The Otherwise Possibilities of Pleasure:

A Post-Intentional Phenomenological Exploration of Students' Literacy Experiences

A DISSERTATION

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I read the acknowledgements of every book I finish; writing my own now feels like the completion of a dream I've held for a very long time. Fair warning—I didn't hold myself back.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Ida and Theodore.

You are my otherwise possibilities.

Abstract

In this dissertation I take up post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2025) to explore the phenomenon of pleasure, asking*: how might pleasure be provoked and produced for undergraduates in and through their literacy experiences? And what might that pleasure provoke and produce?* Inspired by my time teaching first-year writing at the university, this study takes seriously students' affective responses to reading and writing, with a focus on how pleasure takes shape and why pleasure matters. The study is rooted in an understanding of pleasure that is expansive and critical, personal and political, and deeply informed by the work of adrienne maree brown (2019)'s pleasure activism—"the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy" (p. 13). The literacy focus of this work affords a specific entry point into pleasure and allows the research to join the discourse of those in education who talk and write about the purpose and power of literacy in the current age.

Post-intentional phenomenology, or PIP, draws on phenomenological and poststructural philosophies to seek a layered, entangled way of thinking, writing, and doing (Vagle, 2015, 2025). During analysis, the post-intentional phenomenologist works the three points of the PIP Triangle, considering in equal measure the study's theoretical concepts, phenomenological material (data), and post-reflexions. In this study I gathered phenomenological material through semi-structured conversations with 12 study participants, all former students, along with their pleasure reflections (freewrites) and excerpts from their course writing. Throughout the study I kept a post-reflexive journal

where I captured my analytic, emotional, and embodied responses to the research process in an effort to "see what frames my seeing" (Vagle, 2025). Finally, I engaged with analysis in two layers: first, I thought with *affect* (Ahmed, 2006, 2010, 2014) and *presencing* (Simpson, 2011, 2017) to ask: *how might pleasure be provoked and produced for undergraduates in and through their literacy experiences?* Second, I thought with *neoliberal multiculturalism* (Melamed, 2011), *pleasure activism* (brown, 2019), and *resistance* (Hersey, 2022) to ask: *what might that pleasure provoke and produce?*

Through working the PIP Triangle I learned that pleasure matters because of what it reveals. Pleasure in and of itself is not necessarily the goal; feeling pleasure is our clue that something important is going on. What was happening for my study participants when they felt pleasure being provoked and produced? Deep learning. Authentic connection with others, in community. (Re)claiming their identities. Autonomy and creativity. Feeling present in their bodies. Showing up honest and whole. I also learned that experiences of pleasure can function as personal resistance to neoliberal multicultural systems, including the system of higher education. The dissertation ends with an exploration of the *otherwise possibilities* (Crawley, 2014, 2016) that this critical understanding of pleasure opens up.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Narrative Framing

I.[1]

In the fall of 2022, I found myself unmoored. I was back on campus at the university, no longer a graduate assistant in the College of Education and Human Development, where I was pursuing my PhD and had worked for three years as a graduate assistant, or an English Language Arts leader at the local K–12 school district as I had been the past year, but a full-time Teaching Specialist in the first-year writing program in the College of Liberal Arts. While thrilled to have found a new pedagogical home, I was still reeling from my year working at the school district, still picking up the pieces of the academic and professional path that I'd laid out for myself—my research ideas, my career goals and aspirations. I had planned to research and write about the work I was doing with educators in the school district, but leaving that role meant my dissertation plans had turned to dust. Despite practice, it's still hard to adjust when life doesn't go the way I thought it would.

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[1] I begin my dissertation using narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to construct a brief braided narrative (Miller, 2021) of how I came to my current research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that "if we understand the world narratively, as we do, then it makes sense to study the world narratively" (p. 17). Miller's (2021) braided essay form "invites the reader into [the] gaps" of narrative inquiry, emphasizing "what is unknown rather than the already-articulated known" (p. 42).

Additionally, this braided narrative serves as the beginning of my post-reflexing, which is one of the three points of the PIP Triangle, post-intentional phenomenology's methodological approach (Vagle, 2025). While I include post-reflexions most significantly in the analysis portion of this dissertation, I felt these particular stories pushing and shoving themselves to the beginning. Staying open to the "lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Vagle, 2025) of ideas and stories has resulted in a more fully braided text, where post-reflexing and storytelling weave their way throughout.

For the first few weeks of the fall, as I taught my new course, walked from building to building amongst the shifting colors of the tall trees, and felt my body settle, I attempted to fit some pieces of the broken path together. Maybe I could keep my dissertation idea and still talk with teachers I knew well in the school district—friends from my many years teaching there—even though I didn't work there anymore. Maybe I could keep my phenomenon[2] the same but simply change the context, the phenomenological material—I could talk with teachers outside of the district and focus less on myself and the role I had within the organization. Maybe I could still make something work—even though the spark was gone.

II.

At the same time as I was troubling with what to do with my research, I was teaching. The first assignment for Writing 101[3], the course I taught in the first-year writing program, was a literacy narrative. Writing prompts asked students to consider their earliest memories of writing or reading, the role of writing and language in their families, and positive and negative experiences with writing, among other ideas. Multiple students wrote memories of when they had loved writing—mostly when they were in fourth grade, or fifth. Memories of first stories, unpolished but full of bravado and dragons; illustrated paper scrap tales of adventure with heroes and wonder. As they got older, they wrote, that love of writing slowly—or sometimes quickly—disappeared. This was due to a variety of

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[2] I was—and still am—practicing post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2025), which will be introduced in more depth shortly.

[3] Writing 101 is a pseudonym for the course name.

factors, including a restriction of creativity, a narrowing of audience and purpose, and prescriptive forms that privileged compliance.

I found myself thinking about these students a lot, as they wrote their narratives, as they asked me if they were allowed to use the word "I," as they wondered aloud how I wanted their work formatted, as they checked over and over again for permission in small and big ways. I answered their questions, urging them to look less to me and more to themselves, and I realized that what I really wanted to help them learn was how to be inside their writing, like many of them had experienced when they were young. I thought about all the experiences I've had as a writer—the hardbound book I wrote in and illustrated in fifth grade that felt so special and grown up; the time I came home from middle school exclaiming to my mom how excited I was to write an essay; my first creative writing class in high school; experimenting with and refining the craft of language and analysis in college; using writing to heal through chronic illness and infertility; experiencing how writing as inquiry can break open my understandings of the world as a PhD student. Writing has shaped how I know myself and others. I'm inside of it. As I read student narratives and essays, I wondered what might happen if the students in my classes could (re)claim some of that belonging to their own writing. How might that feel? And what might those feelings do?

III.

At the same time as I was teaching, I was reading. Every morning as I drank my first cup of coffee, every night before I fell asleep. In the car if my husband was driving, on the couch while my kids watched TV. More than ever before, reading became my landing place that year—my steady rock. I chose what to read simply by following my fancy, listening to whatever voice in my head or feeling in my gut let me know whether I needed some romance, or some suspenseful thrill, or a multi-layered family saga. That voice, that feeling, has gotten stronger over the years, and I am much better at listening to it, now that I don't worry whether a book is literary or sophisticated or worthy of my time. It took me many years to get to this place—I am a recovering English major, after all. Now I know that if I want it, it is worthy.

That calendar year I read 60 books—the most I've read since keeping track on my Goodreads app. I didn't strive to read a certain number of books or pages, so what this number tells me is that I was learning to take care of myself, to listen to my needs, to practice boundaries and prioritize rest. Also, that it was a difficult year, and books came to my aid as they always do.

I.

I knew I couldn't continue my research as previously planned. My context was different, I was different. I asked myself a question, and tried to answer it as honestly as possible: what do you want to do? What do you want?

I want to spend time with pleasure*, I answered myself. After a tumultuous year, after some broken dreams, as a global pandemic continued, as news of gun and police violence ricocheted across the country, as my understanding of the neoliberal machines that are K–12 and higher education continued to grow in complexity, as more students than ever before expressed a need for support with mental health struggles, pleasure felt like a balm. And a way of speaking back. I had already read most of the theorists and theories that I think with (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023) in this dissertation, so I knew there were deep waters in which I could swim. There was work to be done with my advisors and committee members in order to better suit this new topic and context, but I had those conversations and did that work.*[4] *I was ready.*

Introduction to the Phenomenon

The narrative above describes, in fragments and pieces, my research trajectory and thought process that led to this dissertation. The through line that stayed consistent throughout my research journey, even as I thought about researching various topics in the context of various communities, was my methodology: post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2025). In post-intentional phenomenology, or PIP, the phenomenon is the unit of analysis. The questions I asked as I taught my first semester of Writing 101 helped me to land on my phenomenon—pleasure—and my dissertation research focus: how pleasure might be provoked and produced for undergraduates in and through their literacy

[4] For multiple reasons, including this change of research focus, I knew I needed a new advisor and to adjust my committee before moving my work forward. I'm grateful for the many conversations with mentors that supported this transition.

experiences. As this dissertation will demonstrate, my understanding of pleasure is expansive and critical, personal and political, deeply informed by the work of adrienne maree brown (2019)'s *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*. As our country continues to reckon with effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with systemic racism and transphobia, with gun violence, with book bans and whitewashed curriculum, with daily slides further into authoritarianism, I wondered about the ways in which pleasure might both disrupt and heal. When deciding on my study's phenomenon and context for research, it was important to me that the orientation (Ahmed, 2006) be desire-based, not damage-centered (Tuck, 2009, 2010); pleasure is a direction I wanted to move toward, not away from. Additionally, the literacy focus of this work affords a specific entry point into pleasure and allows me—and the research—to join the discourse of those in higher education and K–12 education who talk and write about the purpose and power of literacy in the current age.

In phenomenology, phenomena are "the ways in which we find ourselves being in relation to the world through our day-to-day living" (Vagle, 2025, p. 28). As I practiced post-intentional phenomenology, I became interested in the ways in which a phenomenon—in this case, pleasure—takes shape through the provocations and productions of specific contexts and situations. In focusing on the *through-ness* of pleasure (Vagle, 2025), I was interested in exploring how pleasure *becomes* rather than is, how pleasure circulates through intentional relations that include bodies, lived experiences, objects and artifacts, and social systems. My readings around pleasure brought me to multiple theories that take up this becoming, which I think with (Jackson

& Mazzei, 2023) in this dissertation study in conversation with phenomenological material and my post-reflexions.[5] Throughout, I explore what Ashon Crawley (2014, 2016) calls the "otherwise possibilities" of pleasure—otherwise as "the enunciation and concept of irreducible possibility, irreducible capacity, to create change, to be something else, to explore, to imagine, to live fully, freely, vibrantly" (Crawley, 2014, para. 11). Articulating these otherwise possibilities became my ultimate goal.

The rest of this chapter serves as an introduction to the dissertation study, including the purpose of the study, research questions, and context of the phenomenon. Next, I share my positionality as the researcher, followed by a brief discussion the study's theoretical framework, which is inseparable from the methodology and the theories I think with (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023) during analysis. Finally, I provide a roadmap for how the dissertation is organized.

Purpose of the Study

I had multiple layers of goals when I began this dissertation. First, as the researcher and phenomenologist, I hoped to learn something, to draw new insights and connections, and to feel pleasure as much as I could throughout the process. Second, I hoped that the students who participated in my study might learn something about themselves that they didn't know before. I think they did. While I won't go so far as to

[5] In PIP, phenomenological material is the phrase used to refer to data collected through the research process. Post-reflexions are reflexive journal entries that help the researcher to think poststructurally and to "see what frames their seeing" (Vagle, 2025, p. 167). Theoretical concepts, phenomenological material, and post-reflexions make up the three points of the PIP Triangle, post-intentional phenomenology's methodological approach (Vagle, 2025). I describe PIP and the PIP Triangle in much more detail in Chapter 3.

say that this research has direct benefit for those students—I think qualitative research too often exaggerates the benefits of research for participants—I do think that through our conversations they too were able to draw new insights and connections, and experience pleasure as well.

As Chapter 2 will detail, there is currently little research that explores pleasure at the intersection of literacy and higher education in the explicit context of neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2011). This dissertation adds significantly to that research. Because this is a phenomenological study, my goal has not been to draw conclusions or make causal claims; that said, what I learned through the research process and write about in these pages will ideally join and contribute to conversations in higher education and K–12 education about the role of pleasure in teaching and learning.

Finally, as both Herman (2010) and Wellington (2010) describe in their explorations of doctoral students and dissertations, the process of this research and writing has continued to refine me as a researcher, with a focus on process over product. brown (2019) teaches that pleasure activism is "the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves" (p. 13)—ultimately, I see this project as a work of pleasure activism.

Research Questions

The main research question guiding my inquiry is: *How might pleasure be provoked and produced for undergraduates in and through their literacy experiences? And what might that pleasure provoke and produce?*

As I will describe in more depth in Chapter 3: Methodology, I developed the first part of this research question—exploring how pleasure might be provoked and produced—ahead of engaging in the research process and gathering phenomenological material, or data. The second part—asking what that pleasure itself might provoke and produce—I developed during analysis in response to thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023) and working the PIP Triangle (Vagle, 2025).

Following Jackson and Mazzei's (2023) method of writing secondary becoming-questions at the same time as thinking with theory, I did not write concrete sub-questions ahead of my study but instead drafted some possibilities that guided my semi-structured conversations with study participants. I then developed theory-specific becoming-questions during the analysis and writing process, as an iterative and in the moment act of thinking/doing. Chapter 3 will provide more context for both sets of questions, but the final becoming-questions I share here:

- *How do affect's "sticky objects" circulate to produce pleasure?*
- *How does presencing make visible the embodied act of writing?*
- *What does pleasure do?*

Context of the Phenomenon

My research took place with and within the Writing 101 community of learners. Specifically, I interviewed former Writing 101 students who I taught in academic year 22-23. Writing 101 is a required course for most first-year students at the university and has a well-established curriculum that includes eight guiding frameworks: 1) equity and access-focused learning; 2) writing-centered and process-focused; 3) scaffolded

curriculum design and low-stakes practice; 4) metacognition and reflective practice; 5) rhetorical awareness; 6) multimodality; 7) information literacy; and 8) first-year focused (First-Year Writing Program, n.d.). Students in Writing 101 represent all the colleges and academic disciplines at the university and bring their diverse identities, languages, home countries, and lived experiences to their writing and to the classroom.

Writing 101 exists, of course, within the larger structures and systems of the university, which participates in and advances the colonial neoliberal project of higher education (Zembylas, 2018). While I have been lucky to experience, at times, what Harney and Moten (2013) call *study*—a kind of transformative learning that takes place in the undercommons of the university—I refuse to be blind to the fact that higher education is often dehumanizing, especially to those whose intersectional identities are traditionally pushed to the margins. For me there is no exploring the phenomenon of pleasure as I am interested in it outside of the container of neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2011) and racial capitalism (Melamed, 2011; Robinson, 2000)—in fact, that's why I think a focus on pleasure is so important. I am not interested in pleasure in a vacuum, disembodied or only theoretical. I am interested in pleasure in the world. This world.

Researcher Positionality

In post-intentional phenomenological research, the researcher's positionality is understood as constantly in flux, ever-changing and contextual (Vagle, 2025). As I unpack in more detail in Chapter 3, post-reflexing is the PIP approach to "seeing what frames our seeing," or considering how our identities, experiences, and perspectives

shape how we understand and interact with the world, including how we conduct and interpret research. Vagle (2025) explains that reflexivity in qualitative research, including phenomenology, "involves a consistent questioning and critique of one's positionality in relation to the phenomenon under investigation–and an equally consistent examination of how context is shaping the phenomenon" (p. 86). In PIP this is done through frequent post-reflexing throughout the research and writing process.[6]

Despite the always-in-flux nature of positionality, I think it's helpful to name some aspects of my own identity and experiences that inform this research in this context. First, my experiences as a graduate student engaging with various forms of research has led me to my current approach. When I entered my PhD program, I knew the basic differences between quantitative and qualitative research. I had not yet heard about positivism and post-positivism, or what might exist when you orient yourself outside of either of those paradigms. The introduction to research courses I took my first year reinforced what I already knew in my gut—that I was going to be a qualitative researcher. Dr. Vagle's brief introduction to phenomenology in that course only confirmed my interest in the methodology.

While I waited for the full course in phenomenology to be offered, I took Critical Ethnography, which gave me opportunity to practice many of the methods of qualitative research such as observations, field notes, and analytic and reflexive memos, and to write my first full research paper. I was also able to think and talk through many of my

[6] In Chapter 3: PIP Triangle Point 3 I share this study's initial post-reflexion as well as the post-reflexing plan I followed.

questions and ethical wonderings around research in community with classmates, and reach some conclusions about what I am and am not okay participating in. By the time I took Interpretive Research, where phenomenology and its forms were studied, I knew that a methodology focusing on phenomena was right for the types of questions I ponder. I was able to spend my time in the course exploring the nuances of the various interpretations of phenomenology as well as the phenomenon I was interested in at the time. That phenomenon has changed, but the thinking and writing I did throughout that course was essential to my development as a researcher.

My final research methods course was Feminist Knowledge Production, taught in the university's gender, women, and sexuality studies department. I learned so much by being in community with students across various university colleges and departments, and my engagement with concepts and praxes such as *co-dreaming*, *situated solidarity*, and *hungry translation* (Nagar, 2014, 2019) reinforced many of my ethical boundaries around theory and method and my stances as a researcher. Ultimately, all three of my methods courses contributed to how I take up and engage with pleasure as a phenomenon, how I teach and learn with students, and how I engage with research as a process throughout my dissertation.

In addition to my perspectives as a researcher, I have been an educator for fifteen years. While I only spent eight of these in the middle school classroom, my experience with young learners absolutely shapes and contributes to this work. Middle schoolers do not take any pains to conceal when learning is boring and irrelevant, and the 6th graders I taught especially were still child-like enough to let the moments when they were deeply

engaged in the pleasure of learning shine. My early experiences witnessing learners find pleasure in their reading or writing stayed with me and contribute to my interest in pleasure as a phenomenon still. Moving to the university, I was an active instructor for Writing 101 at the time of writing this study's proposal and initial chapters and gathering phenomenological material. Because of this, I am *in* the questions I ask, and I am in community with the study participants, as they are all students with whom I have authentic, prior-developed relationships. My experience as an educator brings an important perspective to this research, as I am not asking questions about something I have not participated in, but instead something I am very much mixed up in, for better or worse.

Additionally, I bring my own lived experiences as life-long reader and writer to this work. I have felt in my body the affective thrills and despairs I imagine many students have when writing and creating. Just last night I stayed up hours later than I should have to finish a book that would not let me go. I am grateful that I've experienced so many moments of embodied flow when writing words that feel important and true. This solidarity, this ability to *feel with* what I am asking study participants to share with me, hopefully narrows the gap between researcher and study participant, and also provides me essential post-reflexive insights into how the phenomenon takes shape.

