politically relationships that are entangled between White people and BIPOC (double check reference on this). In

her attempt to harness cognizance to personally erase disparities, Meagan reiterates an epistemic violence where she is trying to rescue herself to make change. Sara Ahmed writes about the non-performatives of declaring social justice commitments. It is also interesting how both Patricia and Meagan do not explicitly state their identities as white people and instead refer to social ills that have been largely perpetrated by “a culture of domination.” Both Patricia and Meagan state the need to be critical of these issues but not being combative. In other words, while they see the value of Black Lives Matter, they state that they will only stoke the flames by being derisive and because it only exacerbates the tension. They argue that calling out whiteness, while helpful, can also create tribalism. The implication here is a conditional acceptance of the BLM movement.

Explicit in their accounts is the importance of care, attention, and empathy for their students. In a class on race, Patricia states “many of these students have not experienced care, and I think it’s just an imperative when you are a teacher.” Meagan similarly offers, “We have the responsibility to nurture all students.” Implicit in their statements is a particular form of care that may be redolent of a savior complex. Matias and Zembylas (2014) write about a latent disdain for marginalized students and the need to care in a particular way for students to perform well that will allow them to perform the necessary “scripts” in order to thrive. This care therefore is ambivalent, a care that supposedly attends to the needs of students, but also attends to the self-interests of the teacher. These accounts corroborate McIntyre’s assessment of many white teachers who have a commitment to racial justice, yet still have deficit orientations or stereotypes of students of color. Moreover, a depoliticized understanding of care does not focus on the needs of the students, but mainly function as a way to maintain feeling better and secure well-being. Appending this argument Beauboeuf-LaFontant (2002) writes:

As teachers, they run the risk of succumbing to self-righteous despair about the enormity of the social problems of poverty, racism, and general injustice, by seeing these problems as insurmountable because they are rooted in the ways of “other people” (84).

The politics of care must be interrogated in order to ascertain whether the reception of care is appropriate. Care, in the case of Patricia and Meagan, is unilateral without much to say about how students are responding to their care. Joan Tronto

outlines this in an ethics of care. Joan Tronto's work on a political relation of care provides an inclusive definition to think to and through the significance of care to name and sustain "a more sophisticated sense of human interdependence." Fisher and Tronto (1990) write:

On the most general level we suggest caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web (p. 41).

It is this more inclusive definition that opens the possibilities of care as a deliberate practice and disposition. In her other works, Tronto (1993, 2013) expounds on the phases of an ethic of care: caring about, caring for, caregiving, care-receiving and caring with. The caring for phase highlights the need for a relational responsibility towards social difference and presents not only an ethical but also a political opportunity to understand the ways in which inequities are perpetuated in a democracy because of the dominant group's inability to appreciate the operation of power. Similarly, Angela Valenzuela (1999) in her ethnography of Mexican-American high school students expounds on the difference between caring about and caring for students. Caring about suggests passive attention to ideas, again this notion of abstraction, whereas caring for evokes an active stance. Still, care in its varied instantiations should be appraised for its impact on students.

Care and its attendant sentimentality and empathy in this way attempts to circumnavigate Whiteness and obscures Patricia and Meagan's implication in it. Apolitical care as the operating principle of teaching dismisses difficult knowledge and emotional investments that make whiteness durable. The calls for greater empathy, as offered by these students seem to be a moral and ethical corrective to the injustices faced by marginalized people. The role of empathy conjures a false belief that we can become more sensitive and understanding of "others." However, as Sabina Vaught states, "[f]alse empathy describes a mechanism by which societal change is sought through the activation of White sympathies... because it does so in the spirit of empathy, it cements these constructs of cultural and personal degradation into the foundation of dominant

ideology” (Vaught, 2011, pp. 19-21). In the rendering of empathy that Meagan provides, its tenor is more of a palliative measure to universalize feelings of equanimity, to produce an affective equivalence to understand the Other (Anwaruddin, 2016). However, such an intervention neither apprehends how social conditions are constructed, the possible changes of these social conditions, relational investments and attachments to certain knowledge productions nor does it create mutual understanding. The affective equivalence is a false equivalence, (being in someone else’s shoes) as they are coercively making legible the incommensurable and the untranslatability of other lives with their own (white). Responses of empathy are more of an affective management that abdicates responsibility of understanding one’s embodied self with another in a relational encounter. In *The Biopolitics of Feeling*, Kyla Schuller (2018) describes how the disavowal of injustice to secure white well-being is enacted, even while proclamations of Black lives > white feelings:

white emotional well-being is produced in part by the ritualized entertainments of the security state, which hinge on the regularized death of black people. Sentimentalism stimulates the moral virtuosity and emotional release of the sympathizer and her affective attachment to the nation-state at the expense of the needs of the chosen targets of her sympathy, typically those barred from the status of the individuated Human: often the impoverished, the racialized, the conquered, the orphaned, and/or the animalized. Yet the meme crystallizes a dynamic at the core of sentimental power that has barely been addressed, let alone theorized. White feelings, in the context of the United States, are the fertile products of racialized vulnerability, disposability, and death. Sentimentalism, in the midst of its feminized ethic of emotional identification, operates as a fundamental mechanism of biopower (p. 2).

This description of sentimentality aligns with the Patricia and Meagan’s vision of teaching. While they may recognize the concern to care for the subjugated, their admittance of white privilege as a technology that contributes to the systemic deaths of Black people (in this example, the murder of Philando Castille), and their persistence to create social change, their sentimental or empathetic concern is both self-righteous and

narcissistic. As Pugmire (2005) states on the relationship between sentimentality and narcissism:

Sentimental concern is narcissistic: it is not with the actual significance of an object but with the emotional impact of that on oneself. In thus being indifferent to the object in its own right, the sentimental attitude is actually cynical.

In casual conversations with Patricia and Meagan in their intimate public before class, they mention that most instructional methods they experienced in their other education classes employ case studies, history vignettes, and cultural narratives to inform their understanding of diversity. These resources were primary heuristics or analytics to gain greater exposure to “social inequalities” and “educational injustices.” Along the same vein, when not foregrounded adequately, much like in the experiences recounted by Patricia and Meagan, these instructional methods can reproduce a practice of “passive empathy:”

[W]here “no action towards justice but situates the powerful Western eye/I as the judging subject, never called upon to cast her gaze at her own reflection...Passive empathy absolves the reader through the denial of power relations. The confessional relationship relies on a suffering that is not referred beyond the individual to the social (Boler, 1997, p. 261).

In these ways, empathy as offered by Patricia and Meagan is a form of self-soothing to be read as a good white people. Mediated by neoliberalism, empathy as a cultural project is reproduced to create a cohesive polity; a form of aversion regulation, much like how tolerance is, to self-correct and work towards a more “equal” and inclusive future. Notions of care for Patricia and Meagan are necessary to secure their position as moral arbiters. With the entanglements of care, empathy, and neoliberalism, Patricia and Meagan feel entrusted to enact care to exercise proficiency as a person with a vested interest in social justice. In other words, the “obligation to be a caring and empathetic individual not only because it is ‘the right thing to do’ but also because empathy, as an emotional competency, has become part and parcel of being a self-managing and self-enterprising individual within a neoliberal order” (Pedwell, 2012, p. 286). Patricia and Meagan gesture to a constitutive disavowal of their implication in hegemonic structures by translating these structures as emotional investments.

In the next section, I describe how Patricia and Meagan, along with their participation in an intimate public, instantiate self-righteous postures of witnessing and testimonies perpetuate hermeneutic violence while learning about the Other. I lay out how their confessional practices, despite reflexive intent, forestall possibilities to confront their implication with their own whiteness and how that mediates their engagements with difference.

Self-Righteous Witnessing: Surveillance, Confessionals, and Testimonies

We need to be unapologetic about being there for our students...looking out for them and giving them the skills, knowledge and support needed so that they can do well...I want to be a role model...A great role model supports a child early on in their life and should set the child up so that he or she doesn't even have to try to avoid the system or not as hard (Patricia).

Patricia was evangelical in her belief that her role as a teacher involved “looking out for” her students. She would make every effort to talk about the perils experienced by her former clients when she worked as a public defender. This recurring motif of looking out for them was her way of being an advocate. While it can be considered admirable for Patricia and other educators like her to keep a watchful eye to prevent students from entering the school to prison pipeline and be at the mercy/be condemned to carceral state logics, I examine how this trope of looking out for “them” invokes various moves that self-righteous witness to social injustice in order for Patricia and members of her white liberalist intimate public to secure their moral standing.

The act of witnessing can have various functions including to provide a defense or justification, or to spotlight the truth (Hallander, 2020). Witnessing can also be a passive practice where one silently observes. The act of witnessing has been the object of inquiry in feminist philosophy circles, to “enable unrecognized subjects to demand that their oppression be seen beyond the dynamics of agonistic recognition” (Figuroa-Vasquez, 2020, p. 68). However, the scenes of subjection, a term used by scholar Saidiya Hartman (1997), are used to project these teacher candidates’ false empathy and to protest the subjugation of Black lives through a distance. Patricia emphasizes in her statements to the class that it is incumbent upon teachers, in their roles as good role models to protect her

students from getting into the system. Adjunct to her calls for teachers to be role models and protectors is her understanding of effective teaching. Patricia writes:

Effective teaching is, at all times, cognizant of high stakes and standardized testing requirements and other state and federal requirements that students must achieve in order to progress to (and excel in) subsequent goals. My philosophy draws upon theories of essentialism and perennialism. Students need to read the Great Works. Mastery and achievement of these skills are key.

Intimated here is a mode of surveilling her students, in the sense that Patricia is calibrating her teaching to get them to succeed, albeit in a generalized way. This surveillance is contingent on a close witnessing of student performance and achievement, which invariably is premised on scrupulous adherence to metrics and particular conventions of achievement and success. These values are aligned with comporting with white subjectivities and knowledge productions (the Great Works) and the state sanctioned determinants for achievement (standardized testing) and equating their contributions as meaningful members of society with the successful mastery or demonstration of in Patricia's words, "the disciplines." In a statement of her teaching philosophy, Patricia writes: "Teachers have an important role in instilling in their students values such as respect for authority and fidelity to duty."

I examine this statement along with a comment in a conversation Patricia offered during an extemporaneous, yet necessary class session I facilitated on police brutality: "We don't want our students to succumb to these senseless murders. We have an obligation to see to it that they don't end up like Philando Castille." These comments reveal a number of things, not the least of which include an inadequate understanding of how whiteness operates in society, and the casting of Philando Castille (and other Black lives) as this object of endemic social spectacle of death and consumption. Alarming for these students was a lack of understanding of racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore, 2006, p. 28). Many contended that race was something inherent, of a biological essence.

As we have recently witnessed transpire in the United States with social movements for change and liberation, most notably, Black Lives Matter, we need to do

much more than evoke vacuous meanings of respect, authority, fidelity and duty. *Have those deemed as Other been treated with respect? Has deference to police authority fared well for the Other? A duty to what? Have attachments to whiteness engendered critical reckonings with difference, or flourishing for all?* Instead, we must question the disproportionate surveillance of Black bodies and the unequal treatment and representation of activists involved in peaceful movements compared to the White far right insurrectionists.

While decrying the fact that Black sociality is continuously held in contempt, where lives are perpetually constrained, is a sentiment that resonates Patricia and by observation also with the white liberalist intimate public, such a statement does not include an acute analysis on the necropolitical tactics of Whiteness that subjugate Black lives and restrict their representations of humanity in quotidian life. Through these statements and observations of Patricia, among her other White peers in class, her disavowal of violence distances her own self. Of note is that she, along with others in the intimate public do not explicitly address their whiteness. As Yancy (2005) has written extensively about whiteness, this is an identity that is both predicated by the dehumanization of who is considered other. This lack of acknowledgment displaces blame onto others, so called “bad whites” not reflexive enough of social issues, and an admission that Patricia stands on the right side. But on the right side of what? And standing up for whom? Patricia’s presumed stance in teaching students to have “respect for authority” seems to accord itself with the administrative violence against BIPOC. Calls for these sentiments of respect and civility are certainly not benign.

To some, making some connection between the recent (and historical) events of racial fascism and social nihilism inflicted by white supremacists, and the sentiments of these white teacher candidates may seem like a far stretch. However, these teachers to be approbating repeated declarations of respect and civility to maintain and keeping equanimity in the classroom, and by extension nurturing good democratic citizens by virtue of their good role model status warrants critical scrutiny. A depoliticized conceptualization of terms like respect, civility, diversity, and equality most surely obscures and keeps whiteness secure. A poignant example is made by Meagan during the

same in-class discussion on Black Lives Matter and police brutality: “I’ve seen what’s gone on. I get it. I just wish they wouldn’t block the streets and highways. If they just protested civilly, we would take their [BLM activists] seriously...It’s just so divisive!” While some white students expressed their disagreement with Meagan’s statement, the class was overwhelming not willing to critically engage why the statement was problematic. Meagan considers the activists’ actions to be disruptive. For Meagan, while not explicitly stated, suggests that this disruption inconveniences the unmarked default mode that regulates ontological conditions and possibilities, which is Whiteness. The freedom by the conferral of unearned advantages for embodied white subjects has been exhaustively researched and explicated. In other words, Meagan in this instance seems to be more concerned about how *her* life, and those like her is disrupted, rather than what the disruptive act represents.

Fieldwork Interlude

Not so surprising, I have personally had to endure similar sentiments and diatribes over the so-called futility of Black Lives Matter protests and diversity projects (though many remained mum regarding white national terrorists). Many of these occurred while transiting to and from my work as a researcher for another project on “equity-based dispositions” in my Lyft. While applauding the progressive values by his state, my driver (ironically, a retired educator) said he too expressed dismay at the protests. “I experience hardship too, but you don’t see me out there making a raucous. People die every day.” (Problematic, again, the fact that there is so much unnecessary death and not questioning who is more at risk to die.)

Among other Lyft experiences, I have had drivers ask me about my research and are aghast that I would spend all my precious time researching culture and diversity in educational spaces. One Lyft driver gripping the wheel exclaimed: “This is America! What the hell is this culture stuff? We’re getting too soft. Kids need to learn that we’re all the same. Why waste our time learning about other cultures? I think that is what creates all this division and nonsense...Let them go out and play ball and learn about each other

that way!.. While I'm proud that I live in one of the progressive states in the Midwest, I think we should spend our time focusing on more important things." (Implication that white people do not have a culture, and the invocation of social cohesion, perhaps nationalist unity, as a societal ideal).

Another driver, a white female, was intrigued by my research on diversity (granted, I most always give the reader's digest version and laboriously conjure up language that is a bit tempered to avoid a painful ride home if I sense less receptivity). She chuckles: "When you say diversity, I hope that means respecting all perspectives... You know, I am a conservative. (In my mind, I am rolling my eyes and doing some quick thought work to manage my own biases and discomfort). I state, "Well, I am open to listening to different perspectives, just as long as those ideas don't infringe on my beliefs or cause harm to others." Somehow, she gets excited and asks, "You're young. Have you heard of Ben Shapiro? I think you would enjoy listening to him... Did you know there are universities now have a cry room to process difficult emotions? What's that all about?" (Yeah, no thank you.) "Can you believe all of this useless protesting? You think we're experiencing slavery now? White lives matter too. I have my own problems, but I don't complain! (in my mind: exactly, you don't need to because your quality of life does not get affected) C'mon we're past this stuff!"

Putting on my coaching hat and biting my tongue to avoid me getting thrown out of her car, I proceeded to ask her why protesting would be such a problem, when an entire historical legacy has been characterized by systemic trauma and depreciation of life? Without hesitation, she stated any efforts to bring diversity talk only erode Manifest Destiny and the wonderful project that is The United States of America. Exaggerating her speech: "I don't want to offend *you* (quickly glancing at me through her rearview mirror trying to make sense of my "cultural heritage"), but I don't want to be a China or a Russia."

From the ostensive progressive teacher candidate and Lyft driver to the self-proclaimed conservative prodigiously listening to Ben Shapiro and Rush Limbaugh, their unmitigated disdain for incivility evokes a delusion of grandeur and more specifically

betrays the hollowed narratives of national progress, tolerance and multiculturalism, and social cohesion- the benevolent malfeasance of white supremacy.

“The black man insists, by whatever means he finds at his disposal, that the white man cease to regard him as an exotic rarity and recognize him as a human being. This is a very charged and difficult moment, for there is a great deal of will power involved in the white man’s naïveté. Most people are not naturally reflective any more than they are naturally malicious, and the white man prefers to keep the black man at a certain human remove because it is easier for him thus to preserve his simplicity and avoid being called to account for crimes committed by his forefathers, or his neighbors.” – James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*

While seemingly an effective way to examine a phenomenon, we use case studies (as in the case of teacher education). However, case studies often devolve into spectacles, to essentialize, and provide a platform to evoke sentimentality and renounce anti-Black violence. However, much of our teacher education curriculum is oriented towards the white polity, many of whom as a gesture of good will participate in liberalist politics to consume the Black body through its perpetual representation as subjugated subject and to gawk at such atrocities. These cases often evoke these events to constantly see, for example white supremacy as in the past or relegate any deleterious action of the present as an anomaly enacted by extremists (see also Dylan Rodriguez and his writing on multicultural white supremacy). The use of the case is further questioned by Lauren Berlant (2007) and Heather Love (2012), where they raise methodological and pedagogical concerns: who is the expert that creates the case, what types of judgments are to be made by the case, and how does the case become an exemplar for something?

The ways in which the Black body is read in these situations creates an environment where “spectacular violence” (Lemmer, 2016) becomes its pedagogical function. By virtue of these cases studies, white teacher candidates believe that their cognitive maneuvers, of probing and analyzing Black subjectivity, makes them a bona fide expert, which aggrandizes themselves as these “do gooders.” The roles of the case

study, image, or testimony to locate sentimental repertoires to connect with difference fall short when the hermeneutical tools and epistemic logics going into inquiry are hinged on a “privileged ignorance” (Bowman, 2020). These white teacher candidates, many of whom claim progressive politics already have come with a mastery sensibility or claiming to know that inhibits continued receptivity and inquiry on identity and difference. Much like the descriptions above, Hallander (2020) states that,

Testimonies will be presented in terms of pre-given understandings and historical narratives that are already put forward. They are conceptualized and framed according to a certain pre-given understanding; there will be no transformative act. The same stories are told, the same stories (prejudices) reinforced, and no translation takes place (p. 48).

Given this observation, (teacher) educators must question how testimonies, case studies, and witnessing practices of those on the margins are set up. As intimated in the previous section of self, criticality, and care, in a show of attempted empathy and solidarity for marginalized students, many of these white teacher candidates often are quick to show what they perceive as contrived empathy to make familiar an experience not of their own. This is what I perceive as injudicious action, or a preempting of confrontational impasses to think about allows ignorance to fester and whiteness to reinscribe itself.

Again, the allure and spectacle of the Other, provides a platform for witnessing and testimony that casts off responsibility and accountability. In other words, the recognition of difference contributes to consumptive purposes (difference as commodity) which is part and parcel of white managerialism and neoliberal multiculturalism. Students are given materials and they are captivated by the Other, in some pursuit of some essential truth about them. bell hooks similarly posits that the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy revels in the Other as a sort of delight. In this process, difference is devoured voraciously without much thought, elevating the white palette as more cultural discoveries are made. She writes: “The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling.” This recognition both modulates difference that engenders certain feelings and attachments to difference. On one hand, those engaging in

the allure and spectacle of the Other can be comfortable in asserting what Lemmer (2016) describes as an “aesthetic difference”, yet this engagement can also create “an imagined intimacy” that purports to be in close contact with the issues afflicting those in the margins, as if this gives those occupying dominant identities credence to issues of difference and Otherness.

Stuart Hall in *The Spectacle of the ‘Other’* (1997) describes the ambivalence of difference and how representational practices around difference are configured. Specifically, he confronts the representational practice of stereotyping and the affects that are mobilized based on the perceived purposes of difference and Otherness in mass media. Hall presents how stereotyping essentializes and naturalizes difference. Significant in his analysis is how difference is hailed to mark a clear delineation of whose difference lives on in more favorable outcomes. That is, through the logics of binary opposition and naturalization, Hall states that when difference that is casted as natural between racial groups, this engagement can thwart inquiries into the “slipperiness” of difference, rendering racial differences as not amenable to change. Thus, “[n]aturalization’ is therefore a representational strategy designed to fix ‘difference’, and thus secure it forever. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable ‘slide’ of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological ‘closure’” (1997, p. 245).

While we impress onto teacher candidates that they become cultural mediators, whose roles entrust them to grapple with the recognition of difference in their pedagogies, this role is seemingly unclear. We foreground the concerns of the demographic imperative and practices to acknowledge engaging with a pluralistic society, yet we do not adequately prepare them to reflexively reckon with the ambivalence and the material impacts of difference. Such an accountable stance takes seriously one’s inability to know everything about the Other, and one’s responsibility to read their social location within a complex relational ecology. In other words, efforts to simply passively self-reflect or even confessing to the lack of skill, capacity, knowledge on occupying dominant identities in a silo may be a futile exercise in engendering meaningful engagements with difference and the Other.

Willful Ignorance: Social Justice for What Purpose and For Whom?

Patricia notes that she still is “very uncomfortable” with whiteness, that “while she gets it,” she feels a resistance to this term because it “causes” white people to feel guilty and unproductive with race relations. Patricia remains steadfast in her belief, despite my framing of the importance of naming these epistemological maneuvers, both subtle and overt, and the ontological outcomes that are predicated upon whiteness. The collective white gaze of the majority of the class on me is unbearable and searing.

“I don’t think whiteness is a necessary concept to learn about oppression. I mean, can’t we just call it *a structure of domination*? That is less incendiary.” (Patricia)

“I agree. We become tribal and this is how we create divisions and unruliness. I agree with Patricia. With all due respect to Charles Mills, I don’t agree with white ignorance.” (Meagan)

“I understand what it means to be oppressed. My foremothers participated in the women’s suffrage movement.” (Patricia)

“You are theoretically ignorant. I do not need to learn about white fragility. I know myself. How does learning about this impact my students?” (Meagan)

Later in the term, I decided to teach from the work of Sara Ahmed and Charles Mills. For teacher education courses, this is not so conventional. In my courses, I make it a point to employ a transdisciplinary approach to not only unveil in which our ontological precedent has been constituted, but also to upend normative logics associated with this precedent through being mindful of my citational politics. That means, I endeavor to center BIPOC scholars and peripheralized knowledges. Perhaps reflexively exhausted, or unable to keep up performances of the righteous liberal, Patricia and Meagan, along with the intimate public, approach a more aggressive form of distancing themselves from the brutality of white supremacy. Broaching white supremacy now became something like a personal indictment against these individual teacher candidates. What is surprising, is that these forms of protestation that are akin to the techniques deployed by the far-right (Matias and Newlove, 2017). The outright denial of being other than wholesome and sharing their “newfound” knowledge to bridge the chimera of ignorance was shocking to them and caused much suffering. Throughout the discussion of whiteness as a form of domination through Charles Mills’ *The Racial Contract*, and the whitening of diversity

through Sara Ahmed, I was interrupted multiple times by Patricia and the white liberal intimate public.

First, through Mills, I situated whiteness as a historical and cultural system that has normalized particular ways of being in the world. Concomitantly, I addressed the notion of an epistemology of ignorance premised on white supremacy where, “a pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), produc[es] the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (Mills, 1997, p. 18). This understanding of an epistemology of ignorance underscores the intentional inverted view that produces a series of effects, including moral, political, and epistemological purposes that seeks to occlude other ways of understanding. I then moved on to Sara Ahmed and her work on a phenomenology of whiteness. I drove home the point that in the very context of the inner sanctum of the university, or in other institutions, whiteness modulates how we difference is construed and what forms are acceptable. In Ahmed’s words, “[d]iversity becomes about changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 34).

Patricia first raised her concern that by broaching whiteness and ignorance as described by Mills and Ahmed, it would deter white people from engaging in anything related to race. She proceeded to mention that the inflammatory use of whiteness, white supremacy, or ignorance would debase the “good intentions” made by those who occupied dominant identities. Patricia looked around the room and passionately described her thoughts about the theoretical framing for the session: “I don’t think whiteness is a necessary concept to learn about oppression. I mean, can’t we just call it *a structure of domination*? That is less incendiary.”