Finally, I am a pleasure-seeker, working, in the words of adrienne maree brown (2019), to "understand and learn from the politics and power dynamics inside of everything that makes us feel good" (p. 13). brown teaches that pleasure activism is the effort to reclaim our whole selves from the impacts of oppression. My experiences of

oppression are intersectionally entangled (Crenshaw, 1991) with my many, many experiences of privilege as a white, cis-gender woman, but I swim in these waters. White supremacy—in our culture, in families, in communities, in workplaces—impacts everyone. I am a recovering perfectionist, pushing back daily against the voice that tells me that control and excellence are the utmost goals, and that shame is a tool to get yourself there. I work intentionally to resist urgency, individualism, binary thinking, and the other characteristics of white supremacy culture (Okun, 2025). No. I want more pleasure than pain in my life. I want gentleness for my children. I want abundance for my neighbors and my community. And so I'm feeling the phenomenon, too.

Theorizing Pleasure

As I will detail in Chapter 3, post-intentional phenomenology incorporates Jackson and Mazzei's (2023) *thinking with theory*, an approach to qualitative research that operationalizes Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of "plugging in." When thinking with theory in PIP, the researcher "plugs" a theoretical concept into the study's phenomenological material and sees what that plugging in opens up.

This approach to theory is different from most other qualitative methodologies, which often include a theoretical framework that informs how the researcher approaches and analyzes data. In *Crafting Phenomenological Research*, Vagle (2025) explains that theory, historically, has held a more tenuous place in phenomenology. Husserl, one of the founders of phenomenology, "envisioned a foundation for all of the social sciences that resisted theory testing, theoretical explanations, and theoretical predictions" (Vagle, 2025, p. 94). This is in large part because the purpose of phenomenology is not to test

theory or predict outcomes, but to "open up and learn more about what it is to live in the world" (Vagle, 2025, p. 94). Heideggerian-oriented phenomenology understands that much like it is impossible to avoid our own positionalities, it is impossible to avoid bringing our theoretical assumptions to the work of qualitative research (Vagle, 2025, p. 94).[7] Vagle's PIP approach to phenomenology takes up thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023) explicitly and holds theories on equal footing with phenomenological material and post-reflexions. What carries over from Husserl's approach is the idea that all concepts, even theory, can and should be examined and questioned in the process of learning more about a phenomenon. Additionally, the "lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Vagle, 2025) that we strive to follow in PIP "always aim to flee the tight boundaries of any theoretical framework and method" (Vagle, 2025, p. 151), meaning the phenomenologist must remain open to following where those lines of flight lead.

While the methodology of this study resists a single theoretical framework, the theories I think with in and through analysis share certain political commitments that are important to name. In a two-layered analytic approach, I think with Sara Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) *affect*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2011, 2017) *presencing*, Jodi Melamed's (2011) *neoliberal multiculturalism*, adrienne maree brown's (2019) *pleasure activism*, and Tricia Hersey's (2022) *resistance*. Each of these theoretical concepts is political by design and orients itself as either a description or a disruption of neoliberal racial capitalism—or both. All of the theorists identify as women, and all but one are

[7] Chapter 3 provides a more detailed history of phenomenology, including Husserl's and Heidegger's contributions.

Black, Indigenous, or people of color. This was an intentional choice on my part. In her blog post titled "Making Feminist Points," Ahmed (2013) discusses the politics of citation and names the importance of intentional citational practices. Citing is not a neutral endeavor, and traditional citational practices tend to be "a rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies" (para. 3). Most of the time these bodies are male and white. Ahmed explains that even when self-proclaimed feminists cite each other in our work, there is "still a tendency to frame our own work in relation to a male intellectual tradition. And there is certainly an expectation that you will recognise your place through giving your allegiance or love to this or that male theorist" (para. 7). While male theorists and researchers are certainly not absent from this project (phenomenology in all of its iterations has been primarily shaped by men), my goal when choosing theorists and theories to think with in my analysis was to center women and people of color's knowledge, perspectives, and understandings, as they more fully speak to the intersections of pleasure, feminism, neoliberalism, race, capitalism, and liberation. Feminism broadly, and the work of feminist scholars of color specifically, is the ethico-onto-epistemological[8] (Barad, 2007) orientation I begin from when engaging with pleasure in this dissertation.

In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, Simpson (2017) writes openly about how she engages with theories from contexts other than her own by asking a series of questions, including:

[8] Ethico-onto-epistemology emphasizes the interrelatedness of "ethics, knowing, and being" (Barad, 2007, p. 185). This term captures the way I strive to approach the world and my actions within it.

> Where does this theory come from? What is the context? How was it generated? Who generated it? What was their relationship to community and the dominant power structures? What is my relationship to the theorist or their community or the context the theory was generated within? How is it useful within the context of my own people? Do we have a similar concept or theory? Can I use it in an ethical and appropriate way (my ethics and theirs) given the colonial context within which scholarship and publishing take place? What are the implications of citation, and do I have consent to take this intellectual thought and labor from a community I am not a part of? Does this engagement replicate anti-Blackness? Colonialism? Hetereopatriarchy? Transphobia? (Simpson, 2017, p. 63)

What I appreciate about this approach is that it makes transparent the fact that citational practices are a choice, that theories are born of the lived experience of real people with specific identities and cultures, and that the theories of others are not something scholars should take up without careful thought, especially if communities and contexts aren't shared. Simpson asks hard questions, some of which I am able to answer in the context of this dissertation and the theories I think with, and some of which I am not—not fully. I have not asked for explicit consent from these scholars. What I have done is read their published work carefully and generously, with a posture of learning and gratitude. I am so thankful for what they have taught me. Simpson goes on to say that "for me, engagement with the theories and practices of co-resistors is powerful because it often illuminates colonial thinking in myself, and it demonstrates different possibilities in analysis and action in response to similar systems of oppression and dispossession" (p.

66). There is no way that I would have been able to articulate the otherwise possibilities (Crawley, 2014, 2016) of pleasure in these pages without these co-thinkers and co-resistors.

Finally, it is important to name that I understand theory not as stagnant concepts but rather potential thought, full of movement and motion. A theory's power lies not in the fact that it has already been articulated by someone, somewhere, but rather in its ability to provoke and product new knowledge within new contexts. As I will explore in later analysis, the orientation (Ahmed, 2006) of our thinking and writing matters. bell hooks (1991) reminds us that "theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end" (p. 2). It is through these lenses that I theorize pleasure.

The Dissertation: Form and Format

Deciding how to organize this dissertation took significant thought. I wanted to honor the elements of more traditional qualitative research, in large part because this community of researchers is my intended audience for this work. I also wanted to follow the flow of the PIP Triangle (Vagle, 2025) and the ways it encourages me as researcher and writer to move energetically between and among theoretical concepts, phenomenological material, and post-reflexions. Patti Lather (2007), whose writing has served as a mentor to me, works to "fold and layer concepts in ways that are multiple, simultaneous, and in flux rather than presenting them as linear and discrete" (p. 4). This fits the spirit of post-intentional phenomenology to me, and I have attempted to do the same. That said, I am also a fairly linear thinker, and I hope that part of me has helped

inform an organization that is natural for the reader to follow and stay present with throughout.

Within the main text I have strived to demarcate two particular forms of writing: the study's phenomenological material and my own post-reflexions. I decided that shorter excerpts from both of these forms would be formatted as all relatively brief quotations are, either within the frame of a sentence or set out as a block quote. Longer excerpts of phenomenological material, shared either in conversation form or creatively in a concrete research poem (Leavy, 2020) or "hermit-crab" timeline (Adrian, 2018), have been written in a different font, Helvetica. All of my post-reflexions, including those shared in block quotes, are indented and *italicized* in Times New Roman (the main text font). The dissertation began with a narrative framing in this post-reflexive format. While footnotes are not a formal element of the American Psychological Association (APA) style manual, which guides education research and writing, I use them sparingly throughout when sharing a tangential thought that I don't want to have interrupt the narrative or analytic flow.

The chapters that follow this introduction include Chapter 2: A (Partial) Literature Review, Chapter 3: Methodology, and Chapters 4-6, where I follow the PIP Triangle (Vagle, 2025) to share phenomenological material, theoretical concepts, and post-reflexions in a layered analysis. I close with Chapter 7, a non-conclusive conclusion, where I explore what I learned through this process, the implications for this research, and the otherwise possibilities (Crawley, 2014, 2016) that it has opened up.

Chapter 2: A (Partial) Review of the Literature

Post-intentional phenomenology (PIP) invites researchers to engage in a partial review of the literature prior to embarking on the research study (Vagle, 2025). There are benefits, of course, to fully exploring and understanding the literature, including the feminist praxis of naming and honoring what has come before (Ahmed, 2017; brown, 2019). Yet phenomenologists also need to be wary of drawing conclusions about the phenomena itself. As a way of striking a sort of balance, Vagle (2025) recommends that contemporary PIP methodologists "get clear" (p. 92) about the phenomenon of interest through a partial review of the literature, while remaining as open as possible to the phenomenon throughout the course of the study. For this literature review, I aim to understand more about the phenomenon of pleasure and how it has already been studied and discussed within the fields of literacy and higher education.

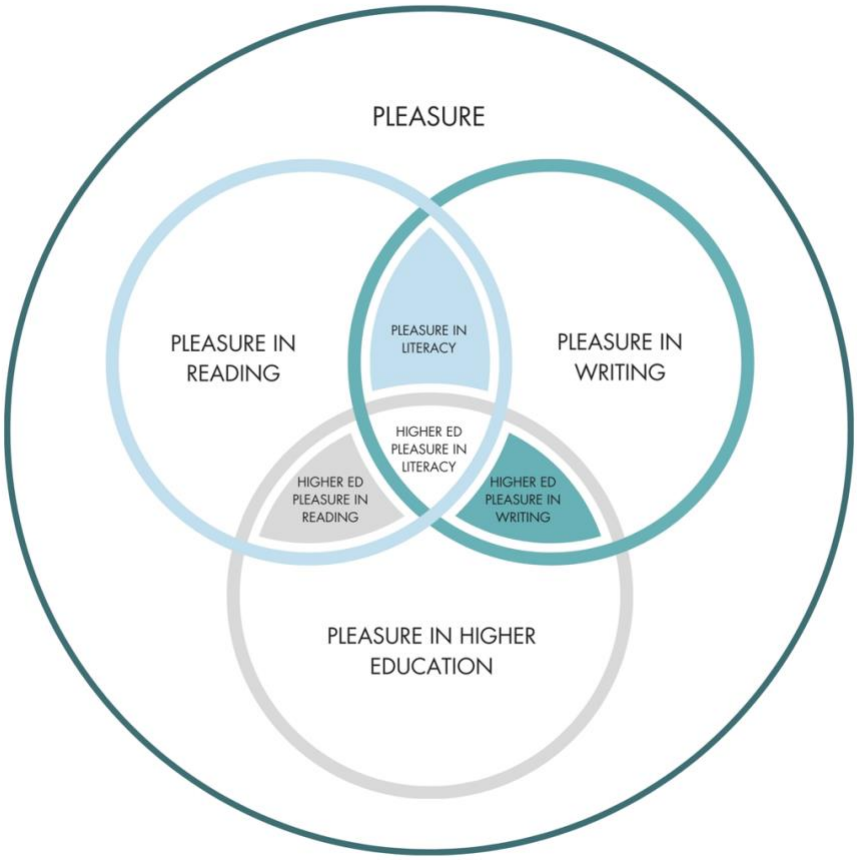
My own personality and process as a researcher has led to a review of the literature that is likely more than partial. As I researched, read, and started to find and establish patterns of synthesis, I found myself wanting to know more. I will admit, I also carry perfectionist tendencies and the desire to complete a task to its fullest. Despite potentially going more in-depth than was called for here, the word "partial" did serve as the quiet whisper that encouraged me to slow down, consider when I had read enough, and eventually stop. All researchers know that a literature review is never truly complete, and yet at the end of this process I feel that I have a strong understanding of how pleasure is conceptualized and written about in the literature.

To compile sources for this literature review I used the university library system search functionality to locate peer-reviewed journal articles, relevant chapters, and books. I also searched specific databases such as Education Source, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Web of Science. I used the following keywords/phrase in various combinations to locate applicable studies: pleasure, literacy, reading, writing, college students, and higher education. I selected my sources based on relevance and time of publication, excluding anything published before 2000. In a few cases, I leveraged reference lists to locate related articles. Next, I reviewed the articles and took summary and analysis notes, tagging draft keywords as I went along. I then took a holistic look at the literature, decided my areas of synthesis, and created formal keyword tags. These tags, recorded in Zotero, afforded me the ability to sort the literature in multiple ways and to see which articles connect with each concept, many of them with overlap.

The Venn diagram below, Figure 1, is a visual representation of the multiple areas of study I explored through my research, as well as how they overlap and connect. While higher education pleasure in literacy—the center of the diagram—is most closely related to my specific study's focus, each circle provides vital insight. Surrounding all these areas of study is pleasure, as it is the central phenomenon of this work.

Figure 1

Venn Diagram of Literature Review



Based on my reading and synthesis, this literature review includes an exploration of pleasure through two related but distinct lenses:

1. How pleasure is being discussed in literature connected to literacy generally and reading and writing specifically, as these are the text-based literacies I focus on in this study.
2. How pleasure is being discussed in literature related to higher education, including literacy practices and experiences in higher education.

I conclude with a discussion of how my dissertation study is situated in the literature.

Pleasure in Literacy

My exploration of pleasure in literacies is organized in three sub-sections. First, I situate reading and writing for pleasure in a larger context of the reading and writing habits of learners in the United States. Next, I explore how pleasure is positioned in the literature—as a means to an end, an end in itself, or a combination of both. Finally, I explore how pleasure is defined in the literature.

Context of Reading and Writing for Pleasure

A handful of the literature I reviewed focused on understanding and describing the rate of reading and writing for pleasure among adolescents. While quantitative analysis of who does and doesn't read and write for pleasure is not the focus of this study, it is helpful to have a contextual understanding of patterns, shifts in patterns, and their potential causes and implications over time. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) (2007) report *To Read or Not to Read* focused on reading for pleasure and noted that cognitive psychologists and educational theorists have frequently sought to understand and describe the relationship between reading for pleasure and educational performance. Some of the key take-aways from the report include: 1) Americans are reading less, 2) Americans are reading less well, and 3) declines in reading have civic, social, and economic implications. Additional themes identified from the research note that adolescents read for pleasure less than younger age groups, that there are greater declines in reading test scores among 17-year-olds and high school seniors compared to younger age groups, and that there is a gender-based gap in reading proclivity and achievement

levels (NEA, 2007, p. 21). The NEA report also noted the correlation between reading and writing well, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test (p. 71). As referenced in the third key take-away listed above, *To Read or Not to Read* identified multiple professional and social advantages associated with reading for pleasure, including access to more financially rewarding jobs and increased participation in cultural and civic life. In a meta-analysis of the NEA report along with other related studies, Howard (2011) concluded that the research clearly demonstrates the multi-faceted impacts of reading for pleasure, including that students become better at what they practice; those who read more have better vocabularies, reading comprehension, verbal fluency, and general knowledge as compared to non-readers (p. 47). However, students are reading—and reading for pleasure—less and less.

A significant focus of the NEA (2007) report was the decline in pleasure reading among young adults, including college students, compared both to younger students and to students of the same age in previous decades. Table 1 (NEA, 2007, p. 8) shows that 17-year-olds read less than 13- and 7-year-olds, and that the percentage of 17-year-olds who read for fun has decreased almost 10 percent over 20 years.

Table 1

Percentage of Students Who Read Almost Every Day for Fun

Percentage Who Read Almost Every Day for Fun

	1984	1999	2004
9-year-olds	53%	54%	54%
13-year-olds	35%	28%	30%
17-year-olds	31%	25%	22%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

Note: From *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (p. 8), by National Endowment for the Arts, 2007, National Endowment for the Arts. In the public domain.

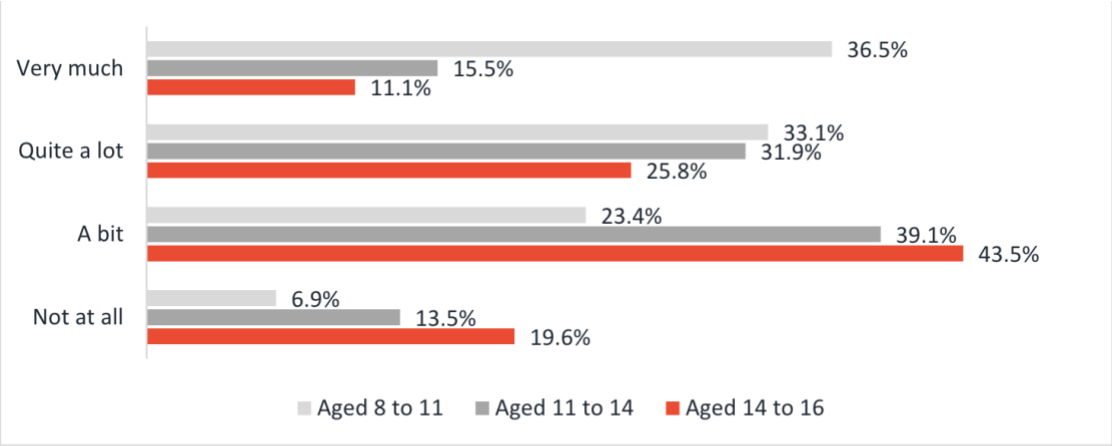
The report found that college attendance does not guarantee active reading habits. At the time of the study, 65% of college freshmen read for pleasure less than an hour per day or not at all, and the percentage of non-readers had almost doubled from 20 years prior. By the time they became seniors, one in three college students did not read for pleasure at all. Some of the potential causes for decreased pleasure reading discussed in the report include increased compulsory reading, increased responsibilities and activities, and use of other media. As *To Read or Not to Read* was published before the rise of smart phones and social media—TV watching and music listening are named as the two top media activities—I can imagine that media has an even more significant impact on reading habits eighteen years later. What the report does not include, of course, are the voices and perspectives of these readers themselves, and its focus on reading alone as opposed to a holistic approach to literacy narrows its impact.

While there is no writing companion to the NEA's exploration of reading for pleasure, research indicates that writing for pleasure has faced similar declines as reading for pleasure over the past few decades. Surveys conducted by the National Literacy Trust (Clark & Teravainen, 2017) make it clear that "for many years there has been a decline or stagnation in children's enjoyment, volition, and motivation to write both in and out of school, with around half showing indifference to or an active dislike of writing" (Young & Ferguson, 2020, p. 20). Importantly, just as *To Read or Not to Read* (NEA, 2007)

showed a discrepancy between rates of pleasure reading in youth and adolescents, this discrepancy exists in writing enjoyment as well. See Figure 2 (Clark & Teravainen, 2017, p. 5).