The request to temper the use of ostensibly inflammatory terms also included other members from the intimate public adumbrating all the service projects and “experiences” they had abroad. Patricia noted that she spent some time in “exotic” Oman and learned so much about “their” culture. She later expanded in an educational autobiography assignment where she referred to her study abroad trip as “a hot and a steamy love affair with the Sultanate of Oman” and “appreciated and experienced other [sic] culture in a way that worked for me.” Other classmates in the liberal posse shared

similar experiences of coming across different cultures from volunteering in “mostly urban settings” in New York City to learning Spanish in Madrid and attending professional development workshops on culturally responsive teaching in Wisconsin. The thought that there would be some level of ignorance about issues of difference was surely not welcomed during our discussion that day. One student commented that I made her feel guilty about herself, something that she “couldn’t control” and that was something she was tired of hearing.

Somehow, ignorance is regarded as a fundamental social flaw, a belief that these teacher candidates cannot seem to shirk off. Aside from the experiences of cultural tourism above, these white teacher candidates enjoy the self-aggrandizing activity of listing their credentials and experiences as evidence that they have arrived. Also, while many metrics and assessments can be helpful as a starting point to assess and develop cultural sensitivities, we must not exclusively rely on them. I am by no means trying to disavow such qualitative and quantitative measurements (e.g. Intercultural Development Inventory, Cultural Intelligence, culturally responsive workshops, Courageous Conversations), but it is the way we come to use these heuristics that are most important to inquire. Passively taking an assessment does not necessarily correlate with meaningful and sustainable action.

As I have witnessed in this class, particularly of the white liberal intimate public, these students generally do not want to be challenged on their beliefs, again arguing by virtue of occupying a liberal standpoint, that they are clearly on the right side. The problem with this is that such a righteous stance occludes any new insights from developing. Willful ignorance is enacted. As I have observed through my own teaching, such expressions of willful ignorance cannot be treated with knowledge alone, as I argue, but rather through a way to sense how their beingness in the world has material and phenomenal effects. In thinking about the willful ignorance that is exhibited by these teacher candidates, I am reminded by feminist scholar Mariana Ortega (2006) and her astute characterizations of an “arrogant perception,” where “the perceiver believes himself or herself to be perceiving lovingly even though this is not the case, and the perceiver wishes to make knowledge claims about the object of perception, even though such claims are not checked or questioned” (p. 16). Ortega specifically addresses the

dynamic between white feminism and women of color feminisms, where the former is caught up in being identified as worldly and supposedly in solidarity with the latter. As Bowman (2020) explicates, this performance of being worldly is an insufficient attempt to understand difference, a ruse that does not take the calls for the lives and knowledges produced by women of color seriously.

In obfuscating other knowledges and the claiming to know difference, these teacher candidates do not wish to contend with difficult knowledge. Their complicity in this form of ignorance situates their righteous knowledge claims as “disciplined thinking” justifying their discomfort in thinking otherwise. Generally, the institutional conditions are set up so that they can bypass engagements of willful ignorance (e.g. modular teacher education curriculum, the white university, abstraction, accumulation, accounting/accountability, and the language of an economics of value – in other words, constantly appraising work to see what is worth knowing to get by). These conditions also reify what Tuck and Yang (2012) describe as settler moves to innocence, notably getting on the epistemic bandwagon of progressive slogans or metaphors without being accountable and confronting “ugly feelings” (Ngai, 2005). To prove their rightness and to preserve their subjectival integrity, these teacher candidates leveraged a willful ignorance to keep them from having to think otherwise. Clearly, confronting whiteness and ignorance is a heavy subject.

At the end of one class session, Patricia sidled up to the front table after class to mention how I was taking whiteness too personally and that she knew what it was liked to be oppressed. I nodded as she then recounted her history, particularly her foremothers’ participation in the Women’s Suffrage Movement. Certainly, my classes do not entertain Oppression Olympics. Later that day, Meagan sent a pointed letter about how the class session on whiteness did not apply to her and that I was “theoretically ignorant” for suggesting all white people should somehow be subjected to punitive measures for their whiteness. While I am certain I do not personally indict white people in my courses of having a fundamental moral flaw, it always intrigues me how I somehow become the instigator in racist relations (I have been called a reverse racist many times in different institutional settings). Somehow, there is also an implication in Meagan’s message that I am not qualified to understand my own experiences interfacing with whiteness. My goal

is not to perpetuate more violence, but rather to call attention to our collective responsibilities and to try to mitigate the reflexive distancing when engaging with racial difference. The “testimonial smothering” (Dotson, 2011) that tends to happen in the courses I have taught or observed, whereby white liberal identities try to speak on my behalf or to empathize with the plight of people of color, has an invalidating and silencing effect. I (as well as other people of color) have in turn felt the need to conceal parts of my story to be rendered intelligible.

Misplaced Advocacy: So, What am I Supposed to Do?

Per my examination of white teacher candidates and teacher preparation more generally, I have been intrigued by the desires and motivations of acting towards solidarity and advocacy for difference, and the bases of these motivations. The preponderance of social justice discourse, especially in the wake of movements such as Black Lives Matter and the intensification of right-wing propaganda emblematic of emboldened whiteness has necessitated acute attention, as these matters are not merely phenomena occurring “out there.” The organizing around co-resistance efforts is important to acknowledge in what these efforts mean, and how these efforts bring to bear on education and the preparing of our future teachers. While there may be attempts even by the most social justice oriented or progressive teacher or teacher candidate to redress systemic inequalities, a central concern is the disconnect between discourse and meaningful action.

As alluded to previously, the positioning of the white liberal identity in many ways obscures or redirects complicity to other whites who are less conscientious about social issues. The figured white liberal subject, in turn, secures indemnity that allows them to be free from blame of the various instantiations of, for example, racial violence. Achieving a self-proclaimed level of proficiency allows this white liberal subject to continue performing their humanitarian, or even, savior complexes without much condemnation. Capitalizing on their desires to make the world a better place and to leverage their liberal and progressive proclivities for empathizing with the Other, these teacher candidates’ misplaced advocacy perpetuates the violence they intend to ameliorate. Disregarding the “material, social, and psychic aspects” of teaching practice

(Singh, 2018, p. 102), I compare these intentions of doing good that Patricia, Meagan and their posse proclaim with that of Julietta Singh's reading of deluded humanitarian imaginaries. Harm can be inflicted because of the fetishism of "caring over" and securing a mastery power where "despite their own profound desires, humanitarian characters work to distinguish themselves from their objects of aid, to form hierarchical relations between themselves and their aid targets, and to extend this relation across time" (2018, p. 104).

Towards the last week of class, I discussed the importance of maintaining some level of ambivalence regarding their identities (particularly white liberal subjectivities) and their roles as teachers. Ambivalence allows a humbler approach to being in the world that is not moderated by masterful orientations. I shared an article by Linda Martin Alcoff entitled, *The Problem of Speaking for Others* and hearkened back to conversations we had on ignorance and going beyond good intentions. In the article, Alcoff makes a distinction between speaking *for* and speaking *about* others and the crisis of representation that invariably when we are speaking from our situated knowledge, context, and positionality. This crisis could be potentially dangerous when more privileged positions secure their power over those they are speaking for, inevitably perpetuating harm.

Patricia and Meagan, in exasperation, quickly commented that the article left them with a helplessness and hopelessness about what to do when it comes to racial and social justice. They stated their desires to be good anti-racists but were overwhelmed with what to do. They adamantly stated that they read all the books and diligently tried to be part of activism work. When I offered that perhaps it would be a good exercise to not try to intervene all the time and to just bear witness of who we are and what we bring into situations, including dropping into what is uncomfortable to confront (particularly the issues raised in this course) Patricia and Meagan were visibly annoyed. My hope was that such a suggestion of being undone and amenable to the otherwise would help to slowly disrupt masterful and commensurable ways of learning about difference.

Advocacy is not about aligning with the logics of oppression or extrapolating the Other's experiences as one's own. Rather, it is being attentive to our connections and complicities and faithfully resisting the matrix of domination. An advocate in this regard does not hold an authentic or pure position, akin to self-righteous posturing, but rather holds space and necessary impasse for what one does not know or cannot possibly know. Misplaced advocacy, unfortunately, is an egoic compulsion to rectify without being informed. It is the impulse to serve the delusion of white supremacy.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to sketch the contours of white liberal subjectivities. In these descriptions that span possessive individualism, confessional testimonies, sentimentality, ignorance, and misplaced advocacy, I have demonstrated how despite claims to know difference through even a progressive standpoint reiterate violence. Despite the resources we have, we all must be vigilant in how we contribute to white liberal intimate publics, especially in teacher education programs, that ineluctably obscure or gloss over complicities. The need to apprehend the wide range of how white liberal subjectivities and white supremacy more generally is imperative to revitalize our relational commons. Implications from this paper contribute to the practices teacher educators can employ to mitigate consumptive modes of apprehending difference.

INTERLUDE

The World According to Becky:

An Inverse Chronology of Humanity in a Teacher Preparation Program

Because for me, they are special, and I believe I am special for them. Having spent several years developing her identity and acumen as a no-nonsense public defender in Chicago, Rebecca Crenshaw has struggled to connect to what she considers her true calling. As much as she enjoyed the grind of tirelessly advocating for others in and out of the courtroom, Rebecca also feels that a better work-life balance is necessary to bridge the gap between her aspirations and reality. Following her favorite feminist YouTuber, Laci Green, Rebecca begins her daily morning ritual of diary writing in hopes to discover more about herself and her future. The sentiments are consistent as she anchors the eddying thoughts onto the page, “This is it. It is now or never. I have a singular responsibility to care for those who are less fortunate.” Inspired by mainstream feminist treatises on empowerment, self-help manifestos to have it all, and icons such as Malala Yousafzai, Emma Watson and Beyoncé, Rebecca believes she can make the most impact in education. She has even devoured a few books by Sheryl Sandberg and Megyn Kelly. She often ponders: “Why can’t I have it all? What can we possibly accomplish if we all lean in to what matters for a change?” Rebecca is captivated by the swell of women across the country who have political ambitions. Rebecca doesn’t want to merely make a difference but to *be* the difference.

Motivated by the renewed charges for social transformation in daily life, especially in light of the 2016 presidential election, Rebecca moves back home to Whiteshore Lakes, Minnesota. She fills out an application for the elementary education licensure program at Eastcliff University, a large public institution. In her application, she proudly mentions the numerous accolades she received based on her participation in activities that defend the defenseless as an attorney. Not to mention, she lists her multiple certificates in equity, diversity, and interculturalism. Her acceptance letter arrives in late April.

June 26, 2017

When Rebecca first steps foot on campus during a humid June morning, she takes in the grandeur of campus. Although her hair starts to frizzle a little, the excitement of the

hustle and bustle makes her forget her potential bad hairday and is ecstatic for what's to come. She saunters down The Knoll, an area with manicured lawns where she'll spend most of her time. She feels like she belongs. Lawn signs abound with "everyone is welcome here" assures Rebecca of her decision to attend this program. She catches a glance at a large bronze sculpture and marvels at its dignified stance. A striking woman grasping a school book and sporting academic regalia. At the foot of the sculpture is an informational plaque of Alma Mater. She mutters to herself, "Alma Mater depicts Athena. She is goddess of fortitude, grace, and power." Without any hesitation, Rebecca reaches for her phone and snaps a few pictures throwing peace signs for her small yet strong following on Instagram. She includes the hashtags blessed, nofilter, winning, womenarethefuture, forthem, and futureteacher.

Throngs of people are trying to figure out where they need to be for their orientation sessions and first classes, whereas Rebecca has already studied the campus map and knows that the education building is by the Mississippi. Proudly strolling past all the confused students, Rebecca enters the building and quickly finds her classes for the day. These sessions include professional dispositions and teaching for social justice. In her first class, she befriends Libby Whitaker, who like Rebecca, is also a twenty something white woman who has decided to make the switch to teaching.

"Wow. There's a lot of people here. It's so great to see a bunch of us millennials wanting to do something noble." Libby smiles and tries to amplify her voice so as to make herself heard within the bellowing chorus of excited teacher candidates paced in the auditorium.

"Absolutely. Especially during these times, there are so many problems. I mean, Trump isn't going to help those who are disenfranchised, right? So, I guess we have to. And it's like that Ghandi quote, we need to be the change we wish to see in the world."

Both Rebecca and Libby chuckle and consult their schedules for the day. Rebecca is a little peeved about the requisite courses. "I still can't believe we need to take a class on race and diversity in education. It's 2018." Rebecca tells Libby in a scornful tone as she color-codes important dates in her passion planner. "I mean after all I've learned about this all before. Yes, there are different races. There's injustice everywhere. What else is there to know? It's common sense to me. I know all about race and diversity."

Libby nods her head and scoffs, “It’s as if they think we don’t know anything. We get it. I don’t know about you but I’m doing all that I can to show that black lives matter. Let’s see...I voted for Obama...twice... and am rooting for all things Democrat. I always try to post all these things from HuffPost and Occupy Democrats on Facebook. There’s always some good dialogue among my friends in Whiteshore Lakes.”

“Quite frankly, I think it’s a waste of time and money...the people that really need to have a course on race and diversity are those Trumpeters. We’re the woke ones, right Libby?”

Rebecca and Libby finish their planning and commemorate their budding friendship with a gratuitous selfie. Rebecca immediately changes her Facebook profile picture, includes Maya Angelou’s enduring quote, “When people show you who they are believe them.” Rebecca also includes what she considers a felicitous hashtag, woke, to capture their outlook on life. Libby and Rebecca admire their beguiling smiles and agree to embellish the picture with a trendy frame.

They try to stay focus on the themes in the orientation sessions. A keynote is delivered by a young black professor and the message couldn’t be any more poignant. She poses, “How do we teach so we don’t kill? Education is political. Where we are has been written by particular values, the types of things you are learning; in other words, the curriculum. How might we unlearn what we’ve been taught.” While the message is riveting for Rebecca, she couldn’t help but be turned off by the message. After the keynote, Rebecca and Libby discuss their reactions.

“Well, what did you think about that presentation, Libby?”

“I don’t really get it. She is definitely passionate about what she’s talking about, don’t get me wrong. But what does she mean that education is political?”

“Yeah. It shouldn’t be about Republicans and Democrats.” Rebecca exclaims. “We want to be teachers so that everyone can get a fair chance. Every child shouldn’t be left behind.”

Libby adds, “Yeah, this is what happens when we get all tribal. We can’t make any progress. You know what, I think teaching in a way that doesn’t kill actually means killing people with kindness. Why would I want to unlearn what I got from my

progressive Midwestern upbringing? I mean, how is tolerance a bad thing? Way to make us feel good about being teachers!” Rebecca nods vigorously.

Libby assumes a power pose with arms in akimbo and overstates, “What I *really* want to learn is classroom management. You know some kids are rowdier than others. How am I going to control them without getting into trouble? Everything is so risky for us and we might be called a racist for doing the right thing and even when what we do is what’s best for these marginalized kids.”

“Oh God forbid we get called racists! I get so stressed about the possibility of being called out. If people only knew what’s in my heart and soul and all that I do to show I’m a bonafide social justice warrior... Anyway, I say we protest and scheme against people who are not like us over a skinny vanilla latte!”

June 24, 2017

It has been about a week and Rebecca has her schedule down pat. It is frenetic as these courses often rotate frequently because of the compressed nature of her program. Her instructors for most of her courses are predominantly white women and Rebecca believes she has gleaned so much from their expertise as well as their class activities. Sandy, a middle-aged white woman, is the instructor for her introduction to elementary school course. Sandy poses daily reflection prompts and has students record their thoughts in journals. For one class activity, Sandy breaks students up into small groups of 4 and assigns them a “diversity book” featuring children from different cultures that is appropriate for elementary students to discuss. As much as Rebecca doesn’t like to harp on diversity, she feels enlightened about the many resources she can use to reach her “diverse students.” When diversity is broached, Sandy has an uplifting attitude and recites, “We are all pirates. We all have differences. Remember that diversity is our strength and that it is our everyday work.” Rebecca likes how she is learning about “different cultures” and believes these essentializing and “authentic” case studies help her to better relate to her future students. She understands that having different books in her classroom will go a long way in the fight for anti-racism.

Along with having these discussions of cultural groups and their representations in these books, Rebecca also takes seriously the notion of culturally sustaining pedagogy,

and for her concerns mostly about securing academic achievement and finding ways to celebrate different cultures in discrete ways. Sandy facilitates the discussion with the class on relationship building with students, how there should be a certain level of intimacy to feel for what these students are going through.

She takes copious notes on how to implement some of these strategies in her own classroom. “I’m going to need a bigger binder for all these things I need to be doing. I need to get these methods right for my students!” Rebecca exclaims. Libby laughs, “Look at you loving this diversity talk!”

Rebecca appreciates Sandy and the tangible ways that help her hone the moral practice of teaching. After several weeks of this seminar, Rebecca is elated about receiving an A on her final project intellectualizing the need for more empathetic relationships, building a “sentimental repertoire,” and fostering soul to soul connections for anti-racist education, she realizes she must move on to a requisite course on race, school, and society. Rebecca is neither thrilled nor motivated for this course as she assumes that she is going to hear what she already knows. Plus, she hears the instructor is a real hardass about race according to her other peers. Nonetheless, Rebecca keeps sight on the children she is going to affect.

July 22, 2017

A month later, Rebecca’s schedule starts to pick up. With her preparing for her student teaching placement in a few months, Rebecca frequently relies on her experiences thus far. Using her years as an attorney as a crutch, she begins planning well in advance about piloting a project for her race, school, and society class that will knock the socks off this professor who can’t seem to get enough about race.

Rebecca hits up Libby and says, “Are you ready for this?”

“Gosh, ready as I’ll ever be! I can’t believe how long this class has been and now it’s time for a project? Let me guess what the professor wants... starts with an R and rhymes with base.” Libby quipped.

“I get it, but let’s stay positive! We have to empower these people. In the end, I just hope this class is worth it and I get a good placement in a up and coming

neighborhood. I don't really have any expectations for someone telling me what I know already. I just want to be in the classroom already." After their conversation, Rebecca digs through her drawers trying to find a special shirt she wore a few months back. "Ah! Here it is!" Rebecca laughs gleefully.

The next morning, Rebecca jots down musings about making it as a millennial in trying times. She ruminates about her role as a teacher and to change lives. She certainly doesn't want to lose touch with what has motivated her to become a teacher. She also makes a note of the hot yoga class she scheduled in order to support her self-care ritual. Rebecca beams when she sees the shirt she will don in class: a bespoke tee with the statement, "black lives > white feelings." "This is what I'm here for." Wearing this t-shirt for Rebecca is a statement of solidarity and to show her dedication towards racial equity, among other issues related to social justice. What's more, she sports a 14k white gold safety pin necklace crafted exclusively for her from Etsy. The safety pin, which she was inspired to wear based on its popularity on Instagram, seemingly represents Rebecca's stalwart commitment to ending hate and being an ally for all marginalized folks affected by Trump.

The class is fairly large and includes students from outside the school of education. There is one Black woman in the class named Andrea in the predominantly white class. The instructor, Justin introduces themselves, a queer Filipino-American who has spent years teaching and researching race, gender, and class within education and cultural studies. They have the students position the desks into a circle. Justin begins the class with some working assumptions, "We're not building comfort zones in this class; but inviting space for the things we don't know and can't possibly know." Many of the students groan at this statement and are seemingly disinterested in what they are hearing.

Grumbles from students in the class include, "Is this person for real?" "I don't want to be here. I'd rather take a multiple-choice exam with Sandy. She makes me laugh!" "This is all stupid." Rebecca rolls her eyes while also catching Libby's roving gaze around the room. As Justin speaks about the course objectives, Rebecca mouths out slowly "BORING" to Libby, as the two eye Justin up and down as if to size them up. Justin quickly calls the class to order and requests that students get into pairs to begin an interview activity.

Rebecca swiftly chooses Libby and listens intently on instructions.

“Before you begin, I want you to think carefully about these questions: Why do you want to be a teacher? Who are you and how do you know?”

Begrudgingly, Rebecca obliges and quickly conjures up descriptions of teaching and education, hearkening to her reflections in Sandy’s class. Always the overachiever, Rebecca begins to a long missive to her instructor,

I want to be the voice for the voiceless. Urban youth need champion educators who demand excellence and are fiercely dedicated to empowering them. I am a fierce advocate for social change. I am a concerned citizen, former attorney, and human. I cannot describe how proud I am to have been the one to have had the honor of being the one to have stood up and gone to bat for those who had been charged with and even found guilty of certain crimes. I know who I am because I just do. I am a do-gooder. Social justice to me is about listening, but also about keeping people responsible and accountable of their stories and the consequences and products thereof.

Rebecca shares these goals with Libby. “You’re so amazing.” Libby swoons over Rebecca’s statement, “You’re meant to be an elementary teacher.”

When Justin invites those to share parts of their responses, Rebecca is quick to raise her hand.

After the session ends, Justin assigns an extension of this activity to write a personal narrative that critically examines their background, formative educational experiences, and looks in retrospect of how investments in certain knowledge productions are shaped.

July 26, 2017

Rebecca is keen on detailing her formative years and life at Cedarwood Elementary. While the assignment only asks for 7 pages, she is resolute on writing what will probably be a 20-page legal memo recounting significant episodes. She wants to demonstrate, that she too has experienced adversity. Beside Rebecca is a legal pad where she scrawled some vignettes of her difficult childhood. Rebecca furiously types: “It was hard having to move a lot during my childhood. My mother had to relocate to advance her career and we as a family wanted to support her mobility. Eighth grade in New York City was bad and I

thought the students were dumb. They expected I lived in the projects or in the Bronx. I got into fights because some of the students suggested that I couldn't have lived in the city because I had lived in a house."

She is impelled to write about issues of diversity. Rebecca states emphatically, *I defensively believe that I am culturally competent and that embrace and honor diversity in a way that is productive for persons of different backgrounds. I offensively concede that tomorrow, I will be more culturally competent than I am today.*

With tears streaming down her face, Rebecca deftly types, *I become defensive in asserting my ability as a culturally-competent teacher. I know that I can make a difference for my students. I get angry when I feel people are telling me that I will not be able to relate to my students, to understand them, to teach them, just because I am white and they will come from different worlds. Maybe this is a good thing. I am fired up because this is wrong. I know this is wrong.*

She concludes her story,

I want to save public schools and the deplorable conditions our students are subject to. Call me crazy, but I want to be able to save the children who grew up in not so great areas by being that teacher who cared, that made them feel like they could do anything. Kids are impressionable, and I want to impress to them that they matter. Because for me, they are special, and I believe I am special for them. They are my martyrdom. I love the idea of public schools...It is a romantic and naïve idea, but so what. You don't decide who or what you love, you just do.

July 28, 2017

Rebecca was not looking forward to the class session on identity, race, and whiteness in education. After all, why discuss something so sensitive, so seemingly unproductive to the general purpose of becoming an effective teacher. She had already enumerated all her experiences about being different from the racists. The readings assigned for the week only fomented her indignance. The former attorney was ready to be a devil's advocate in class to show her legal prowess. She had a bone to pick with Charles W. Mills and this thing called "the racial contract." She was already familiar with the works of Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa. She reads terms that in her mind aren't meaningful to her.

She dismisses Mills' suggestion that there is a knowledge system that perpetuates ignorance.

Justin begins with a discussion of whiteness, a pervasive movement and sensibility that structures the values and realities of the world.

“Excuse me, don't you think you're being a bit harsh about talking about white people the way you are. This is why white people feel discouraged, guilty, and ashamed when they try to do good in some way. I mean, just a suggestion... we need to work on this aggressive tone and unnecessary rage... Not all white people are bad people. I, for one, am doing the work. This is the problem, we can't make any progress with race relations if we harp on about how bad things are.” Many students in the class slyly grin at Rebecca's proposition. She boldly continues, “Maybe it could just be an issue of semantics. How about if we just reframe whiteness to a culture of domination?”

With a look of incredulity, Andrea, the sole Black woman teacher candidate in the room who is working towards her licenses in elementary and special education delivers a compelling rebuttal: “We can't just push these issues under the rug because race and whiteness are very much a part of our everyday lives. It becomes convenient for white people, who don't recognize their own marked and privileged beings to not think about their impact on people of color. Whiteness *is* the culture of domination.”

Justin offers, “Well, we often miss opportunities to confront the systemic violence of race and how these get reprised overtime. It's great that one can say they're committed to diversity, one's actions often get disconnected from the rhetoric that supposedly espouses a more racially just future.

Andrea chimes in, “the message is about how can we all collectively restore humanity. That is not to say we're taking on a color-blind mentality and seeing things through rose-colored glasses, but what are we going to do to disrupt these structures and processes of oppression. We're not implicating all white people, but you need understand how you white folks are complicit in perpetuating violence.