Figure 2

Levels of Writing Enjoyment by Age Group in 2016



[5] 9,041 pupils were in Key Stage 2 (aged 8 to 11; 22.9%), 23,266 pupils were in Key Stage 3 (aged 11 to 14; 59.0%), 6,126 pupils were in Key Stage 4 (aged 14 to 16; 15.5%) and 978 pupils were in Key Stage 5 (aged 16 to 18; 2.5%). Pupils aged 16 to 18 were excluded from this analysis due to low numbers.

Note: From *Writing for Enjoyment and its Link to Wider Writing* (p. 5), by C. Clark and A. Teravainen, 2017, National Literacy Trust. Copyright 2017 by National Literacy Trust.

Another key finding is naming the motivations to write, disaggregated by students who say they enjoy writing and those who say they do not. See Figure 3 (Clark & Teravainen, 2017, p. 13).

Figure 3

Percentage Agreement with Motivational Statements by Whether Children Enjoy Writing

Note: From *Writing for Enjoyment and its Link to Wider Writing* (p. 13), by C. Clark and A. Teravainen, 2017, National Literacy Trust. Copyright 2017 by National Literacy Trust.

As this data shows, students who enjoy writing are more motivated by intrinsic motivation and the extrinsic motivation to write for achievement, including ongoing

writing achievement. Students who do not enjoy writing are more extrinsically motivated by approval, including writing when they have to and because they are supposed to. These students also relate more to self-efficacy statements indicating writing is difficult and a struggle. Many of these motivational statements, whether positive or negative, appeared in my conversations with study participants as they described their feelings about and relationship with writing.

In their exploration of perceptions of writing in their classroom, Graham and Johnson (2012) found that, "while 75% of the children demonstrated a positive attitude towards their reading experiences, only 10% of the same children described positive or happy associations in their writing memories" (p. 110). The majority of children in this study associated the writing experience with incompetence or anxiety, and even those perceived by their teachers to be capable writers did not experience writing as emotionally rewarding or pleasurable. In *Writing for Pleasure: Research, Theory, and Practice,* Young and Ferguson (2020) connected declines in writing achievement to concurrent declines in writing for pleasure, concluding that "children are likely underachieving as a result of their dislike of writing" (p. 21). These claims are supported by the National Literacy Trust report (Clark & Teravainen, 2017). According to data collected from 39,411 students age 8 to 18, "eight times as many children and young people who do not enjoy writing write below the expected level compared with those who enjoy writing" (p. 14). Young and Ferguson (2020) make explicit connections between students' enjoyment in writing and their academic success, naming motivation

and volition as two of the most important pointers to high attainment in writing, with the single best motivator being agency.

What is made clear from these studies is that both reading and writing for pleasure have declined over many decades. What this research alone does not offer is a complex understanding of why, why pleasure matters, or what reading and writing for pleasure even mean. To explore those questions, I now examine the literature through multiple lenses.

Positioning Pleasure

As I read and analyzed the literature related to pleasure literacies, I realized a distinct difference in the ways that various studies positioned pleasure and their reasons for exploring it. Some of the research seemed interested in pleasure solely because of its positive contributory effect on traditional academic achievement. Many other studies explored pleasure as an end in itself—not worthy as a means to achievement, but worthy as an experience and feeling on its own. Finally, some studies took up both positions, valuing pleasure while also acknowledging and exploring its academic impacts. Thinking about how the literature positions pleasure is an important point of analysis and synthesis, as these positions reveal how and why pleasure is studied across various sectors of education.

Discourses around students' experiences of pleasure in and through literacy have often centered on pleasure as a means to success, better grades, the development of certain skills, or other achievements within the neoliberal education system (e.g., Beglar et al., 2012; Chireac et al., 2022; Sullivan & Brown, 2015). Beglar et al.'s (2012) quasi-

experimental study examining the impact of pleasure reading on reading rates (speed) and reading comprehension is one such example. The findings of this quantitative analysis showed that students who engaged in pleasure reading along with teacher-assigned reading made greater academic gains, and the two pleasure reading groups who read the most showed the greatest gains in both reading rate and comprehension. In this study reading for pleasure is positioned only as a strategy to increase fluency and comprehension, not because it has inherent value. Another example is Sullivan and Brown's (2015) study that explored Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction, asking whether social background—measured by two "indicators of 'cultural capital'" (p. 971), reading for pleasure and playing a musical instrument—impacted achievement in vocabulary and mathematics at age 16. Results of the longitudinal statistical study suggested that childhood reading is linked to substantial cognitive process between the ages of 10 and 16, whereas playing an instrument is not. Reading most strongly impacts vocabulary knowledge, with a weaker but still significant impact on mathematical skill (p. 986). Importantly, phrases such as "reading for pleasure" and "childhood reading" are used synonymously throughout the study, which overall seems less concerned about the children's felt experience of reading and more about how much they read and how that contributes to measurable academic success.

Much of the literature that explored pleasure literacies positioned both pleasure and success as equal, if not interrelated, goals, or at minimum made effort to discuss the connections between pleasure and academic achievement (e.g., Boyask et al.; Cremin, 2014; Dewan, 2016; Garces-Bascal et al., 2018; Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018; Howard,

2011; Quigley, 2020; Strommen & Mates, 2004, Wilhelm, 2015; Young & Ferguson, 2020). In *Closing the Reading Gap,* for example, Quigley (2020) emphasized that the relationship between pleasure and achievement is reciprocal; pleasure reading may increase achievement, but skill and confidence also increase pleasure. Quigley argued that it is difficult to enjoy something you can't do well:

> In simple terms, able readers read more independently. The reading rich get richer, the reading poor get poorer. This is unsurprising: when you can do something well, it usually is more enjoyable. Given that children's reading ability determines how much they read, as teachers, if we can improve the teaching of reading, then we are likely to increase our pupils' reading ability and how much they read for pleasure. (p. 4)

This rings true from my own experiences as a reader and a teacher. I know that my pleasure in reading—which has led me to read thousands of books over the course of my life so far—has contributed to many of my literary skills. Also, the fact that I have those skills and feel that I am a competent reader allows the effort of reading to fall away and the pleasure of the experience to be more felt. In the classroom, I taught many students who shied away from reading not because they weren't interested in a character or a plot, but because reading the text required skills they had not yet developed. Quigley's work is important when acknowledging that pleasure and achievement are not necessarily two poles on a binary line, but more likely connected in layered and complex ways.

In "Economic Well-being and Social Justice Through Pleasure Reading," Dewan (2016) has also drawn connections between leisure reading and overall literacy abilities,

extending the argument to consider how literacy skills are central to prosperous and equitable societies. Paralleling Quigley (2020), Dewan argued that "becoming literate is a by-product of reading. People who read frequently become more literate than those who do not" (p. 558). Dewan drew on Malcolm Gladwell's claim that pleasure is the secret ingredient that motivates people to spend the necessary amount of hours to develop deep proficiency of a skill to assert that when we read for enjoyment, we painlessly develop the skills necessary to become literate. In a cyclical fashion, "reading then becomes effortless and rewarding. Consequently, we turn to it as a favourite activity, which in turn further enhances our literacy skills" (Dewan, 2016, p. 558). Far from the frivolous or escapist activity that it has been depicted as, Dewan believes that "reading for pleasure is fundamental to the development of proficiency in literacy" (p. 558). This proficiency has significant implications on society. According to Dewan:

> We have seen that creating a more literate population has a direct impact on poverty reduction, standard of living, labour productivity, unemployment reduction, political participation, social and cultural engagement and social justice. Indeed, the well-being of society depends upon the literacy of its citizens. By helping people become more literate, we reduce barriers to a full functioning society. Literacy, as studies have shown, is the lynchpin and cornerstone of a thriving society. (p. 564)

Dewan and Quigley's studies are examples of literature that draws important connections between pleasure, literacy achievement, and our larger society.

Finally, much of the literature clearly values pleasure as an end in itself, with that pleasure being the main focus of the study (e.g., Blackburn, 2021; Burnett & Merchant, 2018; Curtin, 2022; Ehret et al., 2023; Kucirkova et al., 2017; Loh et al., 2022; McNight, 2018; Oxley & McGeown, 2023; Parry & Taylor, 2018; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016a, 2016b; Zare et al., 2023). In "Pedagogy and Pleasure: Trans and Gender Transgressive Students in an LGBTQ-Themed Literature Class," Blackburn (2021) drew on her experiences teaching an opt-in LGBTQ literature-themed high school class that intentionally prioritized pleasure. Blackburn wanted students to not only feel safe and seen in the classroom community, but to experience pleasure in their work with each other, as pleasure is one of the integral notions of queer theory. Engaging in a combination of ethnography and teacher-research, Blackburn developed curriculum and taught the three-term course, collecting data throughout the academic year. The class's collective exploration of pleasure led Blackburn to conclude that trans and gender transgressive students need queer-friendly schools and need to see themselves in curricula, "but they also need to engage in that which gives them pleasure. They need to be recognised for who they are and who they might become, with an acknowledgement of the gifts they are capable of bringing with them" (p. 789). Wilhelm and Smith (2016b)'s "The Power of Pleasure Reading: What We Can Learn from the Secret Lives of Teens" takes seriously the pleasure adolescent readers experienced as they read oft-marginalized genres: romances, vampire stories, horror novels, dystopian fiction, and fantasy. What the authors found by simply listening to passionate teen readers of texts "their parents and teachers tended to disapprove of" (p. 27) was that the teens were

describing four distinct kinds of pleasure. Wilhelm and Smith coded these pleasures according to Dewey (1913): 1) the pleasure of play, 2) intellectual pleasure, 3) social pleasure, and 4) the pleasure of work, both functional and psychological inner work (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016b, p. 25). According to the authors, the data strongly suggests that pleasure has enormous power in fostering reading engagement and development, yet it is not foregrounded in schools. Prioritizing pleasure would:

> require us to encourage students to playfully enter a story world…avoid teaching that devalues play by focusing primarily on technical issues…allow students to experience the intellectual pleasure of figuring out authentic problems…allow students to use their reading time to name themselves and to affiliate with others, something that can't be done unless we provide plenty of opportunities for choice…and doing so would mean that we would have to provide opportunities for students to do work in the world…[including] the kind of inner work that might help them become the people they can be. (p. 30)

Both Blackburn (2021) and Wilhelm and Smith's (2016a, 2016b) work values pleasure as an end in itself and provide insights into the phenomenon of pleasure and how it has and can be experienced by young adults.

Definitions of Reading and Writing for Pleasure

Some of the literature takes care to define what the authors mean when they discuss reading and writing for pleasure; others do not. Despite its length and focus on reading for pleasure, the National Endowment of the Arts (2007) report described above—*To Read or Not to Read*—does not include a definition of reading for pleasure

aside from the implicit assumption that reading for pleasure includes all reading not assigned by a teacher. This narrow understanding ignores the fact that many readers experience pleasure in reading assigned texts in addition to texts they choose themselves. To explore the definition of reading for pleasure further I turn first to Cremin's (2014) "Reading for Pleasure and Engagement: Reviewing the Research." According to the author, "at the core of reading for pleasure is the reader's volition, their agency and desire to read, their anticipation of the satisfaction gained through the experience and/or afterwards in interaction with others" (p. 5). In response to the idea that reading for pleasure might therefore be thought to only include recreational reading, Cremin cites the National Literacy Trust in the United Kingdom (UK), which recognizes that pleasure reading "can encompass reading which, whilst it began at someone else's request, is sustained by the reader, in response to their interest (Clark and Rumbold, 2006)" (Cremin, 2014, p. 6).

While definitions of writing for pleasure vary, Young and Ferguson (2020) have suggested a definition that mirrors Cremin's (2014) definition of reading for pleasure: "a volitional act of writing undertaken for enjoyment and satisfaction" (p. 21). The specific sources of enjoyment and satisfaction are many and vary according to context, identity, purpose, and more. The authors also offer a distinction between writing *as* pleasure and writing *for* pleasure. Writing *as* pleasure is pleasure attained in and through the craft of writing, from engaging in the process itself. Writing *for* pleasure acknowledges that the act of writing is often painful, frustrating, and difficult. However, writers push through to experience the kind of pleasure that comes *after* the act of writing, including the sense of

a purpose fulfilled, the anticipation of having others read their work, pride and feelings of having achieved something significant, and discovery of their writing voice. For the sake of this study, I include both types of writing pleasure when I use the phrase "writing for pleasure," but the distinctions between these two come out in the experiences and words of my participants.

In addition to these definitions that focus on volition, agency, and desire, some of the literature goes further to connect pleasure to other theories of embodiment. One subset focuses specifically on reading and writing *as* pleasure, referring to that in-the-moment, embodied experience as "flow." In "Finding Flow: The Power of Motivation and Pleasure," Wilhelm (2015) used Mihaley Czikszentmihalyi's theory of flow to interpret data collected previously with co-researcher Smith (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) about the literate lives of boys. According to Wilhelm (2015), this theory of flow suggests that when people are most engaged, they have "achieved a state of flow that is defined as that state of mind where one is totally immersed in the present activity to the extent that nothing else can interfere or interrupt it" (p. 74). The boys in Wilhelm and Smith's studies all talked at length about flow experiences in activities outside of school. When they did experience flow in school, it was most often during sports or activities involving shop or the arts (Wilhelm, 2015, p. 74). Wilhelm and Smith found that conditions of flow connected directly with motivation, and that the lack of flow explained every case in which the boys were unmotivated. The conditions of flow experience include:

- A sense of competence and control

- A challenge that requires an appropriate level of skill—and assistance to meet the challenge
- Clear goals and feedback that provides visible signs of progress and accomplishment
- A focus on the immediate experience
- The importance of the social (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002)

Wilhelm (2015) argued that flow in school, and specifically in literacy, needs to be intentionally cultivated for students to not only experience motivation and achievement but become competent citizens and life-long readers, writers, and learners.

The final concept that the literature I reviewed connected to literary pleasures is "enchantment." In "Affective Encounters: Enchantment and the Possibility of Reading for Pleasure," Burnett and Merchant (2018) applied Bennett's (2001) theory of enchantment to their research on children's digital literacies. Bennett described enchantment as:

> a mixed bodily state of joy and disturbance, a transitory sensuous condition dense and intense enough to stop you in your tracks and toss you onto new terrain and to move you from the actual world to its virtual possibilities. (p. 111)

Burnett and Merchant used enchantment to describe how moods can unexpectedly and spontaneously take shape, especially in response to objects. Connecting with additional theories of affect, they explored the material-social relationships between readers and what they read, suggesting that pleasure that "bubbles up" in a reader is both born of and sustains engagement with text. In "Reading, Risk, and Reality: College Students and

Reading for Pleasure," Gilbert and Fister (2011) cite Felski's (2008) argument that enchantment as a quality of the reading experience is underrated in literary studies because of its association with women's "supposed tendency to succumb to escapist fare and because it is believed to be a cheap sleight-of-hand trick performed by profit-driven mass media concerns" (Gilbert & Fister, 2011, p. 475). Felski has argued that enchantment is richer and more multi-faceted than literary theory has allowed, and Gilbert and Fister suggest that endorsing the power of enchantment as a legitimate purpose for reading might go far to sanction students' reading for pleasure.

Pleasure in Higher Education

I found that literature exploring pleasure in the context of higher education focuses more on the lived experiences of academics, educators, and researchers than on undergraduate students (e.g., Labinski, 2017; Riddle et al., 2017; Sword, 2023). Researching with the keywords "pleasure" + "undergraduates" or "college students" elicits literature focused mainly on pleasure through sexual experiences, alcohol, or drugs, which—while not explicitly excluded—is not the pleasure I focus on in the context of this study. Interestingly, the literature that does focus on college students' reading and writing experience are largely from the field of library studies as opposed to education, literature, or composition studies. In this section I will explore how academics understand literary pleasures for themselves and then move to how college students' experiences of reading and writing pleasure are positioned and described.

Focus on the Faculty

Understandably, the literature focused on higher education employ considerably more theories and theorists than K–12 focused studies when discussing and analyzing pleasure. One common theory is Roland Barthes' *jouissance*. Harris (2012) argued against the work/leisure divide of faculty through a meditation on jouissance, a blissful pleasure that "implies ecstatic sexual release that dissolves normal identities and delivers liberation from convention" (p. 123). This is contrasted with the tamer *plaisir*, which involves enjoying a text as it follows the common and often predictable conventions and patterns of literature. While acknowledging that loudly proclaiming the pleasures of academic work might "raise the spectre of elitism," Harris ultimately argued that the pursuit of pleasurable activities and jouissance can serve to humanize the workplace and "celebrate the everyday resourcefulness of oneself and one's colleagues" (p. 128). Clayton et al. (2009) focused on the lived experience of jouissance for both educators and students, bringing in a larger social and critical context to argue that "[j]ouissance is not simply a flow experience or a pure physiological state, but a pseudo-psychological, socially embodied feeling of gratification" (p. 379). Finally, Hughes (2011) discussed jouissance in relation to doctoral pedagogy, contrasting the easygoing enjoyment one experiences when encountering texts that confirm, and therefore leave unchanged, one's own perspectives—or plaisir—with the more intense pleasure-bliss of jouissance, experienced when a text "opens up hitherto unknown vistas, and as a consequence leaves the subject altered" (p. 622). Hughes connected these two types of pleasure with the ways that Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault theorize desire and pleasure as both stasis and

change. Foucault's theories of pleasure illustrate how pleasure can be a form of resistance through which change occurs. Hughes references McWhorter (1999), who argued that for Foucault pleasure is "not just a state of the body and/or mind that occurs following some particular accomplishment or stimulus. Pleasure is not just an outcome. Pleasure, like power, is creative" (Hughes, 2011, p. 624). Thinking of pleasure as a powerful, creative resistance connects with brown's (2019) understanding of the political nature of pleasure as well as many of my participants' lived experiences.

There are multiple full-length books focused on faculty pleasures. Riddle et al.'s (2017) *Producing Pleasure in the Contemporary University* explores how pleasure is both possible in and often central to the pursuits of academics working in universities. The editors acknowledged the various, sometimes disparate ways pleasure can take shape, and have defined pleasure as "affirmation, affordance, flow, focus, fulfillment, happiness, heightened consciousness, immersion, joy, motivation, and self-actualization" (p. 3). In *Writing with Pleasure,* Sword (2023) argued that academic and professional writers have long been taught to "privilege intellect over emotion, logos over pathos, and the life of the mind over the sentiments of the heart," (p. 3), leading to a sense of writing as a hedonistic chore. The book is focused on helping the academic writer recuperate pleasure as a legitimate and crucial writing-related emotion. Sword used the acronym SPACE to argue that all professional writers need to consider the social, physical, aesthetic, creative, and emotional aspects of writing to perform at their best and find pleasure and nourishment in that performance. Sword did not directly connect this advice for academics to the students that academics teach and mentor, nor did she examine how

teaching choices might foster or disrupt students' experiences of pleasure, illustrating how much room there is for continued research and discourse around the affective experiences of university learners themselves.