Rebecca retorts, “But Andrea, why are you indicting those who are trying to do good? Why are you making people like me complicit in all of this? I'm not one of them. How can you say that I don't support black people? I've done a lot! I won't stand for this.

If white people can't do anything, if I'm hearing you correctly, what do you expect us to do?"

"You just need to listen to what people of color are saying. It isn't about your feelings and it's more about your impact. Right now, you're doing a lot of damage by being so defensive of your whiteness," Andrea says.

Rebecca flummoxed by this entire exchange, storms out of the classroom, feeling that everything she has accomplished was in vein. Her close colleagues—white women, following in tow, their Tumi backpacks adorned with Hillary buttons, and equality stickers, also leave the classroom trying to console her. "They don't understand that we're trying to help. It's okay, Rebecca. You're doing great things. Some people just take things too personally."

"I guess, so." Rebecca still distraught. "It shouldn't have to be this hard. I don't like being shamed. Aren't we all here to help students? Race this and race that. I'm so over it. It's like I can never please *them*. I guess you pay a price for being nice and white."

That evening, Rebecca is still trying to come to terms with all that had happened in class. She wants to prove to her instructor and Andrea that she has their best interests in mind. As a gesture of good-will, she takes out some textured crème cardstock embossed with her initials and begins to write a note to Justin and Andrea. Each letter is the same. A glass fountain pen in hand, she writes,

Maya Angelou often said, "When you know better, you do better." Audre Lorde made clear "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences." I thank you for sharing how you feel and I know how it can be difficult being a minority to express yourself. My foremothers were a part of the women's suffrage moment, so I understand struggle and oppression. I am not unlike you. I think we can all learn a valuable lesson from what transpired yesterday. You should be proud of where you are today. I don't ever want to take that away from you. But, I think in order to work towards social justice, we need to come together as one. People are not out to get you. Instead of chastising one another, we need to assume people have the best intentions.

Rebecca signs it affectionately with *Love, Becky*.

August 4, 2017

At the end of the next class session, Rebecca delivers the note to Justin and Andrea. Andrea opens the card first, scanning the content with her mouth gaped in disbelief. Justin is in the background trying to diffuse the situation, but also attend to last minute questions from students.

Andrea looks squarely at Rebecca and responds, “I don’t know what you are trying to convey in your message. Honestly, Rebecca, this is not only offensive to me, but not a constructive way to confront what happened yesterday.”

Exasperated, Rebecca points her finger at Andrea and yells, “Are you freaking serious right now? What do you people want? Everything is such a big deal. Professor, hello? Help me out!”

Rebecca turns to her instructor, to which they remain stoic. As a professor, Justin speaks in a calm, yet stern tone, “You need to realize Rebecca that your message is condescending. You are invalidating Andrea and putting all this labor on her to have to explain everything to you.”

Rebecca chides both of them, reiterating how she felt Justin and Andrea were ignorant about the real issues affecting black children.

When home, Rebecca pens a lengthy e-mail to the dean of the college and describes how rude the professor and Andrea have been and how this class does not fulfill the institutional promise of inclusive excellence. Furthermore, she states how the instructor is unqualified and theoretically ignorant. Rebecca can’t seem to understand how Justin and Andrea are being “racist” to her after everything she has done professionally.

August 6, 2017

Sipping her green smoothie at the nearby juice bar, Rebecca receives a reply from the college dean. It writes “Thank you Rebecca for your and message. We are evaluating ways to make this a better educational experience for you.”

Meanwhile, Andrea speaks to Justin about what transpired in class the other day. She details how she constantly feels surveilled, dehumanized, and demoralized in the

university. Andrea yearns to feel heard and to not be taken as a pawn who readily accommodates those who are “being lovingly, yet knowingly ignorant” and who preserve this ignorance through self-righteous arrogance. For Andrea and Justin, this is not just about an unfortunate encounter with a disgruntled student, but rather about the continual struggle to survive and flourish in the present apocalypse; that is, reckoning with a (white) lifeworld and conditions whose maintenance is dependent on the perpetual suffering of marginalized people.

Together, Andrea and Justin form an undercommons study group for teacher candidates of color to discuss, critique, and envision healing ways to be in, but not *of* the academy. Andrea and Justin hope this group is a breathing space where people of color do not have to be under the scrutiny of white feminism.

August 11, 2017

Class resumes, but Andrea is nowhere to be found. Rebecca lets out a sigh of relief and is surprised to see Sandy at the lectern, with Justin. Sandy greets the class, “Hi everyone. Starting today, Justin and I will be team teaching this course.”

Rebecca is confident. She feels like she has an ally in Sandy who takes care in talking about issues of difference in ways that are palatable to her. Rebecca is glad that there is no one threatening her motives. Rebecca is wide-eyed and quickly smiles at Libby before taking out her legal pad. She’s now ready to take notes and eager to learn the *right* way. After all, she really just wants to be a good white feminist.

PAPER 3

Toward Cosmopoetical Fabulations of Difference and Relationality: A Reflexive Theoretical Treatise on Otherwise Praxes in Education and Beyond

On Meaningful Relationality – A Field Memo

In Poetics of Relation, Édouard Glissant limns a reflective treatise on difference and the human experience. He advocates for a revitalized politics of care for difference that destabilizes the everyday investments in white colonial logics as ontological precedent. For Glissant, poetics is not just a writing aesthetic, but a deliberate and creative exercise to evince more liberatory ways of thinking, being, and relating in the world. His writing on meaning-making in relationship offers confrontational impasses for engaging the historical and material entanglements that reprise systemic violence resulting from difference. This mode of being is unequivocally an ethical intervention as it exhorts one to consider their embodied place in the greater relational commons and the responsibilities with which we are entrusted when contending with the irreducible plurality constituting the human experience.

Central to Glissant's relational sensibility are the processes of errantry and opacity. Errantry refers to a "sacred wandering" across relational encounters and acknowledges intersubjective indeterminacy. This position disavows claims to master identity and culture, or to presume an inherent genealogy ascribed to these concepts, and instead rigorously explores discontinuities and tensions for capacious engagements within and across difference. Similarly, opacity describes the right to preserve the particularities of difference without the need for these particularities to be intelligible within a hegemonic rubric of understanding. In other words, this gesture towards opacity illuminates the ethical dilemmas of legibility by disidentifying from the very practices that seek to make visible, homogenize, or conquer what is hailed as Other. Taken together, Glissant's Poetics of Relation is a call to convivial movement, collective freedom, and the sustainability of radical politics and democratic projects.

When I consider my positionality as a scholar, activist, and practitioner in this current moment of endemic political emergency, I keep returning to Glissant's understanding of being in relationship. What makes this a timely and meaningful book for me is its application for advancing justice and liberation. We often romanticize notions of

solidarity and community building in social justice projects. Despite good intentions to build an ethos of common values or ideals, we often assume or impose what is best or right. In many relational encounters and spaces, I am either tokenized, or my voice suppressed. Glissant's poetics has given me a language to understand the processes that strip agential capacities within social formations. I have become better attuned to the dynamics around how the space is oriented, what bodies matter, who can participate, and whose voice is given credence in the relentless allure of community. Glissant's unapologetic critique of everyday tactics of oppression and exploitation that complement our relationships have guided my thinking of my own complicity; that is, in any space, I am an implicated subject in an interdependent world. The beauty imbued in his writing is also captured through his affective reading of a plural consciousness. I have learned through Édouard Glissant's decolonial poetics that a vulnerable dialectic of the world expands our purview of repair and appreciation of identity, difference, and relationship.

**

Introduction

This project has a vested interest in the entanglements among difference, knowledge productions, and relationality in institutionalized higher learning. I have sought to employ a transdisciplinary approach that both reveals and destabilizes the overdetermination of solipsistic engagements, homogenization, and the romanticization of difference, and how these ultimately avow whiteness. My stance on transdisciplinary research and diffractive readings as described in the first paper of this dissertation is significant as it pushes for “close reading and thin description” (Love, 2013; Jackson, 2013) of the various modalities that direct the performances of difference. Like Sara Ahmed, I am less concerned with what difference means, but rather what it does, how it is used in institutional settings, and what its implications are for a politics of relationality (Ahmed, 2006, 2019).

This paper begins by examining how relationality is an important analytic to our engagements with difference. Drawing from biopolitical thought, critical affect studies, and critical ethnic studies, I situate how a politicized understanding of relationality

generates curiosities around the development of praxes to better apprehend and potentially disavow from the *crisis ordinariness*, or the “protracted historical and experiential condition” of which we have been habituated (Berlant, 2011; Roitman, 2014). This crisis ordinariness features the oppressive conditions, injurious rhetoric, and the commodified ethos that gradually erode the subject. Through this understanding, I make an explicit acknowledgement that bodies and populations are perpetually “living in prognosis” and are subjected to varying degrees of precarity through the savage regime of neoliberal capitalism (Puar, 2009). Relationality, in this regard, provides a basis to syncretize understandings of ethics, responsibility, and resistant liveness around difference in these times of crisis ordinariness.

Following this section on relationality as analytic, I then contextualize otherwise ethico-onto-epistemologies as necessary ruptures to the normative configurations that mediate understandings of identity, culture, and society. Notably, these otherwise imaginations seek to transgress the dictums of institutionality that dislodge the regime of Man—that is male, white, colonial subjectivities—and strive towards coalitional consciousness building (Wynter, 2003; Keating, 2005). What are meaningful ways to engage our unpredictable relational entanglements that can better apprehend radical interconnectedness despite difference?

Ultimately, I argue that a radical dialectic of relationality beyond our current facilities and rubrics of neoliberal institutionality, as informed by these otherwise praxes, is what is necessary to transgress the systematic reprise of death, debility, and dispossession engendered by the naturalized fictions of human difference. By no means am I seeking prescriptive interventions through these otherwise praxes, but rather I am amplifying and responding to the urgent calls to “faithfully witness” and center the relational imperatives from the margins for a more liberated future for education and beyond (Lugones, 2003). Following Hartman and the practice of fabulation, I suggest the traditionally peripheral insights that are part and parcel of the *otherwise* are invitations “to narrate a certain impossibility, to illuminate those practices that speak to the limits of most available narratives” (Hartman and Wilderson, 2003, p. 184); invitations crucial to reconstitute the human, the social world, and social mores.

Relationality as Analytic: Recognition, Address, and Embodied Others in Crisis

“The predicates of a relational methodology invite us to uncover, reveal, desediment, unveil, and excavate, prompting us to account for entanglement and its obfuscation or burial” (Feldman, 2016).

Examining relationality opens ways of understanding the character of interactions to envision possibilities towards ethical solidarity and reckoning with the pluriverse (Lugones 2003). Relationships and the subjectivities contained within these relational encounters are contingent on various intensities, politics, and other established kinships. Thus, these relationships can be questioned and reshaped. As Weheliye (2014) states, drawing from Edouard Glissant (1997):

Relationality provides a productive model for critical inquiry and political action...because it reveals the global and systemic dimensions of racialized, sexualized, and gendered subjugation, while not losing sight of the many ways political violence has given rise to ongoing practices of freedom within various traditions of the oppressed (p. 13).

Weheliye encourages inquiries into the lifeworlds and worldviews. Extending this invitation to higher learning would specifically look at how students occupy and take-up subject positions and social locations, not solely to build an individual knowledge of what it would be to be taking up ethical solidarity with those in the margins, but to rethink how positionality and relationality are always situated in existing, broader sociopolitical processes that are beyond one’s milieu. This rethinking can evince new horizons of taking a humanizing relational ontology seriously.

In *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant (2011) describes the affective investments that constrain the imagination and hamper the ability to think differently about relational patterning. Berlant provides a trenchant examination of the affective schema by which people construct and attach to uphold the good life perpetuated by the neoliberal “precarious public sphere.” This attachment to the possibilities where “the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation” constitutes this relation of cruel optimism. In other words, these affective attachments to conditional promises get in the way of flourishing or the desired goals of, for example, attaining the good life.

Berlant suggests this valorization of the good life takes for granted the everyday crises and injury that eventually wear down the subject, and consequently propels them to develop strategies for coping and survival. Berlant turns to affect and aesthetics to interrogate this deterioration of the subject and the everyday maneuvers they employ within unlivable social conditions to enact new genres of being in states of precarity and debility. Berlant's analysis of cruel optimism can be extended to the social issues of today. While Berlant does not take an intersectional approach in her work, her concept of cruel optimism can be used to understand how difference is engaged, particularly with the kind of passivity employed by the act of tolerance. In a relation of cruel optimism, tolerating difference depoliticizes relational encounters, their containment of histories and "habits of perception," to "sustain a coasting sentience" and avoids any reckoning with the historical and precarious present (p. 43). Any invocation that interrupts the neoliberal order or crosses the threshold of what is tolerable or acceptable engenders an opening of discomfort, disgust, or injurious acts.