One academic-focused article that centered students' experiences of pleasure along with the researcher's is Papoulis' (2003) "Pleasure, Politics, Fear, and the Field of Composition: Elbow's Influence on my Theorizing and Teaching." In this memoir-style reflection, Papoulis described how she moved toward, away from, and then toward again Peter Elbow's (1973, 1985) composition pedagogy. Papoulis described Elbow's approach as "kind, willing to listen, often appearing to be a bit undecided, yet in fact totally unshakable in terms of the things he really believes in" (p. 159), including the importance of authentic listening and respect for all learners and their opinions. As his student, Papoulis experienced the political nature of this approach:

> Watching Peter work, I realized that attention to pedagogy was crucial for anyone wanting to find ways to effect political change within established classrooms. While I rarely heard Peter talk overtly about politics, his ideas answered a yearning in me to have a practical grounding for the theoretical framework I was developing, a framework that grew out of feminist and postmodern theories, resistance to hierarchies, concern with fairness, championing of the marginalized, and attention to women's experience. The kind of classrooms Peter urged us graduate students to create, I realized, was the kind in which such ideas were enacted in practice. (p. 160)

While Papoulis's commitment to Elbow's pedagogy grew and was supported while teaching her own courses as his graduate student, her confidence waned as she moved institutions and into spaces "where one had to take sides in what we now tend to see as false dichotomies—personal vs. social, expressivist vs. social constructionist, etc." (p. 161). Surrounded by critics of Elbow's approach, Papoulis began to worry that freewriting and other "unbound explorations of students' own ideas" were *too* pleasurable, and the part of her worried about rigor was deeply suspicious of pleasure. Ultimately, her students were the ones to demonstrate to her the importance of feeling pleasure and passion for writing, and Papoulis realized that teaching analytic arguing without engaging students' personal interests did not work. Her expressivist inclination and belief that the "best thing [she] could teach first-year writers was to develop the confidence and skill to articulate their own deepest insights" took over again (p. 164). This article serves as a strong example of the interconnectedness between an instructor's affective experiences and those of her students, and the importance of both.

College Students and Literacy Pleasures

As mentioned above, only a handful of the total literature I reviewed are specifically focused on undergraduate students' literacy pleasures. Most of these focus on reading for pleasure; studies that center writing pleasures for undergraduates are even more scarce. Of the literature that does focus on college students' writing experiences, many come from the Stanford Study of Writing, a five-year longitudinal study that investigated the writing experiences of Stanford students during their four undergraduate years and first year post-college (Lunsford et al., n.d.). The study included 189 student

participants who submitted all the writing they did for their classes, as well as much of their out-of-class writing. Over the course of the study researchers collected over 15,000 pieces of student writing, including lab reports, research essays, PowerPoint presentations, problem sets, honors theses, emails and texts, blogs and journals, poems, documentaries, fan cation, and a full-length play titled "Hip-Hopera" (Lunsford, 2013).

In an op-ed titled "Our Semi-Literate Youth? Not So Fast," the Stanford Writing Study's primary investigator Lunsford (2013) described the four results that quickly emerged from the study. First, students were writing a lot, both in and out of class, though they were more interested in the "life writing" they did outside of class than in school assignments. Second, students were increasingly aware of who they were writing for—their audience—and adjusted their writing accordingly. Third, students wanted their writing to count for something; good writing, they said, was the kind of writing that "made something happen in the world" (p. 1). Finally, students increasingly saw writing as "collaborative, social, and participatory rather than solitary" (p. 1). Lunsford goes on to dispel the myth that students were writing less than in the past, that they were making more frequent grammar and spelling mistakes, and that technology was interfering with writing production and development. Instead, digital technologies offered more opportunities for students to engage in self-driven learning, and the participatory nature of digital media allowed for more—not less—development of literacies (p. 2). In one of the first publications from the Stanford Writing Study, Fishman et al. (2005) focused on the personal and performative aspects of student writing that were already emerging through their data collection. Students frequently described their self-sponsored writing

as more personal than their academic writing, and one participant called their nonacademic writing "a type of personal therapy" (p. 230). Overall, students enjoyed their nonacademic writing more than what they wrote for class, not only because they could choose topics they were passionate about, but because they had the freedom to make rhetorical choices that met their audience and purpose. "I'm willing to break rules more often in order to get a specific effect I desire" says student-participant Paulo (p. 231). The study builds on previous research described in this chapter connecting pleasure to students' volition and agency.

The enjoyment of self-sponsored writing translates to what studies reveal about college students' self-sponsored reading. Gilbert and Fister (2011), and Parlette and Howard (2010) write from the perspective of library and information science researchers about undergraduate students' reading habits. In "Reading, Risk, and Reality: College Students and Reading for Pleasure," Gilbert and Fister asked several related questions:

> What are undergraduates' attitudes toward reading for pleasure? How do their experiences compare to academic librarians' perceptions of student reading habits and preferences? Do colleges and universities unknowingly erect barriers to reading for pleasure? Do academic libraries have any reason to encourage reading books and other material that does not directly support the curriculum and, if so, what methods would students favor? (p. 474)

To address these questions, they gave surveys about recreational reading to students at one university as well as academic librarians nationally, defining recreational reading as any voluntary reading not assigned for a class. The results of the study showed that

almost all students at the university (93%) enjoyed leisure reading, but there were notable differences in reading habits among students in different majors. Humanities majors were almost unanimous in their enjoyment of leisure reading (99%), while preprofessional and social science majors reported the lowest enjoyment of reading—though this was still at 90% (p. 478). The study found that students read broadly across a number of genres and modes (books, websites, newspapers, etc.). Importantly, despite such high rates of reading enjoyment, students reported spending very little time reading anything that wasn't assigned in a class. Survey data revealed multiple reasons for this lack of time spent reading for pleasure, including students having too much reading for class, preferring to socialize, and preferring to spend their time in other ways. Barriers to reading for pleasure reported by librarians at other institutions included many students working full time while attending school, small or nondescript recreational reading collections, limited budgets, and language barriers when accessing English-predominant collections. Interestingly, some librarians saw supporting recreational reading as outside of their scope and purpose, exemplified by the comment: "Is active promotion of recreational reading really part of our mission, and should those materials be part of our permanent collection? Part of me says no…that our focus should be more academic" (p. 484). In contrast, many other librarians did believe the reading promotion was an important function for academic libraries: "One of our six fundamental goals of the library is facilitating the appreciation and celebration of books. We view this not as a separate program but as an integrated, integral part of our students' education" (p. 484). Ultimately, Gilbert and Fister's (2011) research indicated that college students enjoy

reading for pleasure to a far greater degree than previous reports—including the NEA's (2007) *To Read or Not to Read*—would suggest. Despite competing priorities and limited time, students' "enjoyment and reading and their expressed desire to read material of their own choosing indicates that reading is, in fact, thriving" (p. 490).

A study by Parlette and Howard (2010) focused on first-year university students' transition to college and the impact of that transition on pleasure reading contributes to the claim that many students are "enthusiastic and active readers who read for pleasure primarily for relaxation and enjoyment" (p. 58). Through focus group conversations with 26 first-year undergraduates, Parlette and Howard found not only that reading for pleasure was a well-established habit amongst many students, but there were also strong connections for students between academic reading and pleasure. Several participants attributed reading to improved academic success and named the possibility of learning new things and broadening their perspectives as strong motivations for reading. This connects to Wilhelm and Smith's (2016b) four types of pleasure, specifically intellectual pleasure. Another significant finding was students' desire and need for autonomy when choosing reading materials. According to participant Sarah, "If someone tells me to read a book, I just don't want to" (Parlette & Howard, 2010, p. 60). Research participants also described their experiences with academic libraries. Parlette and Howard (2010) found that students were impressed with the college library's research resources but did not consider it a place to find recreational reading materials. When asked if they would utilize a library collection specifically intended for pleasure reading, 83% indicated that they'd use such a collection if it existed. These participants recommended a collection

that was easily browsable and organized by genre with book displays, much like a bookstore. After naming the limitations of the study, including that the participants opted-in to discuss their reading habits and therefore likely did not represent the full student body, Parlette and Howard distill recommendations to foster undergraduate student reading, including pleasure reading collections, campus reading programs, book clubs, and quiet and comfortable reading areas in academic libraries. Together, Gilbert and Fister (2011) and Parlette and Howard's (2010) explorations of undergraduates' reading habits press upon the importance of a holistic approach to college literacy that is inclusive of academic libraries and librarians.

Only one article I reviewed considered undergraduate students' experiences of pleasure within a traditional English department. Jolliffe and Harl's (2008) "Studying the 'Reading Transition' from High School to College: What Are Our Students Reading and Why?" examines whether and what college students read, mostly through the lens of English literature faculty wondering if students are reading for their classes. The researchers discovered students who were "actively involved in their own programs of reading aimed at values clarification, personal enrichment, and career preparation…who were extremely engaged with their reading, but not with the reading that their classes required" (p. 600). Taking what I feel at times was a condescending tone, Jolliffe and Harl acknowledged the value of students' independent pleasure reading while making clear that such reading is still subordinate to academic reading. The authors argued that students need to be explicitly taught how to make text-to-text and text-to-world connections, implying that pleasure reading only leads to solipsistic text-to-self

connections. College students, they said, must be "walked through demonstrations of mature, committed, adult readers who draw connections to the world around them, both historical and current, and to other texts" (p. 613). While developing readers with ability to make robust connections across multiple domains is valuable, the implication that college students choosing their own reading cannot be "mature, committed, adult readers" is insulting. That said, the article is an all-too-rare examination of why curricular choices may not be inspiring students to engage in course-related reading. Jolliffe and Harl conclude by encouraging faculty members and administrators to create curricula, co-curricula, and extra-curricula that intentionally and authentically engage students in their reading, such as learning-community programs where students take multiple courses together, focusing on a common theme, and service-learning and community-outreach programs. They also encourage faculty to enhance student learning through increased technology-based reading and responding, as "many students have developed literacies in electronic contexts that instructors overlook or ignore" (p. 614). While this article clearly values pleasure and engagement as a means to class preparation and participation, not an end in itself, it is an important example of faculty being willing to examine their assumptions and practices when students are not meeting their preconceived expectations.

Conclusion

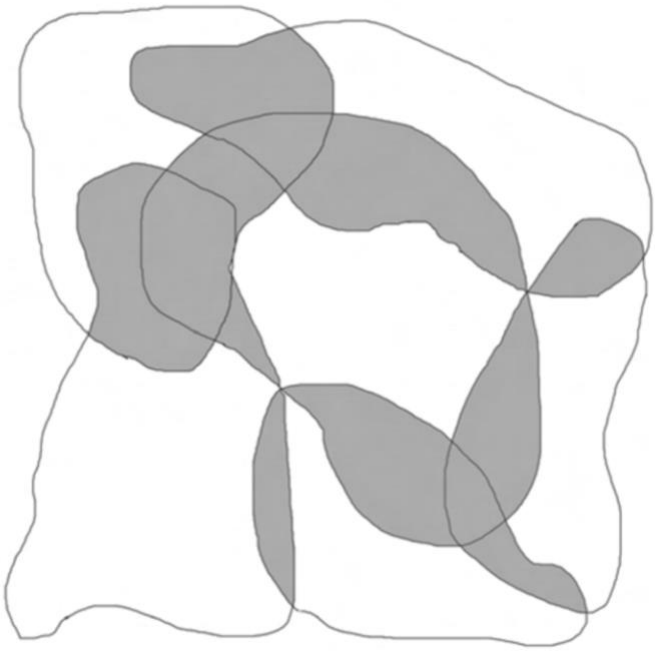
The theories, concepts, definitions, and examples explored in this literature review paint a multilayered portrait of reading and writing for pleasure and the impact of that pleasure on students' lives. My goal when grouping and synthesizing the literature as

I did was to pay attention to the multiple provocations and productions (Vagle, 2025) of pleasure as well as the connections and disconnections between how pleasure is understood across various disciplines and discourse communities. The breadth of these communities means that there are multiple conceptions of reading and writing for pleasure and varied assumptions about why that pleasure is something worth valuing. While some studies were baldly focused on pleasure as a means to achievement, even the literature that valued pleasure more holistically could go further to include analysis of the systemic dynamics that impact various peoples' access to pleasure, or conversation about the ways in which pleasure can disrupt oppression and participate in liberatory justice work. Those considerations are beyond the focus of most of the published literature about undergraduates and reading and writing for pleasure, but thinking with brown's (2019) pleasure activism and the theories in this dissertation opens up these possibilities.

While the Venn diagram (Figure 1) at the beginning of this chapter helped me conceive and organize how I would explore the literature, what is clear to me now is that there are no clean lines or simple single-layer relationships among the various ways that pleasure is explored and understood. Instead, the landscape is much more like Figure 4 (Vagle, 2025, p. 43), Vagle's (2025) depiction "Take Shape," which "signifies a post-intentional move away from essence and toward contexts, situations, and the partial" (p. 41).

Figure 4

Take Shape



Note: From *Crafting Phenomenological Research* (3rd ed., p. 13), by M. Vagle, 2025, Routledge. Copyright 2025 by Mark Vagle.

In the next chapter I move to exploring those contexts, situations, and the partial through an explication of the methodology and methods of this post-intentional phenomenological dissertation study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

"Phenomenology? What is that?"

I remember entering the coffee shop in NE Minneapolis, both excited and nervous. It was January of 2018, and I'd recently learned I had been accepted to a PhD program in literacy education. That day I was meeting with a third-year PhD student, Sara Sterner, who was studying in the same track that I would be and held the same graduate assistant roles that I was assigned. We spotted each other in the busy coffee shop—she had told me to look for someone resembling Professor Trelawney from the *Harry Potter* series—and found the last two open spots at the counter. As we talked over our respective latte and tea, I asked Sara about her experiences in the doctoral program and about her planned dissertation research. She told me about her research setting and questions, as well as her methodology—post-intentional phenomenology. "Phenomenology?" I remember asking. "What is that?"

Sara explained phenomenology in its most basic terms—that she was exploring a specific phenomenon, "reading whitely" (Sterner, 2019), in the context of the course she taught, an introduction to children's literature with a focus on diversity and inclusion. I remember her telling me that phenomenology was a type of qualitative research, so qualitative that the only numbers in her dissertation would be her page numbers. This attracted me more than it probably should have; I've never been enamored with numbers. We talked about many other things for the next two hours, and I left the coffee shop sure of two things: I was going to get my PhD, and I was going to study phenomenology.

Learning more about post-intentional phenomenology, or PIP, was a practice in patience, as I wasn't able to take the course until my third year as a graduate student. When the time finally came, it was the first full semester of the pandemic, and everyone was teaching and learning from home. My memories of learning about phenomenology and practicing thinking like a phenomenologist are colored with the dim lighting of our basement, where I attended Zoom courses and found pockets of quiet in our small, full home.

One of the most important things to know about phenomenology, at the start, is that it is both a philosophic discipline *and* a research methodology. The philosophy came first—developed most notably by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and his student Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)—and following that philosophy some human and social science researchers formed a research methodology by the same name (Vagle, 2025). This is important because phenomenology as a methodology remains deeply philosophical, in that philosophy and theory are essential to the entire research and writing process. Unlike some qualitative methodologies where it might be more difficult to trace the methodology back to its philosophical, epistemological, or ontological underpinnings, phenomenology remains tethered. I think this is a part of why phenomenology has always attracted me: I like being able to draw a line, to be able to make connections and understand how one got from there to here. To echo Sara Ahmed (2006) in *Queer Phenomenology,* "it matters how we arrive at the places we do" (p. 2).[9]

[9] It is important to name that Heidegger was a known member of the Nazi party. This incredibly problematic association complicates my understanding of orientation and how we have "arrived" at our current understandings of phenomenology, including post-intentional phenomenology. There was an urge I

At its simplest, phenomenology as methodology is the study of phenomena and how they are manifest in the world (Vagle, 2025). Since its emergence from philosophy, phenomenological research has been in a constant state of becoming; there is no *one* phenomenological methodology, but rather many. Each takes up varied ways of studying phenomena, such as descriptive-oriented (which stems from Amedeo Giorgi and is most closely connected to the philosophies of Husserl), interpretive-oriented (which stems from Max van Manen and is most closely connected to the philosophies and ontological turn of Heidegger), and reflective lifeworld research (which stems from Karin Dahlberg and which does not prescribe directly to one philosophical origin or the other), to name a few (Vagle, 2025, p. 18-19). Post-intentional phenomenology, the methodology I take up in this dissertation, stems from Mark Vagle's (2015, 2025) entangling of phenomenology with poststructuralist concepts.

In phenomenology the primary focus of study is the phenomenon—the thing itself. Heidegger's description of a phenomenon as *that which becomes manifest for us* suggests that phenomena don't simply exist but are *brought into being* through our living in the world (Vagle, 2025, p. 28). Therefore, the purpose of phenomenology as a methodology is to study what it is like as we *find-ourselves-being-in-relation with* others

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felt, when I first learned more of Heidegger and his beliefs, to disregard phenomenology as a research discipline. Could I take up a methodology that was inspired in large part by a person whose ideas and values are wholly antithetical to my own?

Conversations with fellow phenomenologists and two texts have helped me think this through: the New Yorker article "Is Heidegger Contaminated by Nazism?" by Joshua Rothman (2014) and adrienne maree brown's (2020) *We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice.* I haven't reached any easy conclusions. I know that humans are deeply flawed. I know that this is something I will continue to wrestle with, both as a scholar and a human. Poststructuralism asks us to avoid binaries and essentialism, and I lean into that even as I take up post-intentional phenomenology.

and other things. Often the phenomena that are brought into being through that living in the world are obvious, normal things, such as love, sadness, motivation, disappointment. This fits; as phenomenologist Sokolowksi (2000) has described, phenomenology is about "looking at what we usually look through" (p. 12). How a researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon differs according to the particular methodology they practice. In post-intentional phenomenology, phenomena are active, constantly in motion with their relations and social contexts. Glimpses of post-intentional phenomena are partial, layered, incomplete, and always already shifting.

Poststructuralism Meets Phenomenology: PIP

As described above, post-intentional phenomenology, or PIP, draws on phenomenological and poststructural philosophies to seek a layered, entangled way of thinking, writing, and doing (Vagle, 2015, 2025). Vagle (2025) makes clear that the "post" aspect of post-intentional phenomenology does not mean *after* but is a nod to poststructuralism and the understanding that there is no *one way* of knowing phenomena, as they are always "shifting, moving, undoing, and re-doing themselves in and over time through various, sometimes competing contexts" (p. 112). Poststructural theory lives within postmodern thought, the core of which is "the doubt that any method or theory, any discourse or genre, or any tradition or novelty has a universal and general claim as the 'right' or privileged form of authoritative knowledge" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). Poststructuralism in particular is focused on language and the ways in which language functions with and within subjectivity, power, and society. A skepticism of truth and rationality are at the center of poststructuralism, and, significantly in education

and anytime research or writing about the "Other" is taking place, poststructuralist theory "calls into question the authority of the author and breaks down the division between the one who knows (and tells) and the ones who are being written about" (Davies, 2003, p. xiii).