Indeed, this cruel optimism of neoliberal sloganeering and a depoliticization of difference ineluctably has material consequences. For example, in *The Materialization of Race in Multiculture*, Angela Mitropoulos examines the performatives and non-performatives of race and multiculturalism that figure the governance and acceptability of social difference in Australia. Particularly, she signals to the failure of multiculturalism in its inability "to sufficiently deliver on its promise of a redistribution or expansion of rights (and recognition) when confronted with what are said to be intractable racial differences" (p. 1).

Mitropoulos situates the movements of multiculturalism by noting the celebrations of difference and indigeneity of the eighties to the more recent government tactics of surveillance and divestment within the purview of indigenous politics. She criticizes the depoliticized and benign deployment of race and multiculturalism that lays claim to the liberal commitment of a good and ethical life made accessible to all. Ultimately, Mitropoulos opens a critical dialectic on the ways multiculturalism, the naturalized fiction of race, and liberalism imbricate to organize biopolitical mechanisms and logistics that enfold bodies into the project of citizenship.

Mitropoulos names the liberal maneuvers of the Native Title laws that tout the liberal accomplishment of progress—that is, of recognizing and integrating the indigenous subaltern into the liberal polity in deference to social cohesion and as a corrective to the “indigenous poverty of culture.” These liberal maneuvers of “beneficence and national maturity” as Mitropoulos describes mirrors the arguments made by Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) and Jodi Melamed (2011) in thinking about the historical breaks created to disavow brutal and oppressive histories and to preempt confrontational provocations that preserve the liberal social imagination of tolerance, diversity, and multicultural happiness. These desires to uphold this rendering of a good and ethical life forestalls any critical apprehension of the biopolitical mechanisms that are part of liberalism’s inclusionary order. In other words, inclusion is always legitimized by its binary of differentiation. Thus, it is critical and it would be important to examine the ways in which subjects are hailed and disciplined in the project of differential inclusion (Ong, 2006).

The tactics and logistics of multiculturalism and racialization seek to regulate movements in the colonial spatial imagination. Mitropoulos underscores the calculated invocations of racialization and capitalism that confer valuations on bodies—those who are rendered invaluable are consigned to precarious living conditions and a (social) death. She writes, “race exists insofar as capital— its conditions, relations and procedures – is spectralised, just as abstract equality exists to the extent that concrete differences are sifted, ordered, repudiated, costed and abjected” (p. 5). These calculated processes pervade institutions in society from prisons to education and social services. Mitropoulos strongly conveys that identity within (late) liberalism is not concerned with holistic approaches to cultural differences, but shifts injustices from the state to the racialized individual who is supposed to construct a new memory that overcomes their adversity and becomes like the unmarked or default subject of the state—white settler colonialist.

Adhering to the good life and the good tolerant, liberal subject, there comes an appeasing of difference that is overly celebratory and averts conflict. Like Mitropoulos, Sara Ahmed, through her work on affect, problematizes multicultural happiness, in its explicit maneuvers to ignore historical traumas and place differential investments on certain bodies in the name of social inclusion.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2004) develops a relational analysis that posits the performative quality of emotions that circulate a series of effects. Through this understanding, emotions delineate the surfaces and boundaries that constitute subjects or objects, individually or collectively, and shape the directions or orientations (moving towards and/or away) of these subjects and objects.

In her chapter, “The Performativity of Disgust,” Ahmed responds to two questions: “What does it mean to designate something as disgusting? How do such designations work to generate effects?” (p. 84). She inquires about the affective qualities of and relations between subjects and objects interpellated as disgusting and those within the ‘community of witnesses’ that are disgusted. She further describes the metonymic power of stickiness and the effects produced by the accumulation of sticky signs. Drawing from Judith Butler, Ahmed probes the performative nature of discourse and speech acts that “generates the object that it names (the disgusting object/event)” (p. 93). Using examples from the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Ahmed demonstrates how issues of identity, otherness, and allegiance—constructed through affect—become embroiled in the maintenance of a biopolitical order that (re)inscribes certain bodies, namely recognized as “Middle-Eastern,” as “non-human, as beneath and below the bodies of the disgusted” (p. 97). Returning to the notion of stickiness, a recognition of Middle Eastern becomes associated with disgust, fear, and terrorism.

For Ahmed, stickiness is about relationality, “or a ‘withness’, in which the elements that are ‘with’ get bound together” (p. 91). This understanding undergirds her description of how affect, particularly disgust, gets stuck to certain bodies. Stickiness is created through the repetition or citation of signs. Ahmed highlights the political nature of emotions to cohere allegiances and cast out abject others. Her analysis of disgust is reflective of and organizes the sociopolitical field. This field sets up perpetual boundaries when the threat of racialized strangeness is imminent and infringes on the sanctified space of whiteness.

Jasbir Puar in “Prognosis Time: Towards a geopolitics of affect, debility, and capacity,” opens a dialectic that plays with the tensions and potentialities of a “bio-necro political collaboration” syncretizing Foucauldian biopolitics, Deleuzian control societies and Mbembeian necropolitical critique. Puar grapples with notions of affect, debility, and

capacity, to re-envision the performative quality of bodies and embodiment and their figured representational politics. In other words, Puar rigorously broaches debility and capacity to dislodge the normative discourses around subject formation, and displace what Elizabeth Povinelli describes as, “the certain literalism of the referent.” Ultimately, Puar gestures towards a recasting of disability as debility, whereby bodies and populations are perpetually “living in prognosis” and subjected to degrees of precarity through the savage regime of neoliberal capitalism. She underscores that this intentional political recasting:

[W]ould not disavow the crucial political gains enabled by disability activists globally, but to invite a deconstruction of what ability and capacity mean, affective and otherwise, and to push for a broader politics of debility that destabilizes the seamless production of abled-bodies in relation to disability (p. 166).

Puar proffers an invitation to consider how relationality can be reconfigured through the analytics of assemblage and conviviality and to transgress the racialized, classed, and gendered categories that constitute an individualist subject. She inquires into the affective conditions that control societies perpetually surveil yet also simultaneously help us to discover the interstitial spaces where bounded identity politics—and even intersectionality—often fail to recognize. Puar issues a challenge to “Euro-American identity-based rights politics” and the subsumption of social difference that disability often performs that hails exceptional class of “privileged disabled bodies in distinction to various ‘others’” (p. 165).

This analysis of the bio-necro collaboration and prognosis time that launches from Foucault, Agamben and Mbembe, also gestures, albeit lightly, on this collision of social life and social death. She writes, “[p]rognosis time should ideally articulate with other theories of queer temporality and social death that work through the unevenness of how populations live and get to live time” (p. 166). Similarly, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and her scholarship on carceral racism and by extension, legislative criminality substantiates the importance of imbricating other theories of queer temporality and social death. Black subjectivities have always been subjected to a perpetual state of precarity, where histories and insights have largely been ignored or warped.

Jared Sexton and his critique of Mbembe's use of necropolitics explicitly addresses the re-inscription of a form of reductionism that Puar is ostensibly working against (that all people are under the same degrees of precarity). In *People of Color Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery* Sexton describes:

What is lost for the study of black existence in the proposal for a decentered, "postblack" paradigm is a proper analysis of the true scale and nature of black suffering and of the struggles — political, aesthetic, intellectual, and so on — that have sought to transform and undo it. What is lost for the study of nonblack nonwhite existence is a proper analysis of the true scale and nature of its material and symbolic power relative to the category of blackness (Sexton, 2010, p. 48).

Here, Sexton makes clear the affliction of an anti-Black ontology of which the current social/biopolitical order is predicated on should be given due consideration.

The move from disability to debility as described by Puar provides a wider range of possibilities to think about what a body can as opposed to what it should do. In his essay, *What Can a Body Do?* Gilles Deleuze shares similar sentiments with Jasbir Puar regarding the move towards more convivial ways to account for the instabilities and vulnerabilities of the body. Deleuze draws from Spinoza to uncover the unknowable. The convivial approach also inherent in Deleuze's essay helps to disrupt rigid boundaries and question social positions. Notably, a connection can be made with Puar's insistence that affect can serve as an epistemic site of "bodily discombobulation and creative resistance" (Puar, 2009, p. 162).

This invitation towards a convivial analytic traces broader relationship among affect, capacity, debility and identity politics within relational encounters and to disavow a disability fetishism (much like in Sara Ahmed's description of stranger fetishism in *Strange Encounters*). Puar writes of conviviality as:

[A]n ethical orientation that rewrites a Levinasian taking up of the ontology of the Other by arguing that there is no absolute self or other, rather bodies that come together and dissipate through intensifications and vulnerabilities, insistently rendering bare the instability of the divisions between capacity-endowed and debility-laden bodies (p. 169).

Puar signals towards a radical openness to deconstruct about how an epistemic community conjures embodied others and not shy away from confrontational impasses that can uncover new modes of recognition, address, and embodiment. Augmenting Puar, though somewhat differently, Seawright (2017) contends these relational encounters with difference are inevitably determined not solely through:

Reflective efforts—others’ efforts, the spatial setting, our pre-predicative movements, along with many other relational variables come together to define a moment [...] products of cultural habit, which give them a character of, for instance, coloniality, white supremacy, or other forms of oppression that are more readily analyzed at the level of social systems, not intimate social exchange (p. 181).

Seawright’s provocation also opens inquiries into the character of these relational encounters, specifically in destabilizing the supposed rigidity of subjectivities, and encouraging the apprehending the contingent social worlds we have interpreted that we inhabit:

[To] understand a full ethical picture, so to speak, we must push the individual (vis-à-vis the destruction of the sovereign subject) to the background where they can be seen as part of a whole social situation that is already infused with racial hierarchy (p. 181).

These various heuristics of difference and relationality gesture to something different, to witness and resist the modes of relating that align with whiteness as the ontological precedent. Otherwise possibilities take a radical dialectic to incommensurable difference, consciousness-raising, and interdependence. These otherwise modes are an ethical imperative, as Audre Lorde astutely argues “we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals, and because of this we stand to be fractured from one another and ourselves” and to dislodge the institutionalization of difference, where it is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people” (Lorde, 2012). The following section contextualizes otherwise ethico-onto-epistemologies and how such orientations can pluralize and embolden relationships, organizing, and life with criticality, creativity, and capaciousness. These orientations

bolster the ideas and theorizations highlighted in the previous section, with particular attention to critical race feminisms and decolonial thought.

Theorizing the Otherwise: Refusals and Indictments

“What will have to be relinquished for us to unleash the imagination’s radical creative capacity and draw from it what is needed for the task of thinking The World otherwise? Nothing short of a radical shift in how we approach matter and form” (Silva, 2016, p. 59).

“The refusal is where it’s at; the refusal, which is to say a kind of inoculation of flesh against the supposed weightiness of normative physical and discursive structures, is the site of daring to exist otherwise” (Bey, 2019, p. 106).

In this enduring era of apocalypse and dystopian reality, scholarship from the interdisciplinary humanities and everyday activism have been mobilizing around the term *otherwise* to both unveil and articulate emergent forms of resistant liveness. For example, *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (2020) examines the relationships and incommensurable differences between Native and Black communities. Through a collection of essays, art and creative meditations, the contributors weave a compelling and necessary rejoinder to the systematic onslaught of violence derived from sociogenic descriptions of the human and the ontogenic interpretations of the flesh. In particular, the editors state: “When we want to imagine other wise possibilities— other wise worlds—we must abolish the very conceptual frame that produces categorical distinction and makes them desirable; we have to abolish the modality of thought that thinks categorical distinction as maintainable” (p. 15).