Poststructuralism is suspicious of ideas such as progress and critiques master narratives, or any attempt to "propose a general, global, uniform, or norm as if it were a universal, natural, or foundational fact of human existence" (Parkes et al., 2010, p. 166). This critique challenges researchers to approach knowledge itself as problematic. Further, following Foucault's understanding of power as discursive and productive, "how people are understood, or how knowledge is constructed about people, is a function of power—thus the intricate relationship among power, knowledge, and the subject" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 53). I attempt to bring to my own work this poststructural understanding of the interrelated functions of power, subjectivity, and discourse.

The goal of designing and conducting PIP research is not to find an essence or describe a theme, as one might do in descriptive or interpretive phenomenology, but to explore "how the phenomenon might take shape, how it is entangled and provoked, and how it is produced in time and space" (Vagle, 2025, p. 164). Sterner (2019) has succinctly traced the philosophies and theories that contribute to Vagle's conception of PIP, naming Deleuze and Guattari's concept of lines of flight, Foucault's understanding of power relationships, and Merleau-Ponty's discussions of embodiment. Ahmed's (2006) *Queer Phenomenology* has also significantly influenced how I take up and understand PIP, specifically her concept of orientation. Vagle (2025) acknowledges that

the "putting together" of philosophies from two seemingly incommensurate paradigms—phenomenology and poststructuralism—is "hardly clean," (p. 138), but argues that it is along the "jagged edges of phenomenology and poststructuralist ideas, where stories are in flux, where we enter into middles instead of beginnings and ends (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)" (p. 126)—the hyphen—where the work of PIP really takes place.

In addition to its relationship with poststructuralism, post-intentional phenomenology has moved consciously and purposefully into conceptualizing research as social change. According to Vagle (2025), while traditionally phenomenology has not usually been seen or used as a political philosophy, "there are phenomenological craftspeople who have gone ahead and put phenomenology into play, or interplay, with more disruptive, politically-oriented theories/methodologies" (p. 147). Such craftspeople include Madeleine Grumet (1988), who put phenomenology in dialogue with feminist theories, and Sara Ahmed (2006), who layers phenomenology with queer theory to articulate a queer phenomenology. My hope when putting phenomenology into conversation with the theoretical concepts I think with this in this dissertation is to contribute to this disruption. These theoretical concepts, which I describe more in the PIP Triangle Point 2 section below, are consciously political, feminist, and anti-oppressive. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2011, 2017) work, in particular, helps me articulate how I understand social change, including the potential contributions of this dissertation. Simpson's (2017) argument that "*how* we live, *how* we organize, *how* we engage in the world—the process—not only frames the outcome, it is the transformation" (p. 19, emphasis in original) places the action of change within this dissertation itself, not

outside of it, not as some external result of its completion. *How* I have talked with, researched, thought, questioned, read, written, erased, and rewritten—*how* is what carries the energetic potential.

Thinking Through Intentionality

Intentionality is a central concept in phenomenology, but it is slippery; even after four years of trying to fully grasp it, I still struggle. I knew I needed to think this through as a part of my dissertation process, and because writing is how I come to know, these paragraphs are that thinking.

Intentionality in phenomenology describes the inseparable connectedness between human beings and all the things we interact with in the word—things both animate and inanimate, including ideas (Vagle, 2025). Despite containing the root word "intention," intentionality in this case does not signify a plan or purpose for doing something. Instead, it signifies "how we are meaningfully connected to the world" (Vagle, 2025, p. 36). Freeman and Vagle (2009) have referred to Merleau-Ponty's description of intentionality as "the invisible thread that connects humans to their surroundings meaningfully whether they are conscious of that connection or not" (p. 3). Importantly, rather than accepting consciousness as something conscious in and of itself, intentionality signifies that consciousness is always *of* something (Sokolowski, 2000). Intentionality exists in the relationship, the thing between us and the world.

Like all of phenomenology, intentionality has shifted and transformed in meaning over time. Husserl was oriented toward the "essence" of a phenomenon, or the thing itself. In Husserlian phenomenology, intentionality is thought to have essential structure

or qualities, and research is about uncovering and describing those essences. In Heideggerian phenomenology, phenomenologists pay attention to manifestations as opposed to essences; for Heidegger, phenomenon meant "that which becomes manifest for us" (Vagle, 2025, p. 40). Manifestations come into being through intentional relations, which are by nature in a constant state of interpretation. Therefore, intentionality is not the "essence" of a phenomenon but interpretations of manifestations (Vagle, 2025). In PIP, intentionality becomes plural. According to Vagle (2025):

> Whatever understanding is opened up through an investigation will always move with and through the researcher's intentional relationships with the phenomenon—not simply the researcher, in the participants, in the text, or in their power positions, but in the dynamic intentional relationships that tie participants, the researcher, the context, broader social issues and matters, the produced text, and their positionalities together. In this way, intentionality is always moving, is unstable, and is constantly being provoked and produced in and over time—and therefore can be read poststructurally. (p. 40)

A PIP research approach resists a stable intentionality while still embracing the concept as "ways of being that run through human relations with the world and one another" (Vagle, 2025, p. 41). This way of thinking about intentionality connects with what Patti Lather (1993) has said about validity in qualitative research—that "it is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing" (p. 675). This move to look *at* what we normally look *through*, as Vagle has described, is a primary

purpose of the researcher's post-reflexions, which I describe in more detail later in this chapter.

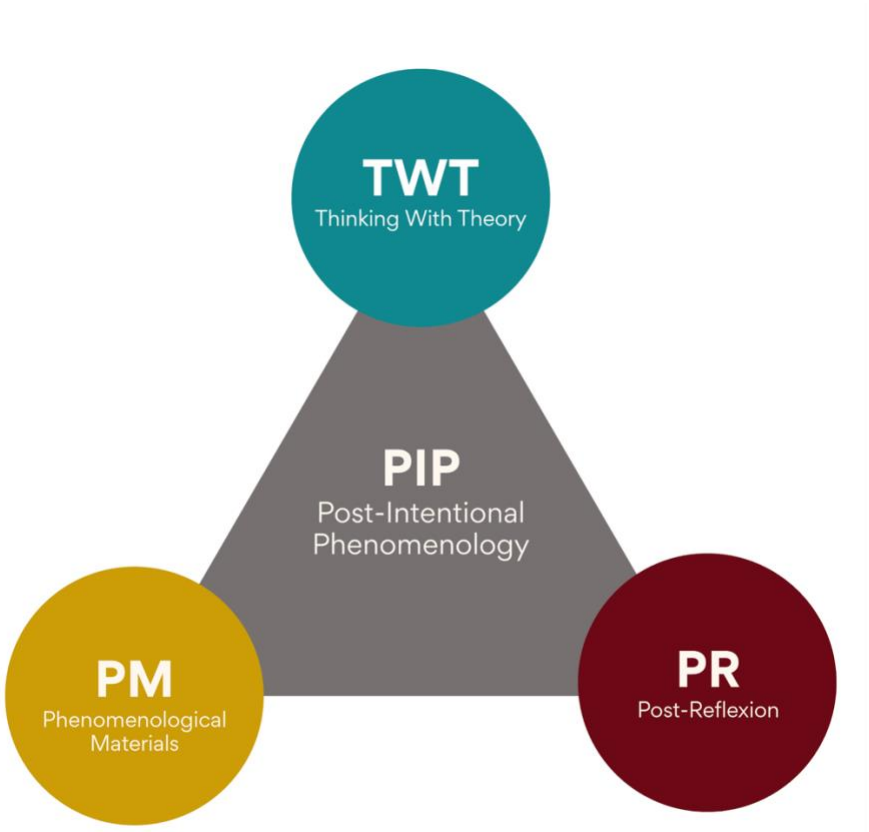
As described above, post-intentionality does not signify a full departure from intentionality, but is a conceptual move meant to bring poststructuralism and phenomenology together. Vagle (2025) draws on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) figuration *lines of flight* to conceptualize how post-intentional phenomena take off, leak, flow, and swell. Thinking with lines of flight prompts us to focus on *how things connect* as opposed to a more Husserlian or Heideggerian *how things are.* According to Vagle (2025), working the edges of phenomenology with these poststructural ideas can "help intentionality become de-stabilized, partial, and ever-changing. Intentional connections 'exist,' but they become plural lines of flight—they elude, flee, entangle, and take on various intensities in and over time, across contexts" (p. 144). Posting intentionality reminds us that we always enter into the middle of things, in complex contexts and lived bodies, and that there are no clear or linear lines to be traced from the origin of a phenomenon to some sort of stable understanding. Instead, intentionality is "running all over the place, all the time—at times with clarity, but most often in the gnarliness of life" (Vagle, 2025, p. 145). The outcomes of a post-intentional phenomenological inquiry are therefore multiple, varied, entangled, and shifting in and over time (Vagle, 2025). This focus on *how things connect* and the embrace of the partial, incomplete, and shifting nature of understanding are part of what draw me to PIP—it does not attempt to simplify that which will always be complex.

Methodology and Methods: The PIP Triangle

The PIP Triangle illustrates post-intentional phenomenology's methodological approach. In PIP, thinking with theory, phenomenological material (data), and the researcher's post-reflexions are considered in equal measure during analysis. According to Vagle (2025), the PIP Triangle as methodological tool is a natural product of PIP's recent moves even further into poststructuralism and is heavily informed by Lisa Jackson and Alecia Mazzei's (2023) *Thinking with Theory*. See Figure 5 (Vagle, 2025, p. 179).

Figure 5

PIP Triangle



Note: From *Crafting Phenomenological Research* (3rd ed., p. 179), by M. Vagle, 2025, Routledge. Copyright 2025 by Mark Vagle.

Boehm-Turner (2020) has explained that the PIP Triangle does not represent triangulation, an analysis method common in traditional qualitative methods, but:

> instead represents the fact that theories, the researcher (i.e., post- reflexions/self-work), and the phenomenological material (i.e., the lived experiences of participants, stories told, the "data") are always there, and each produces and shapes what becomes thinkable about the phenomenon. (p. 85)

During analysis, the triangle may shift in emphasis as the researcher considers a theoretical concept along with a piece of phenomenological material, for example, or a particularly illuminating revelation from a post-reflexion journal along with phenomenological material, or potentially all three points of the triangle in conversation. The fluid nature of this methodological process allows the researcher to remain open to—and follow—lines of flight (Vagle, 2025) as they emerge in and through analysis.

Thinking With Theory

Because "thinking with theory" informs the PIP Triangle so greatly, this section unpacks what that means in the context of my dissertation study.

In *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research,* Jackson and Mazzei (2023) introduce the process of "plugging in," drawing inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus* and the idea of texts as literary machines. "When one writes," Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have explained, "the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, *must* be plugged into in order to work"

(p. 4, emphasis in original). Thinking with theory is the process of "plugging" one text into another and seeing what happens. Notably, Jackson and Mazzei (2023) posit that thinking with theory works against "conventional interpretive qualitative research, traditional coding, data reduction, and thematic analysis—all of which prioritize the production of an end or commodity: an 'easy sense'" (p. 2). Instead, Jackson and Mazzei (2023) position plugging in as "an emergence of 'thought in the act' (Manning & Massumi, 2014) …a production of the new: *the assemblage in formation*" (p. 2, emphasis in original). As the authors describe, this is a profound shift from traditional (Western) social science knowledge and is connected in many ways more to philosophy than conventional qualitative research.

Practically, the process of plugging in involves bringing a theory to what Jackson and Mazzei (2023) call "performative accounts", known in PIP as phenomenological material and in traditional qualitative research as data. Before identifying a theory to think with, however, the researcher spends significant time with the phenomenological material, reading and re-reading, listening, viewing—whatever the material necessitates. This time is essential; as Jackson and Mazzei (2023) describe, these "accounts," this phenomenological material, "*are* not things (i.e. stories that reflect experience); [these] accounts *do* things. They are *force.* As force, they transform our relation to thought and to how we consider what might be said about life" (p. 2, emphasis in original). Therefore, as I will describe more below, the force of the phenomenological material I gathered and the ways it transformed my thinking led me to the theories I ultimately think with in this dissertation.

Jackson and Mazzei (2023) caution that plugging in is not simply using the vocabulary of a theorist or forcing or purposefully applying the concepts into phenomenological material. Reading theory deeply is essential. Spivak (2014), a philosopher whose work has influenced Jackson and Mazzei, has described both the difficulty and importance of deep reading, explaining that theorizing is a practice that changes our way of thinking—theory transforms. Jackson and Mazzei (2023) agree that theory is not an application or a reflection, but a responsive practice, something we *do*: "*a chance encounter that incites the unthought*" (p. 5, emphasis in original). This disorderly and experimental style of plugging in "captures a doing and undoing *as it is happening in the moment of sensing, thinking, reading and writing* in the production of the new, of the unthought" (p. 5, emphasis in original). Unable to conform to a predetermined, ready-made method, "plugging in is revealed along the way, in bits and pieces that function contingently to produce the work" (p. 5). Each plugging in that happens is unique, its own becoming. I find myself responding with an ontological *yes!* to the idea of writing without fully predetermined, step by step method, of writing as thought, of writing, reading, and thinking endlessly entangled as both reflection and production.

Becoming-questions. In another challenge to qualitative methods, Jackson and Mazzei (2023) resist prescribed research questions that guide inquiry and instead describe *becoming-questions* that "emerge in the middle of things: they glimmer and glow to unsettle and reconfigure thought" (p. 7). These becoming-questions emerge in the *threshold*, a figuration the authors use to describe the movement inherent in plugging in. Thresholds exist as passageways, in-between places that contain both entries and exits.

The excess of a threshold "is the space in which something else occurs: a response, an effect, an affect. An intensity that is perceptible—sensed, felt. And once a threshold is passed through or exceeded, something new happens" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 6). This *something new* cannot be repeated, replicated, or transferred. According to Jackson and Mazzei (2023), "thinking with theory as arrested in the threshold, then, can signify a *temporary reading that can escape and transform at any moment*—with more passes through the threshold, chance encounters, and movements that are always more than one" (p. 7, emphasis in original). Becoming-questions arrive during this thresholding, during the practice of reading intensively. They are questions that make room for difference, reorient thinking, and,

> because they emerge in the threshold of doings, they are articulated *retroactively,* in/as an afterward. Becoming-questions assemble the heterogeneous elements of a thinking with for a unique task and cannot be picked up, reused, or applied elsewhere. Becoming-questions are movement: they flow in between all the doings of inquiry to produce experimentation and change. Rather than starting and steering inquiry, they *are inside* thought that actualizes, as it is happening. (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 7, emphasis in original)

What this means for me is that, aside from my overarching research question, my becoming-questions[10] emerged and solidified *during* the process, in the threshold of my reading/writing/thinking.

[10] Commonly known as research sub-questions.

Review of Research Questions

The main research question at the heart of my inquiry is: *How might pleasure be provoked and produced for undergraduates in and through their literacy experiences? And what might that pleasure provoke and produce?* This question has evolved over the course of my study through the process of working the PIP Triangle. For the initial stage of gathering phenomenological material, I had only the first part in mind—wanting to learn more about how pleasure was provoked and produced for students. During analysis, I realized that the theoretical concepts I was thinking with were drawing me towards a two-layered question, or a question with two entry-points. Not just how the phenomenon is provoked and produced, but also—what does that pleasure then do? What might it provoke and produce itself? The second part of my question came about as part of my commitment to exploring the political aspects of pleasure within higher education and allows me to explore not just the "what" but also the "so what" of the phenomenon.

As I described above when exploring "becoming-questions" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023), I did not write concrete sub-questions ahead of my study. I did, however, create becoming-questions during the analysis and writing process, as an iterative and *in the moment* act of thinking/doing. In order to prepare and practice for those becoming-questions ahead of gathering phenomenological material, I drafted some possibilities, one for each theory I thought with in my preliminary exam, which served as a chalkboard of sorts for my dissertation process. These preliminary becoming-questions shaped and contributed to my conversations with study participants, but as Jackson and Mazzei described, the study's true becoming-questions emerged in the threshold of doing. As I

will discuss more below, the theoretical concepts I think with shifted and expanded through this project. This shifting gave way to becoming-questions that came into being *inside* thought, and which are connected both to the theoretical concepts and analytic structure of this project. My preliminary and emergent becoming-questions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Preliminary vs. Emergent Becoming-Questions

Preliminary Becoming-questions	**Emergent Becoming-questions**
• How do students describe their affectual experiences in Writing 101? In other University spaces? What literacy objects are "sticky" (Ahmed, 2014) with pleasure? • What is the relationship between pleasure and neoliberal multiculturalism in the academy? • Does pleasure act as a resistance to neoliberal multiculturalism or other tenets of higher education? If so, how?	• How do affect's "sticky objects" circulate to produce pleasure? • How does presencing make visible the embodied act of writing? • What does pleasure do?

The structure of the rest of this chapter follows the PIP Triangle. First, I explain my process for gathering phenomenological material as well as describe the material gathered. Then, I think with the theoretical concepts that emerged in the process of talking with study participants—some anticipated, some new. Finally, I share my process

for post-reflexing, as well as my initial post-reflexion statement, written at the start of this study.

PIP Triangle Point 1: Phenomenological Material (Study Methods)

In PIP, phenomenological material are the data a researcher gathers during a study. While unstructured interviews and lived experience descriptions are the most commonly used sources of phenomenological material, or data, in phenomenology, Vagle (2025) emphasizes that the post-intentional phenomenon can be studied in many different ways—wherever the phenomenon takes us, we should follow. Below I describe the study's context, participants, and process for data collection, including descriptions of the phenomenological material that were important for "opening up" pleasure in the "multiple, partial, and varied contexts" (Vagle, 2025, p. 162) of this study. I also describe my data analysis process using the PIP Triangle.

Context for Data Collection

The site for my data collection was the course I taught during the proposal and data collection phase of this dissertation process: Writing 101. Following an ethic I developed as a graduate student practicing critical ethnography, it was essential to me that I did research with people with whom I was in relationship, in a context where I was an authentic member of the community. While phenomenology doesn't employ ethnographic fieldwork, per se, Madison's (2020) meaning in the following advice still holds for me: "fieldwork, above all, is relational. Your work is inextricable to your

relationships in the field: Without relationships there is no ethnography" (p. 2). I believe that without relationships there is no—and *should be no*[11]—research.

Writing 101 was a hybrid course, with 1.5 hours in person per class section each week, and 1.5 hours of asynchronous online reading, writing, and reflection that took place on the university's learning management system, Canvas. Each section I taught was capped at 19 students, and I had three sections each semester. Because there are so many sections of Writing 101, each class was located in a different building across the university. I taught, learned, and wrote with students in cramped, windowless rooms and lofted spaces with sweeping views of campus. We made makeshift shared tables and squeezed ourselves into single rolling chairs. After each class I walked across campus to the next, reflecting on how the lesson had gone and how it had felt. Each season and its warmth, colors, and chills are connected to my memories of teaching, writing, and thinking through this dissertation.