In this spirit, this section provides theoretical musings that guide my understanding of the *otherwise*, its contours, and its significance in envisioning difference and relationality anew. Specifically, I explore how otherwise imaginaries can help forge new assemblages that upend the current constitution of the human, the social world, and social mores. Here, I consider how biopolitics informed by Black Studies and new materialisms undergird otherwise ethico-onto-epistemologies, an intentional term that accounts for the intra-active relationships and entanglements among ethics, ontology, and epistemology. (Barad, 2007; Henderson-Espinoza, 2013). Additionally, while

simultaneously exploring the otherwise, I heed Chad Shomura's advisory on the tendency for intersectional differences to be reduced in new materialist discourse: "[E]fforts to cultivate an ethics and politics of the reassembled human must address the sociopolitical and epistemological conditions that have differentiated humans and the humanities through the racialized, gendered, sexualized, colonialist, and ableist metaphysics of life and matter" (2017).

Wake Work

"What lives would Black people have had outside of slavery? How would they have survived independent of those who enslaved them? (Sharpe, 2016, p. 13).

Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* (2016) describes working in the wake of slavery as an embodied epistemological break from disciplinary circumscriptions of Blackness. Her insistence to "imagine otherwise from what we know *now* in the wake of slavery," interrogates the quotidian orthographies impressed upon Black life through white supremacy. This orthography of the wake is constituted by "a dysgraphia of disaster ... by way of the rapid, deliberate, repetitive, and wide circulation... of Black social, material, and psychic death... it registers and produces the conventions of antiblackness in the present and into the future (p, 21). It is through possibilities of wake work that illuminate what persists and survives, what is relayed and sensed through the long durée of abjection and ontological deprivation (or perhaps, captivation) of Blackness.

I am interested in Sharpe's wake work as a praxis to require new forms of representation beyond the spectacular violence and death ascribed to the sociogenic implications of race. How might we work towards quotidian representations that "[dare] to claim spaces of "something like freedom," and "transform spaces for and practices of an ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention), an ethics of seeing, and of *being* in the wake as consciousness[?]" In thinking of the de rigueur modes of reading and writing of *difference* in higher learning that evacuate historical particularities, political implications, and material realities, I have witnessed a deferral to voyeuristic methods, or what some might consider trauma pornography, where modes of making Black lives sensible to mainly white people ... "become symbol, par excellence, for less-than-human beings condemned to death." If these representations are continuously cited as a means to "diversify" curriculum, or to ostensibly "know" the afflictions of race or some conjuring

of human difference we must question the very desire to know or display Black life solely through the specters of abjection and captivity. The ethico-onto-epistemological ramifications of wake work positions quotidian representations of Black life as a form of curriculum and consciousness and ethical viewing throughout history. This consciousness requires at the very least a curricular intervention or inquiry as Sharpe gestures towards, “what kinds of ethical viewing and reading practices must we employ, *now*, in the face of these onslaughts?”

Wayward Experiments

“It is the practice of the social otherwise, the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies; it is the lived experience of enclosure and segregation, assembling and huddling together.”

In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, (2019) Saidiya Hartman chronicles a social history of young Black women in the late 1800s to early 1900s. Through archival research and speculative fabulation, Hartman illuminates the resistance efforts of subaltern Black women actively responding to the constraints of adaptive state-capital hegemonies. The creative agency and poetics of flourishing demonstrated by these young Black women signals the wayward experiments they conducted by their subjectivities and their existence. Hartman writes of her counter-storytelling:

the endeavor is to recover the insurgent ground of these lives; to exhume open rebellion from the case file, to untether waywardness, refusal, mutual aid, and free love from their identification as deviance, criminality, and pathology; to affirm free motherhood (reproductive choice), intimacy outside the institution of marriage, and queer and outlaw passions; and to illuminate the radical imagination and everyday anarchy of ordinary colored girls, which has not only been overlooked, but is nearly unimaginable (p. iv).

As an extension to my discussion above regarding quotidian representations that are not contingent on negation) but on resistant aliveness, certainly Hartman does not encourage the romanticization of these lives, but rather invites us to think about how resistance and freedom are exercised in the everyday lives of these Black women; how would we read these resistance strategies in spite of the adaptive state-capital hegemonies

on their own terms without the need for a white referent or naïve romanticization? The lives that are subjugated most virulently, and their attendant accounts of ceaselessly pursuing pleasure as activism and radical world making? What can we glean on these?

Hartman's deft account of the politics and aesthetics of the wayward have both resonance and significance in the interpellation of relationality and difference. Notably, her critical fabulation underscores the necessity to take the intimate, ordinary, and dynamic lives of these women seriously. The careful assembling of these stories, animated by photographs forces us to reckon again, the ways we hail the lives of Black life and praxes of freedom. As suggested by the previous impasse on white liberal intimate publics and similarly alluded in Sharpe's wake work, I am sensitive to the ways we reinscribe voyeurism through the distancing we employ by analyzing and relate to Black life in higher learning. In a review of Hartman's text, Jennifer Nash (2020) alludes to viewing images of Black life differently. Drawing from both Hartman and Camp (2017), Nash gestures towards "read[ing] identification photographs of black subjects and reads them not as manifestations of state surveillance, but instead as sites of refusal that 'rupture the sovereign gaze of the regimes that created them by refusing the very terms of photographic subjection they were engineered to produce' (Camp, 2017, p. 5)" (p. 596 in Nash).

Hartman underscores the ethico-onto-epistemological consequences of wayward possibilities as they are instantiated by the lives of these young Black women:

Waywardness is an ongoing exploration of *what might be*; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dictated, when there is little room to breathe, when you have been sentenced to a life of servitude, when the house of bondage looms in whatever direction you move. It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive (p. 227).

This provocation can also be extended to the witnessing practices we employ in higher learning. As Hartman astutely maps and identities through her curatorial work, we must be attuned to the various scenes of subjection we are requiring our mostly white polity of viewing. Notably, it is a meditation on how we can deliberately both study and write into being the various permutations of Black life that constantly inquires into "how

does one make this violence visible when it secures enjoyment, sovereignty, and bodily integrity of man and master?" (p. 27). In light of Eric Garner's and others' tragic deaths and the heartrending refrain of "I can't breathe" at the hands of police brutality, we must seriously attend to institutional practices that "bring back the person, alive, and sacrosanct" (Jordan, 1969, p. 47).

Signaling the Otherwise in the Everyday Commensurability of Difference and Relationality

The figuring of these worlds otherwise is by no means an easy task but one that is necessary to think through difference and relationality in more capacious ways, such that they broach a coalitional consciousness, to cultivate accountability and critical care, to enact ethical solidarity, to acknowledge our interdependence and response-ability for one another. Otherwise possibilities for learning about difference and relationality engenders confrontational 'impasses' of simultaneous stuckness and potential (Cvetkovich, 2012) to both consider and articulate ruptures to the endurance of white colonial logics of desire and mastery. Particularly, in her conceptualization of the otherwise, literary and ethnic studies scholar, Yomaira Figueroa-Vasquez (2020) writes, "the imagining of worlds/otherwise entails engaging the apocalyptic, the ends of the worlds birthed by the non-ethics of modernity, coloniality, and settler colonialism...it is a refusal to succumb to the necropolitics of modernity and an indictment of the interlocking systems of oppression which...advance the continued destruction of the global environment (p. 148).

Through the rampant use of neoliberal metrics of accountability that gauge cultural learning and competence, it is important to question the ways we have been accustomed to desire to know, to accomplish, or to have "right," the ways to engage in the relations of difference through technical proceduralisms and the ways in which otherwise possibilities can transgress the capturing and commodification of difference. In *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang write how the project of decolonization may not necessarily imbricate with other social justice initiatives. The authors write of the relegation of decolonization to a catch-all metaphor: "Decolonization as metaphor allows people to equivocate these contradictory decolonial desires because it turns decolonization into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation" (p. 7). If an objective of critical thinking is to spur transgressions, it may be worth

considering what purposes and for whom this project of decolonization is meant to serve: are we knowingly or unknowingly recentering settler colonialism by abdicating responsibility through “moves of innocence?” (p. 10).

Extending this query more generally, I have been interested in the ways we employ moves of innocence in higher learning by virtue of enacting what I am calling an *ethic of commensurability* (the antithesis of Tuck and Yang’s ethic of incommensurability). In Chapter 3, I described the white liberalist (ones that purportedly espouse anti-oppression and the pursuit of social justice) and how such an identity and its proliferation through a “public” instantiates hermeneutic violence (Fricker, 2007) whose attributes include: facile conceptions of self, criticality and care, self-righteous practices of witnessing, and misplaced advocacy for those on the margins. In that chapter, I ask what is at stake through the equivocation of these abstract moral visions towards a pluralistic democracy and social justice? How do these equivocations align with white managerial logics?

I continue these queries in this section, specifically addressing the risks of relegating our focus on learning about difference and relationality to a continued fascination with “aboutness,” and “products and things,” instead of paying attention to their teleological implications. Given an orientation of the otherwise, how might we reconcile the allure towards machinations of identity, difference, and representation, and the need to deconcretize these for new forms of understanding difference? In other words, how do we understand that while difference is socially constructed, the need to understand their material effects and their distributions among complex power arrangements still warrants attention?

Making Difference Relevant

Kandice Chuh (2014) expresses her concern for identitarianism and continued aggravation over the notion of “aboutness.” Specifically, Chuh describes how disciplinary knowledge is bound and how aboutness corresponds to studying difference as an ancillary topic of study. She regards aboutness as:

an assessment of relevance, and within the racialized economy of academic knowledge (canonical knowledge reproducing whiteness continues to center the US academy and thus ensures that higher education maintain its long tradition of

contributing to the reproduction of social inequality), preserves the (racist) epistemologies of (neo)liberalism through a reproductive logic that is utterly unqueer (p. 127).

Throughout my time documenting and thinking about difference, I became keenly attuned to the orientations, objects, processes, and practices utilized that keep an othering sensibility. These objects and practices include the modular ways courses (in my participation and teaching teacher preparation courses) are configured that normalize whiteness as an ontological precedent. In this way, diversity as a topic is rendered hypervisibilized and experiences thereof held captive by imposing a translatability of incommensurable subjectivities – in syllabi, upon completion of this course, there are official expectations and objectives learning about diversity, these are the official orientations and objects that constitute the ways we should about learning about difference-- and is hollowed of its transformative capacity. As one of a few instructors of color at these institutions, in many instances, I became the cultural liaison or expert that was expected to contribute knowledge about diversity and equity issues, most notably those pertaining to “Asian-American” and “gay” issues, thus difference being read in myopic ways. This was unfortunately recurring for me, and suggests that for diversity to be somehow meaningful, it must remain legible in particular ways. As Lee (2019) describes:

The relation between subject and object is expected to be one of exposure — each must render the other wholly knowable and communicable. Minoritarian bodies in the classroom stand in for bodies of knowledge; they become objects made to bear their own difference, impressed upon by others.

Through this understanding, the objects of diversity are constantly policed. Unfortunately rendering diversity in such a reductive manner only anesthetizes us to how social formations and knowledge productions emerge.

Undoing Our Desire for Mastery

In the neoliberal knowledge economy, the need to map quantifiable measures for learning abounds. Akin to the previous discussion of making lives, experiences, and subjectivities commensurable, by exercising mastery of concepts around difference, we unwittingly create an alibi for complacency and a prescriptive adherence that goes

unquestioned. There is an implication that when we have successfully met course imperatives and objectives and have aligned with institutional decrees and standards, we therefore have proven our competence, and have affirmed our rightness and are now accountable. But accountable to whom and for what? What is hoped to be gained as a result of a mastery of difference is somehow to be in a “right,” or perhaps *righteous* relationship with difference.

I heed the theoretical interventions offered in *Unthinking Mastery* (2018) by postcolonial literary scholar Julietta Singh. The thrust of the work engages the enduring politics of mastery as a violent orientation shaping our social lives, whether wittingly or not. Particularly, I take interest in her readings of masterful configurations of disciplinary knowledge and enclosures that also impact the liberatory projects for which we unequivocally advocate. In her reading of several anticolonial and postcolonial works, she writes of the need to delink ourselves from mastery through practices of vulnerability and discomfort to envision new possibilities for relationality. Singh draws on Butler’s theorization of vulnerability and how it potentially mediates our subjectivities to become undone (Butler, 2016; Grosz, 2011)

As a way of being related to what is not me and not fully masterable, vulnerability is a kind of relationship that belongs to that ambiguous region in which receptivity and responsiveness are not clearly separable from one another, and not distinguished as separate moments in a sequence; indeed, where receptivity and responsiveness become the basis for mobilizing vulnerability rather than engaging in its destructive denial (Butler, 2016, p. 25).