Study Participants

Data collection took place during fall of 2023, and I used purposeful selection to recruit former Writing 101 students I had taught during fall 2022 and spring 2023. With purposeful selection in qualitative research, participants are selected because they are "'information rich' and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2015, p. 46). This type of sampling is aimed at gathering varied and multiple insights about the phenomenon, as opposed to any

[11] For further reading on the limits of research, see Tuck and Yang's (2014) "R-Words: Refusing Research."

positivist or post-positivist aim for generalizability from a sample set to a larger population. Patton (2015) has described two purposeful sampling strategies that I nested to form my study sample: sensitizing concept exemplars sampling and key knowledgeables sampling.

The purpose of sensitizing concept sampling is to illuminate concepts and theories, which supports the orientations of phenomenological research. This sampling method begins with the researcher being *sensitive* to a concept of importance to a group of people (Patton, 2015, p. 291). My research study began, in part, because of how students I taught in Fall 2022 named the pleasure they were feeling in and through their writing experiences. I found myself attuned to the concept, the phenomenon, of pleasure, and wanted to know more. According to Patton (2015):

> Sampling based on sensitizing concept exemplars essentially involves two dimensions: (1) a term or label used by a group of people (the sensitizing concept) and (2) identification of the people or situations where that sensitizing concept will be manifest. The purpose of the sample is to illuminate the sensitizing concept's uses and meanings within some specific context. (p. 292)

This sampling method fits well with phenomenology with its focus on a concept and how it takes shape within a specific context. Because pleasure as a concept became manifest within the community of learners of Writing 101, it made sense to draw my participants from students whom I taught in that course.

I nested, or combined, a second sampling method with the first to further narrow down my potential participants. The purpose of key knowledgeables sampling is to

"select cases to create a specific information-rich group that can reveal and illuminate important group patterns" (Patton, 2015, p. 267). Through this strategy I identified people with "great knowledge" who were able to shed significant light on the inquiry issue. The benefit of focusing on key knowledgeables within a larger group is that they "inform our inquiry when we tap into their knowledge, experience, and expertise" (Patton, 2015, p. 284). I recruited specific students who, through observation and multiple conversations, I believed would have rich insights into the productions and provocations of pleasure. I trusted my own experiences as an educator, researcher, and affective communicator when identifying these students. Additionally, it was important to me that my research participants represent a diversity of races and ethnicities, gender expressions, sexual orientations (if shared and known), and socioeconomic experiences. I kept all of this in mind when recruiting participants.

After my dissertation proposal was approved, I began the International Review Board (IRB) process, which included drafting an information sheet and recruitment email that I would send to all potential participants identified through the process described above. After the IRB was complete, I sent my recruitment email and information sheet to 27 former students, along with a link to a Google Form where they could express interest in participating in the study. My goal at the start of the recruitment process was to have 5-8 total participants, and I thought it was best to err on the side of recruiting well above that number to ensure that enough would be interested. I was pleasantly surprised when 12 students completed the Google Form. All 12 scheduled and completed interviews (see Appendix A for all recruitment materials).

As noted above, one goal in participant identification and recruitment was for participants to represent a diversity of identities. Of the final 12 participants, 2 identified as male and 10 as female. One was openly LGBTQIA+. Two participants had shared and written about their experiences growing up with low socio-economic status, and five were Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC).

Process of Gathering Phenomenological Material

My process of gathering phenomenological material took place over four consecutive stages, outlined in Table 3 below. Following the table are descriptions of each of the types of material I gathered.

Table 3

Stages of Gathering Phenomenological Material

Stage 1	1. Completed IRB Process, including: a. Information sheet. b. Request for participants' email. i. Noted that if more express interest than are needed for the study, I would select participants. ii. I offered a $25 digital gift card as a thank you/honor of time for all final participants. c. Google Form for participants to indicate interest. d. Scheduling email. 2. Sent recruitment email and information sheet to pre-determined pool of study recruits (see Study Participants). 3. Confirmed participants through Google Form and 1-1 follow up.

Stage 2	1. Scheduled 1-1 interviews.
	    a. Mentioned that we'd begin with a 10-minute freewrite — could bring their computer or I would have paper/pen.
	2. Interviews.
	    a. Began with 10-minute freewrite about pleasure (lived experience description).
	        i. Prompt: *How was pleasure provoked and produced for you over the course of Writing 101? In other words, when did you feel pleasure? Additionally, are there reading or writing activities you engage in outside of our course that bring you pleasure?*
	    b. Semi-structured interview.
	3. Wrote analytic memos and post-reflexed after each interview.
	4. Downloaded audio of virtual interviews and transcribed.

Stage 3	1. Collected artifacts that participants named in interviews, if they wanted to share. a. Course projects, course texts, outside texts. 2. Collected freewrites from first part of semi-structured interview, if participants wanted to share. 3. Wrote analytic memos and post-reflexed as I reviewed.
Stage 4	1. I held the possibility of potential 2nd interviews, but this was not needed. 2. Delivered $25 gift cards to all participants.

Semi-structured Interviews. I began my data collection by inviting each study participant to meet for a 1-1, semi-structured interview[12]. In the Google Form students completed to indicate their interest in participating in the study, I asked their preference for an in-person or virtual conversation. Vagle (2025) reminds us that phenomenological research is not experimental, comparative, or correlational, so I was not concerned about how the location or mode of one interview was the same or different from another (pp. 86-87). Instead, each conversation was an opportunity to learn more about pleasure.

I recorded each Zoom interview using the app's recording function, and my one in-person interview I recorded using my iPhone's voice memo app. I explicitly shared that this would be a part of the process in the study recruitment letter, and asked permission again before recording. While I crafted a handful of questions ahead of time, I did not have a formal protocol for our discussions, as the interviews were intended to be "dialogic, open, and conversational" (Vagle, 2025, p. 100) (see Appendix B for drafted interview questions). I took minimal notes as I talked with students and held the goal of staying present and focused on our discussion as it took shape. Following Vagle's (2025)'s advice, I tried to "listen slowly, thoughtfully, and carefully," remembering that while the participant's role was to share their lived experience of the phenomenon, my role was to "move into the phenomenological attitude—to look at what we usually look through" (p. 101). I appreciated Vagle's (2025) lessons from comedian Tina Fey: agree!;

[12] While it is common for post-intentional phenomenologists to complete fully unstructured interviews, I was required to draft potential interview questions during the IRB process. I found these questions to be useful and grounding and included many (but not all) of them when talking with each participant. Therefore, I refer to my interviews as semi-structured.

say “yes, and”; make statements (e.g. “tell me more about that”); and there are no mistakes, only opportunities (pp. 104-105). The process of these conversations was thrilling. If I had felt that it was needed or helpful, I would have invited select participants for a second interview to continue the conversation or follow up on questions I uncovered after reflection. No second interviews were needed.

After each interview I wrote a brief analytic memo to capture my initial thoughts, analyses, and questions. I also wrote in my post-reflexion journal[13], where I described how I felt during and after my conversations. Finally, I transcribed each interview using Otter.ai, a transcription app, and edited manually for accuracy.

Pleasure Reflections (Freewrite). Each semi-structured interview began with a 10-minute freewrite where I asked students to describe, as best they could, their affectual and embodied experiences with each of the three course writing projects, as well as various course structures and pedagogical moves (e.g., writing groups, peer feedback, class freewrites, discussions), in relation to brown’s (2019) concept of pleasure. I informed study participants of this activity ahead of time, and they had the option to share their pleasure reflection with me, to be included in the phenomenological material, or keep to themselves. Seven of the 12 participants chose to share their freewrites.

The freewrite prompt was: *How was pleasure provoked and produced for you over the course of Writing 101? In other words, when did you feel pleasure? Additionally, are there reading or writing activities you engage in outside of our course that bring you pleasure?* Borrowing from van Manen’s (2001) lived-experience

[13] See PIP Triangle Point 3: Post-Reflexions for more details.

descriptions, I asked participants to describe course reading, writing, and pedagogy as they experienced it; to include feelings, moods, and emotions; to focus on particular examples; and to share an example, if possible, "which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time" (p. 27). These reflections helped me to see how students were thinking about, experiencing, and articulating pleasure in and through their multiple experiences over the semester. Asking students to write during our interview itself was a largely pragmatic decision—I did not want to ask for extra labor ahead of our interview that might deter students from participating. Additionally, in-class freewriting was a common activity in Writing 101, so my goal was that students would find it a familiar and grounding exercise before we began our conversation. When I designed this study, I didn't realize how significant the freewriting students had done within Writing 101 would be to their experiences and descriptions of pleasure, but it was a fortuitous and fitting way to begin.

Student Writing. Over the course of Writing 101 students completed three full writing projects, as well as multiple reflections and process-based writing. My hope during the study design was to use student writing as phenomenological material to open up how pleasure shows up for students, if named by them in their reflections and our conversations. For example, if a student named that they experienced pleasure when writing their narrative essay (Project 1), or the multimodal research project (Project 3), I asked if they were comfortable re-sharing with me that specific project as a source of phenomenological material. All participants consented to include their course work and writing projects in the study.

Vagle (2025) describes the study of a phenomenon as the "study of vibrations," which are "not static or clean or stationary. They are moving and dynamic" (p. 99). I see the exploration of writing projects themselves as another way of looking at the vibrations of pleasure as felt by students throughout the semester. I selected my study participants from both fall 2022 and spring 2023, and I adjusted the curriculum slightly between those two semesters, so the specific writing projects shared differ slightly between study participants. However, because the project goals and overall course objectives remained the same across semesters, the skills students practiced were largely the same as well.

Process for Analysis

After I was finished gathering phenomenological material, I began to write. Because I practice writing as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), the crafting of my dissertation has gone hand in hand with my analysis: writing itself is how I think. In *Crafting Phenomenological Research,* Vagle (2025) describes the process for exploring, or analyzing, the post-intentional phenomenon by working the three parts of the PIP Triangle: Phenomenological Material, Thinking with Theory, and Post-Reflexions. Vagle (2025) says:

> I think the triangle process is something that is, indeed, worked. It is a process that gets worked and re-worked. It is not linear. It is circular. It is continuous. It starts and stops. It takes detours. And even though we need to stop at some point, the working of the PIP triangle is never done. This is significant. It requires a willingness to let go of a recipe, or map, or guide. It also requires a spaciousness

by which to hold and engage the triangle—a respect and patience for unfolding. (p. 180)

In addition to working the PIP Triangle and trusting the ways that thought and analysis were provoked during that process, I drew from elements of Vagle's Five-Component Approach, which was developed prior to the emergence of the PIP Triangle and is slightly more connected to traditional qualitative methodologies. I found that moving between both of these approaches (the PIP Triangle and the Five-Component Approach) provided me the balance I needed of fluidity and structure.

Component #4 of Vagle's (2025) Five-Component Approach connects to the PIP Triangle in that it provides a 3-part guidance for how to explore the post-intentional phenomenon using theory, phenomenological material, and post-reflexions. Part one of this process is to deconstruct the whole of the phenomenological material through one round of careful line-by-line reading. Deconstructing the whole connects with the "whole-part-whole" analysis common in descriptive, interpretive, and reflective lifeworld approaches to phenomenology, but moves the analytic process along more swiftly toward a layered of analysis of phenomenological material along with theory and post-reflexions. According to Vagle (2025), the most useful way to carry out this part of the process is to operationalize Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophical idea of lines of flight, lines that "resist the tying down of lived experience and knowledge" (Vagle, 2025, p. 170). Vagle emphasizes the importance of noticing and naming the ways our bodies and emotions respond during this process, which connects circularly and naturally to the study's theoretical concept of affect (Ahmed, 2006, 2010, 2014) and which became a

significant touch-point for me as I read, thought, analyzed, and wrote. Actively looking for the ways that knowledge "took off" as I read through my phenomenological material and remaining open to what was provoked and produced for me as the researcher led to tangible shifts, including reworking (yet again) the theoretical concepts I planned to think with as I continued through the process.

Part two of the analytic process is thinking with theory. Following Jackson and Mazzei (2023), I plugged in theoretical concepts in a layered process. First, I thought with Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) *affect* and *orientation* and Simpson's (2011, 2017) *presencing* to open up the first part of my research question—how pleasure was provoked and produced for my students in and through their literacy experiences. Then, I thought with brown's (2019) *pleasure activism*, Hersey's (2022) *resistance*, and Melamed's (2011) *neoliberal multiculturalism* to explore what pleasure provokes and produces in the context of the university. Some of these were theories I expected I might take up during analysis, and others came to me during the process itself as theories I needed to explore in order to "extend, learn more, and open up the phenomenon in important ways" (Vagle, 2025, p. 172). Knowing there were no right or wrong answers, I had, as Vagle has said, to trust myself. These theories are not the only ones that could have been plugged in to explore the phenomenon, but they were the ones I felt the strongest urge to follow.

Part three of the analytic process is to analyze post-reflexions, the final point of the PIP Triangle. I did this in a similar manner as my other phenomenological material in terms of following lines of flight and looking for ways that my own knowledge "took off." Once I got started with each part of the PIP Triangle, the process became iterative

and entangled (Vagle, 2025, p. 173). Reading a piece of phenomenological material—a transcript excerpt from an interview, for example—often lead me to re-reading the post-reflexive journal I wrote after that same interview or on a related subject and then returning to the theoretical concept or concepts that connect all three. It felt important not that I be consistent with a specific method or pattern, but rather that I went with what made sense to me *as* I wrote and crafted the phenomenological text itself.

Writing as Inquiry. Throughout this dissertation I also used reading and writing as inquiry (Augustine, 2014; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) as methods of analysis. As I took up phenomenological material, theory, and post-reflexions, "writing and reading work[ed] in tandem as methods of analysis" (Augustine, 2014, p. 751). Moving cyclically and circularly between reading and writing allowed for rhizomatic work (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) in which I was able to make "accidental and fortuitous connections" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) I would not have been able to otherwise. For me, writing is thinking. The affective experience of writing without a concrete road map—of following lines of flight and letting the process itself shape how I came to know—was both exhilarating and deeply grounding.

PIP Triangle Point 2: Thinking with Theory

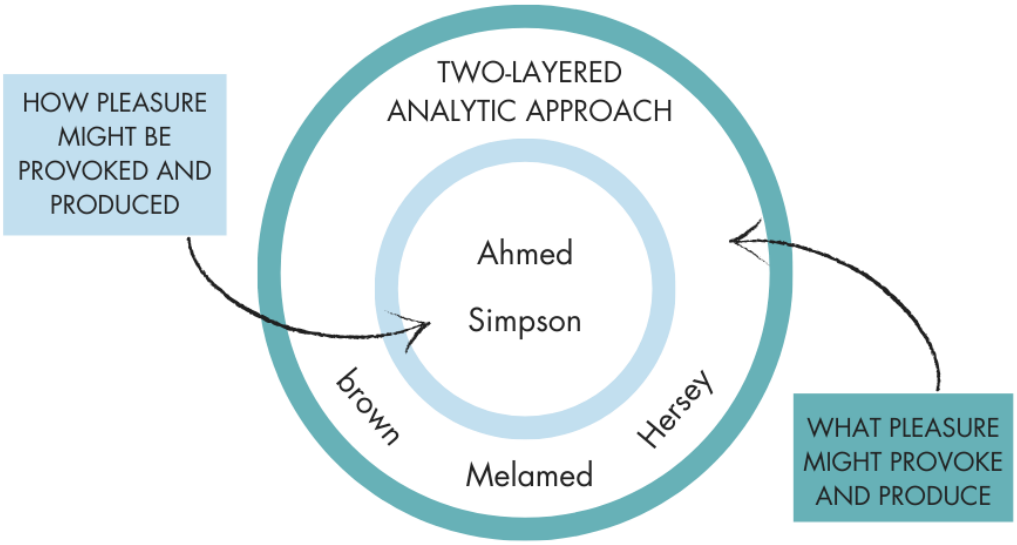
This section provides an introduction to the theoretical concepts I thought with throughout this dissertation. During my preliminary examinations and dissertation proposal, I wrote about theories I anticipated *might be* provoked when I gathered phenomenological material: adrienne maree brown's (2019) *pleasure activism*, Sara Ahmed's (2010, 2014) *affect*, Tricia Hersey's (2022) *resistance*, and Jodi Melamed's

(2011) *neoliberal multiculturalism*. As noted above, working the PIP Triangle and moving through the process of gathering phenomenological material, analyzing, and writing led me to realize that I needed additional theories to think with to more fully explore how the phenomenon was taking shape. The two additional theoretical concepts I think with in this dissertation are Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2011, 2017) *presencing* and Sara Ahmed's (2006) *orientation*. The latter I take up not as a stand-alone concept but considered together with *affect* to open up a more layered exploration of the ways pleasure was provoked and produced throughout my study.

In a testament to the truly circular and interactive nature of working the PIP Triangle, it was thinking with theory and post-reflexing that led me to realize I needed to add to my research question to more fully capture what I was hoping to explore with the phenomenon. This additional question—asking not just how pleasure might be provoked and produced, but also what that pleasure might provoke and produce—led me to a two-part analytical structure, where I take up Ahmed (2006, 2010, 2014) and Simpson's (2011, 2017) theoretical concepts to explore the first part of my research question, and brown (2019), Hersey (2022), and Melamed's (2011) theoretical concepts to explore the second. I visualize this as a two-layered, nested approach to analysis (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Two-layered Analytic Approach



Chapters 4 and 5 employ this analytic approach, but I share it now to serve as a conceptual anchor for the next section, where I write about the theories themselves. In *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research,* Jackson and Mazzei (2023) structure the plugging in of various theoretical concepts by first briefly describing the theory itself and then plugging it into their performative accounts. I now follow that structure and provide an overview of the theoretical concepts I think with in this dissertation. In my analysis chapters I use the layered approach to plug these theories into the study's phenomenological material and post-reflexions.

Layer 1: Why Ahmed?

Sara Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) writings on affect and emotion[14] help me to think about what bodies bring to the conversation about pleasure—how bodies matter. When I hear or say the word pleasure, the first thing that comes to me is what I would call an affect, a feeling, a sensation. This sensation is located in my gut and in my chest; it's both thrilling and calm. There's a sensuality to it, a slowness. Ahmed's affect allows me to think about pleasure not just in my head but in my body, too—where pleasure begins.

Ahmed (2006, 2010, 2014) connects affect to objects, recognizing that when we are moved by something, or experience pleasure from something, there is an *object* there; when we think of pleasure we think of that thing. Even if we imagine pleasure as a "feeling state" or a "form of consciousness", to experience pleasure is to recognize that the feeling "starts from somewhere other than the subject who may use the word to describe a situation" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 29). Pleasure, like the happiness that Ahmed (2010) explored in "Happy Objects," functions as a "promise that directs us toward certain objects, which then circulate as social goods" (p. 29). I think about the various

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[14] What is affect? And how is it different from emotion? Unlike some scholars who have taken care to separate affect from sensations such as emotions and feelings (e.g., Jackson & Mazzei, 2023; Manning, 2013; Massumi, 2002; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010), Ahmed (2014) understands affect and emotion like egg whites and egg yolk: just because "we *can* separate them does not mean they *are* separate" (p. 215). In the Afterword to the second edition of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Ahmed (2014) discusses her rhetorical purpose and audience and explains that she primarily used the word "emotion" in the text because she was placing her work within the scholarly conversation of other feminist theorists thinking about emotion, and "because emotion is the term used in everyday life to describe what I wanted to give an account of" (p. 207). My own rhetorical purpose is slightly different; I *do* want to join the conversation of those discussing affect, as the term is much more common in academic and public discourse in 2025 than it was in 2004 (the original publication date of Ahmed's text). My conception of affect deliberately includes emotions, feelings, and other sensations.

objects I am directed toward as pleasure objects—books, coffee, ice cream, the blank page, spaces where I am alone or with one or two others I love.

These objects accumulate positive affective value as they are passed around, and one way to understand this affective value is by thinking of affect as "sticky." Emotions, feelings, impressions, and sensations that move through the circulation of objects make those objects "sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 11). Thinking about the literacy objects that circulate in Writing 101 as "sticky" with affect makes sense to me. The mentor texts that we read, for example, are full of affect, and the transactional nature of reading (Rosenblatt, 1995) means that affect can move from text to reader and back again. In other words, readers can "catch" the "sticky" emotions of a text, internalizing and appropriating those emotions as they read. Additionally, students' multimodal writing become objects sticky with affect, and those objects are circulated throughout the semester. Thinking of our bodies themselves as objects "sticky" with affect adds another layer of understanding and acknowledgement that the *ways* of interaction, the *doing* of learning and our pedagogical time together in the classroom impacts affectual experiences of pleasure (and other emotions) as well.

Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) understanding of affect is phenomenological. Continuing her exploration of orientation in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Ahmed (2010) has argued that to be affected *in a good way* involves an orientation toward something as *being good*. Orientations "register the proximity of objects, as well as shape what is proximate to the body" (p. 32). Pleasure, like happiness, can "therefore be described as *intentional* in the phenomenological sense (directed toward objects), as well

as being *affective* (contact with objects)" (p. 32). Connecting these ideas, pleasure is "an orientation toward the objects we come into contact with. We move toward and away from objects through how we are affected by them" (p. 32). This idea reminds me of student choice within Writing 101 course design and my own pedagogy, and how students' freedom of intentionality—their ability to direct themselves toward objects, be they texts, research questions, various mediums of production, or other classmates—makes space for a pleasurable affective contact with those objects.

Ahmed (2010) continues to add complexity to affect by arguing that experiencing an object as being affective is to be directed not just toward the object but also to whatever is around that object, which includes what is behind it, the "conditions of its arrival" (p. 33). An object can be affective by virtue of its location or the timing of its appearance, as well as whatever is going on around the object—in other words, its context. To me this connects to the non-essentialized nature of phenomenon within PIP, in this case the understanding that pleasure can never be experienced or felt by two people in the same way, or even by the same person consistently throughout time, because the "conditions of its arrival" will always be distinct and ever-shifting. Additionally, Ahmed (2010) explains that our bodies themselves do not arrive in neutral but are "always in some way or another moody" (p. 36). Therefore, "what we will receive as an impression," (p. 36) or what we experience as pleasure, will depend on our affective situation. I feel this deeply as an educator who has facilitated many different learning spaces. According to Ahmed (2010) "the pedagogic encounter as full of angles" (p. 37)—full of affect. It strikes me that if bodies don't arrive in classroom and learning spaces in

neutral, neither do they arrive in full equity or liberation; this central truth cannot be neglected in any exploration of the affectual experience of pleasure within those spaces. Ultimately, Ahmed's theoretical concepts of affect and orientation provide multiple ways for me to think through how objects, bodies, contexts, and histories impact experiences of pleasure in the literacy classroom.

Layer 1: Why Simpson?

I first encountered Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2011, 2017) theory of *presencing* in a Culture and Teaching seminar[15] in my second year of graduate coursework. During that semester I was also taking a critical ethnography course and felt deep ambiguity about the tenets and goals of critical pedagogy. The educational theory through which my life as a teacher was born and developed had begun to feel unattainable. Elizabeth Ellsworth's (1989) critiques of critical pedagogy, that its key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices are "repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination" (p. 298), were resonating deeply. While I still believed in and tried to practice the four dimensions of critical literacy as put forth by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluey (2002)—"(1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice" (p. 382)—I could not escape feelings that those of us in this effort were futilely working to reach a destination that was, in truth, a mirage.

[15] Culture and Teaching is one of the disciplinary focus areas within the Curriculum & Instruction department at my university and served as my secondary area of study after Literacy Education.

There were fallacies in this line of thinking, however, that reading Simpson's (2017) *As We Have Always Done* helped me begin to understand. First, it placed progress along a continuum, assuming the temporal binary of present as *now* and future as *someday*. In this continuum, injustice is always located *here*, and justice is located as a concrete goal located some distance away. Second, it assumed that the effort, the *how*, is only valuable in as much as it serves the results, the *what*. The goal of full social justice, not the process, is what mattered. Finally, it conflated incommensurability with impossibility, which are concepts that I originally considered synonymous but was starting to understand are not, not necessarily. I had been sitting with Tuck and Yang's (2012) ethic of incommensurability, and while it's vital to understand that their argument is rooted in the specific project of decolonization, their explanation that "there is so much that is incommensurable, so many overlaps that can't be figured, that cannot be resolved" (p. 31) spoke to my feelings of discomfort and doubt about the distinct and separate project of critical social justice as well. At my most honest, I didn't—and still don't—see a "change in the order of the world" (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 31) happening within my lifetime, and yet I was also learning that incommensurability is not stagnant or shallow and does not presuppose futility. What, I wondered, lies at the center of that which is incommensurable?

Reading Simpson's (2011, 2017) work cracked open my understanding of progress and purpose, not answering any of my questions about the feasibility of social justice goals but instead challenging me to reframe the questions themselves. Simpson

centralizes internal, embodied work in the creation of a Nishnaabeg[16] presence and present. Her theory does not deny that her goals require struggle, sacrifice, and fight, but it shifts the transformation she seeks from a distant future to an embodied present. According to Simpson (2017), "*how* we live, *how* we organize, *how* we engage in the world—the process—not only frames the outcome, it is the transformation. *How* molds and then gives birth to the present. The *how* changes us. *How* is the theoretical intervention" (p. 19, emphasis in original). The way to create a different future is to live a different present. Importantly, this presence is rooted in what Simpson calls Nishnaabeg resurgence. In *Dancing on our Turtle's Back,* Simpson (2011) describes this resurgence as a flourishment of the Indigenous inside and a reclamation of Indigenous processes, "since according to our traditions, the processes of engagement highly influence the outcome of the engagement itself" (p. 17).

Simpson's (2011, 2017) theory of presencing wasn't included in my initial thinking and proposal for this dissertation study. I thought other theories would be more relevant. Despite this, it was Simpson's work that I thought of during and after every conversation I had with my study participants. The *act of writing* was central to so many of their experiences of pleasure. I knew after the interviews were complete that I had to return to Simpson and include her ideas in my phenomenological exploration. Presencing centers kinetic *doing*, which is not just praxis; it also "generates and animates theory within Indigenous contexts, and it is the crucial intellectual mode for generating knowledge. Theory and praxis, story and practice are interdependent, cogenerators of

[16] Nishnaabeg is an alternative spelling and pronunciation of Anishinaabe.

knowledge. Practices are politics. Processes are governance. Doing produces more knowledge" (Simpson, 2017, p. 20). It was immediately clear to me that *doing* was an essential aspect of my participants' literacy pleasures. This makes sense to me; doing produces knowledge for me, too. Thinking with Simpson's presencing offers opportunities to center the embodied aspects of reading, writing, and communicating.

Layer 2: Why Melamed?

Jodi Melamed's (2011) theory of neoliberal multiculturalism impacted me significantly when I first read it during the final year of my graduate coursework and continues to shape how I conceptualize literacy, higher education, and society at large. Unlike Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) affect and Simpson's (2011, 2017) presencing, which represent to me a positive orientation and desire-based (Tuck, 2009, 2010) *thinking with*, Melamed's neoliberal multiculturalism represents the reality of the context in which we are doing this work. Like Simpson, Melamed's theory was not a part of my preliminary thinking for this dissertation. Over the course of the study, however, it became clear that I needed a theory to think with that could speak to the complex container that surrounds my participants' literacy pleasures. brown's (2019) pleasure activism is not just about pleasure, after all, but is about "the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy" (p. 13). I needed a theory to think with that could articulate that oppression, and through which I might be able to see and name more clearly pleasure's disruptive possibilities.

In *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism,* Melamed (2011) describes three eras of official antiracisms within modern U.S. history: race liberalism (mid-1940s to 1960s), liberal multiculturalism (1980s to 1990s), and neoliberal multiculturalism (2000s and on). Melamed grounds her portrayal of these eras in a complex historical account of a post-World War II racial break, where in order to convince the world that it was no longer on the side of white supremacy, the U.S. adopted official antiracisms. These antiracisms, most recently neoliberal multiculturalism, have failed to accomplish any real radical or material antiracism. Instead, they have "fatally limited the possibility of overcoming racism to the mechanisms of U.S.-led global capitalism, even as they have enabled new kinds of normalizing and rationalizing violences" (Melamed, 2011, p. xi). In other words, the U.S.'s formalization of antiracism within official structures and systems—including capitalism—has made the real goals of antiracism impossible to achieve.

Melamed (2011) maps literary discourse onto her examination of official antiracisms to drive home the point that literature and literary studies in academia have been key disseminators of these antiracisms. The goal of racial liberalism, the first official antiracism, was to "remake U.S. culture as a whole so that white Americans would lose their habit of prejudice and African Americans would be seen as culturally embodying the U.S. nation" (Melamed, 2011, p. 22). It defined racism wholly as an internal, prejudicial belief system, as opposed to a material, political, or economic system; therefore, the solution was to transform white Americans' attitudes. It did so through state-sanctioned race novels. I was surprised to learn that some of the most well-

known texts of the time—those by James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Harper Lee—were all intentionally published as race novels through support from philanthropic and government institutions proactively seeking to disseminate books that would prove the U.S.'s racial progress. These novels "transformed white liberal attitudes concerning blackness through narrative structures that placed whites as heroic characters that championed civil rights by appealing to white desires for social justice" (Grinage, 2020, p. 11). They allowed—and continue to allow—white Americans to consider an affective experience gained through an act of reading to be equal to that of a material action required for social change.

Liberal multiculturalism and neoliberal multiculturalism have continued the work that began in the racial liberalism era, increasing the commodification of novels as stand-ins for real people. As with race novels, liberal multiculturalism identified literature as a means for information retrieval of the "other". However, whereas the identity of the author of race novels was secondary for racial liberalism, "for liberal multiculturalism the author's racialized identity was of utmost importance because information retrieval for liberal multiculturalism was tied to ideologemes of *representativeness*, *authenticity*, and *gaining voice*" (Melamed, 2011, p. 36, emphasis in original). These stories stayed within the bounds of a master narrative about the civil rights movement and overall assimilation into U.S. mainstream (white) culture. According to Melamed (2011), neoliberal-multicultural discourse has abstracted race itself from race dialogue, resulting in symbolic and ubiquitous discussions of difference and diversity. She focuses on U.S. universities

as key racializing institutions in neoliberal multiculturalism with a strong critique of literary studies, which

> has built upon the previous functions that racial-liberal and liberal-multicultural orders ascribed to literary texts, including assumptions about the transparency of literature, the close and intimate access it offers to racialized others, its authenticity and representativeness, and its power to transform attitudes in a way that guarantees social progress. The idea that literature has something to do with antiracism and being a good person has entered into the self-care of elites, who have learned to see themselves as part of a multinational group of enlightened multicultural global citizens. (Melamed, 2011, p. 45)

I take up Melamed's theory in this dissertation as both a context for contemporary U.S. universities and because I think that the affective *feeling as substitute for change* she has described is very present in teaching and learning. Melamed's critique of elite self-care connects directly with pleasure and brings important complexity to this inquiry. I wonder how pleasure might sustain neoliberal multiculturalism at work at the university, and I wonder how it also might disrupt it. I wonder how it might be doing both at the same time.

Layer 2: Why brown?

Ahhhh, adrienne maree brown. A deep sigh is what I feel when I think of brown (2019) and her work, and I think she would approve. brown's book *Pleasure Activism* is one of the provocations that brought me to wanting to engage with pleasure as a phenomenon. I first encountered brown many years ago, not through her books but

through the podcast that she co-hosts with her sister Autumn Brown: "How to Survive the End of the World". Along with *Pleasure Activism* (2019), brown has published *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017) and is the co-editor of *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (2015). Both of these previous texts have impacted how I teach, think, imagine, and show up in the world; it feels fitting that brown's ideas continue to work on me through this project.

What is pleasure activism? brown (2019) breaks down her concept by first defining pleasure—"a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment"— then activism—"efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society" (p. 13). Pleasure activism is therefore "the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy" (p. 13). This double concept is essential—not simply pleasure for pleasure's sake, but pleasure as a reclamation. brown goes on to say that pleasure activism asserts that everyone needs and deserves pleasure, and we must prioritize the pleasure of those most impacted by oppression. Pleasure activists "seek to understand and learn from the politics and power dynamics inside of everything that makes us feel good," and "believe that by tapping into the potential goodness in each of us we can generate justice and liberation, growing a healing abundance where we have been socialized to believe only scarcity exists" (p. 13). Ultimately, brown (2019) asserts, pleasure activism is about "learning to make justice and liberation the most pleasurable experiences we can have on this planet" (p. 13).

It is important to note that brown (2019) is not calling for a global bacchanal. Pleasure activism is not about excess, but about learning "what it means to be satisfiable, to generate, from within and from between us, an abundance from which we can all have enough" (p. 15). brown explains that part of the reason so few of us have a healthy relationship with pleasure is because a small minority has hoarded the excesses of resources, "creating a false scarcity and then trying to sell us joy, sell us back to ourselves" (p. 15). I can think of so many examples of the ways in which our capitalist society tries to sell us back to ourselves, and rarely is it fulfilling. Connecting to some of the ideas she explores in *Emergent Strategy*, which focuses on what nature teaches us about change, brown explains that pleasure is not one of the spoils of capitalism but is instead what "our bodies, our human systems, are structured for; it is the aliveness and awakening, the gratitude and humility, the joy and celebration of being miraculous" (p. 16). Instead of thinking about moderation and how it limits or controls, brown encourages us to stay mindful of our relationship to *enough*.

In *Pleasure Activism,* brown (2019) traces her pleasure lineage, naming her grandmother, Octavia Butler, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, Joan Morgan, and Ingrid LaFleur. Following the theoretical lines of these thinkers, writers, artists, and activists reveals the ways in which Black radical feminism, Afrofuturism, movement organizing, and speculative imagination shape her conception of pleasure activism. In naming Octavia Butler, brown describes not just the ideas present in Butler's fiction but also "the sheer pleasure I get reading and re-reading Butler and other science fiction writers, stretching my imagination out beyond the horizon" (p. 22). This privileging of

the embodied experience is evident throughout the text—it's not just the ideas, it's how the ideas are *felt*.

Pleasure activism deeply informs my understanding of pleasure as a phenomenon. Personally, brown's pleasure activism gives me language to understand that experiences of pleasure within—and despite—the academy can be part of the work *I* do to reclaim my "whole, happy, and satisfiable" self in a system that is not built to nurture. This goes beyond pleasure for pleasure's sake, or empty discourses of "self-care," and toward something much larger, much more transformative. Similarly, as explored in the literature review, discourses around students' experiences of pleasure in literacy experiences have often centered on pleasure *as a means to* success, better grades, the development of certain skills, or other achievements within the neoliberal education system (e.g. Quigley, 2020). Literature that values literacy pleasure more holistically (e.g. Weinstein, 2006; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016; Young & Ferguson, 2021) could go further to include analysis of the systemic dynamics that impact various peoples' access to pleasure, or conversation about the ways in which pleasure can disrupt oppression and participate in liberatory justice work. Thinking with brown's (2019) pleasure activism opens up these possibilities.

Layer 2: Why Hersey?

Tricia Hersey's (2022) understanding of resistance places my conception of pleasure within the larger conversation of theoretical, theological, and bodily resistance to capitalism and white supremacy. Hersey's commitment to rest as a form of resistance finds root in her everyday experiences of "being part of the machine-level pace of our

culture and surviving the trauma of the terror of poverty, exhaustion, white supremacy, and capitalism" (p. 3). Hersey draws from her academic background of Black liberation theology, womanism, somatics, and cultural trauma to call for a global movement of resistance to white supremacy and capitalism through a reclamation of rest and a divestment of grind culture. I first encountered Hersey's work through her organization *The Nap Ministry*, the idea of which came to her when she was suffering from exhaustion in her own graduate school program; academia, she claims, is the headquarters for grind culture, and I do not disagree. Yet Hersey's work is far deeper than encouraging people to take naps, although the physicality of rest is central to her argument. Hersey explains:

> Many have purposely ignored the social justice and political thread that runs through. It can be easier to believe resting is simply about retiring to your bed when you are tired instead of beginning the messy process of deconstructing your own beliefs and behaviors that are aligned with white supremacy and capitalism. (p. 122)

While Hersey's focus is on rest, I see my inquiry around pleasure mapping onto her framework with ease. Many of Hersey's examples of what it can look like to rest are also examples of what it might look like to experience pleasure: closing your eyes for ten minutes, taking a long shower, slow dancing with yourself to slow music, sipping warm tea (p. 85). In other words, throughout Hersey's (2022) *Rest is Resistance*, I am able to replace the word "rest" with "pleasure" to better understand the theoretical and practical connections between pleasure, healing, and thriving.

Hersey's (2022) analysis of the corrosive and destructive elements of official forms of schooling also speaks to how I see pleasure as a form of resistance in the classroom. As Hersey describes:

> The stress, anxiety, overloaded curriculum, and pressure we normalize in public schools and higher education are toxic and dangerous for everyone involved, but particularly toxic for young children and young adults who are still developing a sense of self. They are exposed to the lie that their worth is determined by how much they can accomplish constantly and it's reaffirmed and rewarded when they push their bodies to the limit to do well in classes. Many also begin to pour themselves into the life of perfectionism, which is a function of white supremacy. We internalize the toxic messages received from the culture and begin to hate ourselves unless we are accomplishing a task. We seek external validation from a violent system void of love. Dreaming and creating the space to dream is the remedy and the cure. (p. 117)

Focusing on pleasure, facilitating possibilities of pleasure, honoring the affectual experience of literacy learning as opposed to only the end product of external achievement—all of this makes sense to me within Hersey's resistance framework. I am curious about the ways in which pleasure might disrupt some of these toxic elements of higher education and create sites of possibility for students to experience a different way of learning and being. At a time when mental health needs of both students and educators are higher than I have ever heard or experienced, I can't help but think this kind of resistance is essential even for survival.