Taking up a vulnerable disposition in this way contributes to what Singh refers to *dehumanism*, or “a recuperative practice that casts ourselves as vulnerable to the ways that other beings—“human” and otherwise—have been subjected to dehumanization” (Singh, 2018, p. 119). This practice of dehumanism necessarily disavows a masterful configuration. Pedagogies around difference should consider ambivalence and strategic risk to undo epistemic orientations that reiterate these masterful orientations.

Epistemic Un/learning

Postcolonial theorist and literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has written extensively on the epistemic violence enacted by imperialist knowledge processes and

productions. Specifically, she writes of the constitutive disavowal or a political will to sanction ignorance that systematically upholds hegemonic orientations (Andreotti, 2007; Spivak 1990). This sanctioned ignorance is akin to Mills' epistemology of ignorance (as described in Chapter 3). Spivak's conceptualization of unlearning privilege is best captured in Landry and Maclean (2013):

Unlearning one's privilege by considering it as one's loss constitutes a double recognition. Our privileges, whatever they may be in terms of race, class, nationality, gender, and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge: not simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social positions (p. 4).

From my observations and interactions with students, the double recognition of privilege and loss can certainly be disorienting and disidentifying. However, when facilitated in an intentional way, the process of becoming undone allows students occupying dominant identities to understand the implications and material effects of their identities. Moreover, they begin to question the underlying beliefs and assumptions that become cited as naturalized truth. Losing oneself, as defined above presents some tension between the expectations to assume a coherent and stable representation of what it means to be an effective teacher or even as a white liberal (e.g. as imposed by teacher identity self-studies or rubrics outlining equity-based dispositions).

White students often expressed their disillusionment with not having enough "tools" to navigate conversations about race. As many white teacher candidates would groan (particularly the white liberal women), "I feel helpless!" and "You tell us we shouldn't do certain things. What do we do then?" The doing comes from understanding that there will be things that cannot be known. Holding space for what cannot be made legible and being amenable to ambivalence is one step towards change. The arrogant perception that "I" can somehow overcome difference only reiterates ignorance and harm for the long term.

Sensibilities and Sensitivities: Towards Cosmopoetical Fabulations of Difference and Relationality

In keeping with more capacious renderings of working across difference in the neoliberal and imperial academy, I intend not to give best practices forward. Instead, I leave open the potentiality of otherwise sensibilities and sensitivities and invite us to conjure *cosmopoetical fabulations*. In my own transdisciplinary orientation to education, I have been drawn to scholars including Glissant (errantry), Lorde (institutionalized difference), and Lugones (faithful witnessing and world-travelling) as points of departure towards an intentional relational ontology. While that certainly may be frustrating for those pragmatists wanting to immediately put something into action, I find great potential and vitality in the ambivalence and discomfort of working through the complexities and vicissitudes of our everyday experiences. Specifically, in foregrounding relationality and affects in the classroom together, over the duration of the semester (philosophy of education course) experienced a raw intimacy that invited emergence and deliberative controversy in the ongoing unknowns of engaging the complex ecology of which difference is a part.

Learning about difference is not an ancillary activity. In the grip of neoliberalism's relational patterning of difference (as trenchantly articulated in Lorde's *The Master's Tools*), we must understand how apolitical renderings of difference that do not account for historical particularities and material effects keep us tethered to hegemony and exacerbates the inequalities already present. Notably, difference is necessarily tied to biopolitical and necropolitical projects. As Hong (2015) states, "difference, then, simply means the future, the present, and the past as always simultaneous; it means life and death and all that lies in between" (p. 147). The task then is to think through the evasion of ethical concerns and the disavowal of death dealing that inheres the epistemological realm of neoliberal capitalism effectively bolstering the administrative power of white managerialism. Hong and Ferguson (2011) make clear that difference is not a multiculturalist celebration, not an excuse for presuming a commonality among all racialized peoples, but a cleareyed appraisal of the dividing line between valued and devalued" (p. 11).

I end this treatise to invite cosmopoetical fabulations, perhaps a deepening to what I have discussed around otherwise worlds. In the spirit of my experimental writing and analysis of this dissertation, I have been thinking about the ways to relate to

difference that keep us in Barad's new materialist terms "response-able." I find that the response-ability, or this active sense making to apprehend the complex relational ecology of difference, is a compelling exhortation for collective action. As Barad offers "individualism and aiming to promote practices oriented to a more positive affirmation of life. Flourishing is a vital matter of living well in the entangled, immanent relations of knowing and being, because 'meeting each moment . . . is an ethical call.' (2007, p. 396 as cited in Taylor, 2018, p. 95). Such a call has been obscured in this sociopolitical moment mired by extraction and nihilism. My position carefully heeds both the limits and potentialities of new materialist students echoes that of Shomura (2017):

The sort of new materialist studies that I find most promising neither dogmatically insists on one ontology nor avoids making any ontological claims (both efforts tend to share the same rigid notion of ontology as declaring the truth of being). . .

This type of new materialist studies takes up the difficult labor of navigating multiple ontologies, amplifying minor connections across racial, gender, species, and material lines in order to challenge the powers that be while offering positive visions of other worlds.

This understanding of a new materialist ontology complements well with Stengers' concept of cosmopolitics as well as poetics and aesthetics as resources "to dare to think and live with different bodies side by side and contemporaneously by decolonizing the compartmentalization of differences imposed by structures of domination" (Tai, 2020, p. 22). Isabelle Stengers (2011) conceptualizes cosmopolitics as our continuous becoming that does not fall victim to the pitfalls of rationality, objectivity, and the allure of tolerance. Importantly, it rejects the universal common propounded by Kant and Habermas. This conception takes up a speculative orientation of being and reality that can suspend pluriverse possibilities.

The creation of these other worlds necessitates a new form of fellowship that values entanglement, "of simultaneity of our being in the world together" (Bradiotti, 2013, p. 49). As Donna Haraway (2018) writes, "How can 'we' make kin otherwise? 'Kin' means cultivating response-ability for each other, whether one wants to or not. I have a relative; a relative has me. Let us recognize relatives as fast and well as 'we' can" (p. 104). This is a radical interdependence that marks each of us as implicated subjects, or

“a figure of responsibility beyond the victim/perpetrator binary who is entangled in histories of violence and exploitation that can be distant in either time or space” (Luciano and Chen, as cited in Rothberg, 2017, p. 514). Our implication is about complicity. Our complicity is about recognizing connections. The empty progressive sloganeering of hope and love, as well as the neoliberal insistence to attachments of cruel optimism abdicates our response-ability to unveil structures of oppression and to work towards social change.

POSTSCRIPT

Diversity in Crisis

Headlines and commentary on a *diversity crisis* in teaching and teacher education in the US abound. This crisis concerns the demographic imperative, that is, the “mismatch between the children most likely to attend public schools in the future and the teaching staff likely to be teaching them” (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 174). Increased recruitment of teachers of color is posited as an enduring educational issue, as more white women and white heterofemininity are at the helm of the classroom. Many diversity initiatives and coalitions have been set up to create a pipeline to sustain greater representation of historically marginalized and underrepresented individuals. The vaunted assumption is that if we attempt to align the mismatch between expectation and opportunity, of recruiting more teachers of color, then we can secure the optimistic promises of diversity, and by association, equity and inclusion. However, indulging in a politics of enumeration to address the needs imposed by this supposed crisis, that is, the mere act of enfolding as many diverse bodies and subjectivities as possible into the teaching workforce or promoting discourses and practices that keep diversity in the abstract, provides a parochial and insufficient response.

This reactionary intervention largely precipitated by socioeconomic indicators and an increasingly bureaucratized culture to achieve various ideological aims, does not shed light on *why* there is a persistent struggle to sustain teachers and teacher candidates of color or *how* the fundamental episteme and ethos of diversity in a neoliberal climate creates structural conditions of attrition and oppression.

This dissertation sought to both broach and provide propositions towards a critical genealogy of difference: *What are we acceding to when we speak about the contemporary claims of diversity? What narratives are being promoted or foreclosed? What knowledge is generated because of heeding to this diversity crisis? What are we learning with regard to difference? How do we constitute meaning of “identities-in-difference?”* (Alarcon)

What are the accounting practices for diversity in this neoliberal era? How can diversity be thought of otherwise where the im(possibility) of life for teacher candidates of color can begin?

The crisis narrative of diversity in teacher education invokes a certain future. There is a particular narrative that *should* be told. A crisis gestures to a moment where goals have attenuated and, in this case, that the educational community has deviated from the supposed normalcy of diversity. However, a crisis temporality, as Lauren Berlant and Miranda Joseph contend “does not provide the greatest insight into the ongoing, ordinary endemic processes of exploitation” (Joseph, 2014, p. xv).

It is the recurrent romanticized deployment and depoliticized performance of diversity in the neoliberal teacher education program and larger university I am most interested in and have sought to follow both as a teacher educator and researcher. As feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed raises, “We might want to be cautious about the appealing nature of diversity and ask whether the ease of its incorporation by institutions is a sign of the loss of its critical edge” (Ahmed 2012, p. 1).

Instead of developing coping strategies for minority difference to survive in this violent neoliberal era, we should consider how the normalized ideal of diversity and its association with the good life create what Lauren Berlant describes as a relation of *cruel optimism*. This cruel optimism of diversity creates an attachment to the possibilities where “the very pleasures of being *inside* a relation have become sustaining regardless of the *content* of the relation” constrains the imagination to think differently of how our relational patterning has been shaped (Berlant, 2011).

Certainly, I am not trying to make a case that diversity itself is inherently good or bad, or debasing the work undertaken by individuals and coalitions about the significance of difference generally. I also acknowledge there have been many scholars that have broached the discontents of current deployments of diversity. Rather, my intention is to strengthen the impasse, that brings together my interdisciplinary training, teaching experiences, and life as a queer person of color, to better apprehend the historical, structural, and affective conditions and genealogies; as well as the material effects of these conditions and genealogies of difference on knowledge productions and social relations.

This consideration draws attention to the need to evaluate the content and character of institutionalized diversity discourses and practices within the neoliberal teacher education program especially in a precarious world mired in capitalist processes

of production and consumption where race and racialization invariably play a constitutive role. By deliberately examining the accounting practices of institutionalized diversity that shape knowledge and subjectivities, we begin to chip away at the pristine veneer of diversity to expose its complicity with and reiteration of hierarchal regimes of power.

Praxes for Critique and Possibility: Difference Otherwise

The theoretical and personal insights I have shared about the teaching and learning about difference under the auspices of neoliberal constraints underscore the following: (1) diversity is often depoliticized and decontextualized from structural domains of power, histories, intensities, and vulnerabilities; (2) diversity is intelligible through technical proceduralisms, where teacher candidates quickly consume methods on how to effectively and efficiently “manage” diverse groups of people; (3) an ethic of commensurability and fungibility pervades engagements stripping difference of its creative and transformative potential; and (4) diversity and anti-racist sentiments are deployed in less critical ways to protect the syntax of progress, innocence, multicultural happiness, and hegemonic whiteness.

I would like us to hold diversity in a different light, akin to what scholar Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, refers to as an ethic of incommensurability. Difference does not have to be perceived intelligibly in neat categories. We can make room for what we do not know and confront moments of unease to stave off the tendencies to claim innocence. We should continue to critique and inquire “into how differences have been and continue to be written or inscribed into the cultural imaginary, and how this in turn affects social and educational policy as well as how people think and feel about each other” (West, 2002, p. 5). Understanding diversity in affective and in embodied forms leads us to question the investments in certain dominant knowledge productions that construct certain images of others and ourselves. Diversity is “not a multiculturalist celebration, not an excuse for presuming a commonality among all racialized peoples, but a cleareyed appraisal of the dividing line between valued and devalued” (Ferguson & Hong, 2011, p. 11). It is this critical distinction between the valued and devalued that requires an incredibly urgent response especially in these highly precarious times. In thinking about practices and policies, there must be space for our teachers and teacher candidates of

color to not only discuss the issues that important to them but how these issues imbricate and materialize in everyday contexts.

Diversity and this appeal to the good life of depoliticization only inhibits transformation. I have found that the very willful work of diversity in more capacious ways as often undertaken by people of color can open impasses to think about our complex and ambivalent lives. We can then collectively unlearn and resist the knowledges that reprise systemic violence, anti-Blackness, and whiteness. Recognizing our complicity, that we all are tied to knowledge productions and social formations, can open new possibilities for transformative action and the ability to form new relationships, strange affinities, coalitions, and kinships in teacher education, schools, and beyond.

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