Like brown (2019), Hersey (2022) names imagination as central to resistance work and a tool of our greatest liberation (p. 159). Hersey tells the story of an after-school class she taught in her home of Atlanta, GA, where students read poetry and wrote poems that mapped the journey of their lives. Week after week they shared "breathtakingly violent and heartbreaking poems…describing the horror of their lives" (p. 176). While she was grateful for the trust and safety these students felt in sharing their stories, Hersey realized "there was no balance, no hope, and no invention for what could be" (p 176). She turned to science fiction, Afrofuturism, Octavia Butler, even the newly released *Black Panther*, to help the students imagine a future where all current problems are solved. The key to me is what Afrofuturism teaches—that that future is *now* (p. 177). Hersey argues that rest work "must be planted deeply in the sea of imagination" (p. 177), and I think the same is true for how I conceive of pleasure. Hersey's framework is essential to me in its unwavering acknowledgment of the historical and contemporary impacts of white supremacy and capitalism on our bodies and souls, but also because she offers a way out. "Resistance is a spiritual practice and a practical map," Hersey teaches. "We learn how to make a way by building as we go" (p. 141).

PIP Triangle Point 3: Post-Reflexions

In some forms of phenomenology, a researcher attempts to bracket (Giorgi, 2009) or bridle (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008) their subjectivity in order to achieve a more "pure" understanding of a phenomenon. In PIP, the researcher does not set aside prior knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs about the phenomenon, but instead explores how those play a part in producing the phenomenon. As Simpson (2017) teaches, "my

body and my life are part of my research, and I use this knowledge to critique and analyze. I will not separate this from my engagement…because in my life these things are not compartmentalized" (p. 31). Post-reflexing leans into the connections between researcher and research and "asks the post-intentional phenomenologist to try to *see what frames their seeing*—to try to locate and name their assumptions of what is normal and what surprises them" (Vagle, 2025, p. 167). It is an ongoing process that happens before, during, and after phenomenological material is gathered, and then the post-reflexions themselves become phenomenological material in turn.

This section includes my initial post-reflexion statement, written at the start of my study in the proposal stage. In this initial reflexion I described not only elements of my subjectivity and my role as a researcher but also where I was beginning to try to "see what frames my seeing" in relation to the phenomenon. The section ends with the post-reflexion plan I followed for the duration of the study.

Initial Post-Reflexion Statement

> *My interest in pleasure in the context of undergraduate's literacy experiences is rooted in my belief that learning is a practice of liberation and freedom (Freire, 2018; hooks, 1994; Shalaby, 2017). As a white, cisgender, middle-class woman, my engagement with liberatory praxis is never neutral—rather, it is complex, entangled with my own complicity in systems that have harmed and continue to harm. My positionality is not in my past; it continues to inform my perspectives, questions, interpretations, and choices. There is no escaping my own subjectivity. I also bring to my subjectivity my experiences with*

multiple chronic illnesses, motherhood, and raising joyful, neurodivergent children.

Additionally, while I believe learning itself to be liberatory, the systems within which learning happens—including schools and universities—are not always or often so. I am inspired by those working and writing within spaces of abolition (e.g., Alexander, 2022; Davis et al., 2022; Jefferson, 2023; Kaba, 2021; Meiners, 2011; Rodríguez, 2010) in order to dream and enact a different present and future, not just for schooling but, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore says, for "everything" (Barnard Center for Research on Women, 2018). Like some of the theorists I explored [in my preliminary exam], speculative imagination—often in the form of fiction, but not only so—helps me to explore what Crawley (2014, 2016) calls "otherwise possibilities" to the common sense (Gramsci, 1971) of the everyday. According to Crawley (2016):

> *Otherwise, as word—otherwise possibilities, as phrase—announces the fact of infinite alternatives to what* is. *And what* is *is about being, about existence, about ontology. But if infinite alternatives exist, if otherwise possibility is a resource that is never exhausted, what* is*, what exists, is but one of many. (p. 2, emphasis in original)*

This naming of multiple, otherwise possibilities for teaching, learning, and living connects theoretically and methodologically with PIP, as post-intentional phenomenologists are encouraged to "make every effort to identify and boldly follow possible lines of flight toward something either not-yet-discovered or

unknown" (Vagle, 2018, p. 136). My engagement with pleasure here and in future research is grounded in these understandings of myself and my orientations.

Post-Reflexing Throughout the Dissertation Study

Throughout my study I kept a digital post-reflexion journal, stored in the university's Google Drive system. While I have kept hand-written journals at times in my life and love when I'm able to return to that mode of record-keeping, I have to admit that I work and think digitally these days. Keeping a digital journal helped me stay organized and record reflexions efficiently.

My goal was to write entries in my post-reflexion journal throughout the research and analysis phases of my study, recording at least one entry per week if not more. I wrote entries after each semi-structured interview (in addition to analytic memos), following Vagle's (2025) advice to "document, wonder about, and question our connection/disconnections, assumptions of what we take to be normal, bottom lines, and moments we are shocked" (p. 168). While each conversation was interesting and impactful in various ways, there were a handful that left me feeling thrilled and energized with my brain pinging about from thought to thought and theory to theory. These conversations immediately stood out as ones I couldn't wait to write about, and I felt immensely grateful for the opportunity to listen to and learn from these students.

I also wrote entries throughout the dissertation analysis and crafting process, though not as many or as often as I had originally planned. Looking back, the flow and scope of my post-reflexions follow the ups and downs of this process. When I was energized and engaged, I wrote more. When I felt disenchanted, frustrated, unsure, or

stuck, more time went by between entries. That said, the thoughts and feelings I captured played a significant role in my layered analysis and how I came to think about pleasure, both the pleasure of my participants in and through their literacy experiences—and my own.

Former Writing as Post-Reflexions. In an unexpected move, I found myself returning often to my previous writing about the theories I think with in this dissertation, the papers I wrote during my coursework as I first used writing as inquiry to think through affect, presencing, and neoliberal multiculturalism. I decided to include these as post-reflexions of sorts, not because I wrote them with that explicit purpose and frame of mind, but because they capture my thoughts, reactions, and feelings about the theories I think with now at that initial encounter. I can trace the roots of the meaning I find in these theories to that initial reading and writing; in many ways they have been "sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 11) for me since that time.

Crafting the Text

Crafting the phenomenological text is equally important as gathering phenomenological material and analysis in the research process. In PIP the phenomenologist has the freedom to craft a text whose shape and structure reflects the study's provocations and productions (Vagle, 2025). Though these concepts "cannot be tied down very well" (Vagle, 2025, p. 174), Vagle describes provocations as intense catalysts and productions as the ongoing ways in which the phenomena is shaped over time. I have framed chapters four and five around the ways that pleasure was provoked

and produced for and with study participants, and chapter six around what that pleasure provokes and produces in the context of higher education. The writing process has been truly iterative, with analysis shaping and re-shaping my study all the way through.

The writing of this text has been especially significant because I am writing about writing. Not only that, I am writing about the *pleasure* of writing. While not every moment at the keyboard has been easy or fun, I have been able to trust and lean into the praxis of writing as inquiry, learning and re-learning that "writing *is* thinking, writing *is* analysis, writing *is* indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 967). Every time I open up this computer, I am surprised and buoyed by what develops. My trust that forward motion will bring me to the next landing place is what allowed me to move into analysis with both wonder—as in I wonder what I will learn!—and embodied, grounded joy.

Introduction to Chapters 4 and 5: How Might Pleasure Be Provoked and Produced?

In the next two chapters I explore the first part of my research question—*how might pleasure be provoked and produced for undergraduates in and through their literacy experiences?*—by thinking with Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) affect and Simpson's (2011, 2017) presencing in the first part of my layered analysis.[17] As I work the PIP Triangle, I bring phenomenological material and my post-reflexions into conversation with the theoretical concepts. In PIP, the phenomenon is the unit of analysis, and my goal here is to put words to some of the multiple and varied ways pleasure takes shape. Paying attention to and following lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Vagle, 2025) over the course of my study led me to understanding affect and presencing as two of the strongest productions of pleasure students named. As I explore each of these productions across the whole of my participants and the phenomenological material, I also spend time with specific provocations—stories students told about their experiences of pleasure and my own self-reflexions—which serve to "open up" the productions and capture them with words, even for a brief moment in time.

[17] See Figure 6 in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4: Thinking with Affect

> I do not assume there is something called affect that stands apart or has autonomy, as if it corresponds to an object in the world, or even that there is something called affect that can be shared as an object of study. Instead, I would begin with the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 30)

Listening to each of my 12 study participants share about their provocations and productions of pleasure in Writing 101 confirmed something I've known to be true since my first year as a 6th grade English Language Arts teacher: how students feel in classroom spaces matters. Over and over again, participants spoke about the role that the affective aspects of the course played in the ways pleasure took shape for them. "Your class was so much different than all the other classes I had that semester," Lauren[18] shared:

> For example, I think yours was the only one where I wasn't in a big lecture full of hundreds of kids. My math was a big lecture, my physics was a big lecture, we didn't meet in person except for a big discussion section. So it was like, at the end of the day, your class felt more like high school, and in a good way, where you're getting to know everyone else. And I know you as, like, a person now…[which] makes me feel more like a person.

[18] This and all participant names are pseudonyms.

In this first exploration of how pleasure is provoked and produced I think with Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) *affect*. The becoming-question (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023) that emerged during analysis and shapes this section is: ***How do affect's "sticky" objects circulate to provoke and produce pleasure?*** What I learned from talking with study participants was not just what they identified as feeling "sticky" with pleasure, but also how those sticky things—what Ahmed refers to as objects—circulated between bodies and passed from one person to another. Through reading and re-reading my phenomenological material and post-reflexions, I identified two "sticky objects" that I explore further in this analysis as productions of affective pleasure: people (each other) and our orientations.

Each Other

> There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it.
>
> —adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*

I vividly remember the first class I taught of Writing 101, in fall of 2022. It was a Tuesday morning; my first of three course sections was held on the top floor of a stately brick building on the university campus, with big eastern-facing windows that let the sun in. I remember feeling nervous—I had taught at the university for three years already, but this was my first in-person course after the COVID-19 pandemic and after returning to campus from a year of local school district-level literacy leadership. I was also excited—

first days of class always hold such potential. You never know who is going to be there, how various personalities will mix, and if and how community will be forged.

My study participant Christopher was a student in that course section and remembers that first day too. “I moved here from 18 hours away,” he recounted to me:

> I didn’t know anyone, like it was just really daunting, to step into a lecture classroom where nobody knows anybody and like, sit in a random seat with who knows who, you know? But I want to say this class was the first class that I had—

“I think it was,” I confirmed, “I remember because it was a Tuesday, and I asked, is this anyone’s first college class? And almost everyone responded—” “Me!,” Christopher laughed. “So yeah,” he continued,

> starting freshman year was scary, because like, not knowing anyone. And I liked how the class wasn't the usual lecture setting, if that makes sense. It’s not like you sit there and you just take notes on what the professor says, and then that's the end of the class, for the whole hour and 15 minutes, or whatever. I liked how we utilized peer review. In class, we used time to like, discuss with different people and read their ideas, but then also, like, give them feedback on it. And it almost made us like a little community in a sense, where we felt free to share our ideas and not feel compelled to, like, prove anything to you or anybody else.

The course community and students’ relationships with each other was a consistent topic threaded throughout my conversations with study participants as they described how pleasure took shape for them. As Lauren and Christopher referenced, two significant

contributors to that sense of community were the small class size[19] and the course's emphasis on writing groups and peer feedback.

These structures allowed for opportunities to form relationships that were not present in many other participants' courses. In a post-reflexion from October 13, 2023, I capture my reaction to this consistent thread:

> *Everyone has mentioned the impact of a welcoming, safe, supportive environment, both pedagogically from me and in the relationships they build with other students. I wonder if there's a theory that gets to this. Maybe affect will still work? The affectual experience of feeling safe and welcome impacts pleasure so much. But also, I wonder if there's anything more specific about community and safety. Safe to be themselves, to risk more in their writing, to show up honestly. I think I want to explore more here.*

This post-reflexion also captures the iterative and flexible nature of thinking with theory, in that I was actively considering which theoretical concept would best help me open up these thoughts on community and relationship. I wondered if Ahmed's (2006, 2010, 2014) affect would still work here, and in a subsequent post-reflexion thought about returning to another formative text of mine, bell hooks' (2004) *Teaching Community.* However, spending time with Ahmed's writing confirmed that hers was a generative theory to think with. A significant portion of Ahmed's thinking explicates how affect moves between bodies and objects and back again, how it circulates. "Indeed," Ahmed (2014) argues, "attending to emotions might show us how all actions are reactions, in the

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[19] Writing 101 was capped at 19 students per section while I taught the course.

sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others" (p. 4). Two study participants, Madison and Levi, talked about the impacts of their writing group and—unknowingly—each other, on the ways that pleasure took shape for them in and through our first course writing project, a personal narrative. This analysis will focus on their stories and the ways both students' affective experiences were shaped by their mutual contact. In an illustration of how the PIP Triangle is flexible and changes shape, the balance of the PIP Triangle is weighted more heavily to phenomenological material and thinking with theory in this section. My post-reflexions take up more space and thought in later analysis.

Madison, a Black woman, and Levi, a Jewish man, were in the same course section of Writing 101 in spring of 2023 and were randomly assigned to the same writing group for our first course project, along with two other classmates. Below I share excerpts from my conversations with Madison and Levi in which they both discuss the impact of that writing group and each other on the ways pleasure took shape for them. [20] I follow that phenomenological material with a layered analysis, bringing affect and my own post-reflexions into conversation with Madison and Levi's accounts.

Madison: I vividly remember the first project we did, which was—I remember it being something about writing about our experiences, or like a memory of something. And I remember my group, and I feel like writing classes—when they're required, like high school writing classes or whatever, not everyone puts their full intent into it. And I remember feeling like my group mates were really taking it seriously, which really helped me feel vulnerable, like comfortable sharing my experiences as well. And I

[20] As you read, notice when the students reference each other.

remember, I think his name was Levi. I don't know if we're going to use names. But that's his name.[21] His name was Levi and like, he shared a story with me about his grandpa had—or someone in his family, I think he might have said grandpa—was a Holocaust survivor. And how that's affected him. And I remember leaving that class being like, wow, I can't believe he was—I made him feel comfortable enough that he felt like he could share that with me. And I felt comfortable enough sharing my experiences as a Black woman with him. And that was something I'd never felt, that gratification, or that…validation? If that makes sense?

Kristin: Oh, totally. It takes all participants to build that safety, right? And I hear that he was able to be vulnerable and trust the group, and that led to you being able to do the same.

Madison: Yeah, yeah.

Kristin: Can you remember—you say you remember that project vividly. What else do you remember about that writing experience?

Madison: I remember, like, I had used a similar story, or talked about a similar story when I was writing college applications. And I remember—obviously, you know, college applications, I feel like you don't go that deep into them. And it was a little more like, surface. And I knew that was always something I kind of wanted to revisit. And so I remember kind of being like, this is a platform, a safe space, and a platform to talk about my experiences as a Black woman and how I had gone from not being comfortable with myself and really struggling with that. Like, depression with not being comfortable myself, to where I am now. And I remember, I looked at my college application and I remember I copied and pasted initially to get my brain flowing a bit. And I kind of felt like I started to remember all these things about the experience, as well as—also, we had more time to do it. I remember doing my college applications, and I was kind of, not rushing, but I remember [in Writing 101] having a lot more time and feeling like, okay, I can share. And truly my group really made me feel comfortable sharing because I remember I had picked out a topic, when we did that

[21] Levi is a pseudonym for the name Madison mentioned.

brainstorming for just initial topics. I picked out a topic that was pretty safe, like not very deep. And then I could kind of see my group members were, you know, more interested in my other topic, and they were showing me they were going to be going deeper. And I was like, okay, this is a comfortable, safe space to share, I guess.

Levi: So, in Writing 101 we had a project about, like, a personal narrative. And I just kind of wrote [in my freewrite] that it was initially quite difficult for me, because if you remember, I had to think back to a time my life where I faced some real personal prejudice against me. And that was a moment that was quite difficult to think back to because it kind of brought up an issue of repressed memories, you know, that sort of thing that happens and a reaction to trauma or something you just would rather forget. And looking back was something that was quite difficult, but in the end, I was able to power through and write it down with a good amount of detail, I think. In the end, I probably could have done better, but given the emotional impact of it, I think I did as well as it could at the time. But after that initial difficulty, there was like a relief in getting it out. And being able to express my history and feelings towards the topic of my ethnicity and family history and things like that. And that was honestly the first time that I had experienced like, a major enjoyment in my writing, where I felt what I was doing was largely impactful. And really just impactful in the sense of myself. I went on to say in this freewrite that…I said that in the end, it was like a relief of sorts. Just to quote myself here, “a pent up feeling of anxiety and low self-worth had been released, lightening an emotional load and toll that had been bearing down on me for much of my life.” And I said, while it was initially difficult, the feeling at the end was more than worth it. So having that load lifted off is something that I've been able to carry with me forward. Like finally being able to express myself, I now have a new self-image after this writing, so I'm able to see myself in a different light and in a more positive way. So that, that is my experience with joy.

Kristin: You mentioned the word joy, and earlier you mentioned pleasure. Can you think about, or describe in any way, how that felt in your body when you were—what

does that actually feel like to you? Does it have any physical sensations? Or is it more like a mental experience?

Levi: Well, it's kind of twofold, I would think—mostly, it was a mental experience. Because the topic itself had been one that had been impacting my mental health a lot, you know and that was kind of a relief for that. But also, there is the kind of emotional, like, anxiety reaction where you kind of have your—I guess, if you can relate to this, you have like a tightness with your anxiety. In a way, it was like that kind of lightened up and I was able to, I guess, breathe in the topic, whenever the topic would come up. Just being able to freely express myself, and not have that sort of anxiety of whenever a family background or ethnicity topic came up,

Kristin: Right, like sort of dreading, what's this conversation going to be like? How am I going to feel?

Levi: Mmm-hmm.

Kristin: How did the writing group dynamic of the class—did it impact that experience for you? And if so, how? The fact that you were, you know, sharing drafts of this and sort of letting folks see your progress? What was that aspect like for you?

Levi: It was really helpful for me, because—and not so much in the sense of, like, needing grammatical help, or well—content help, yes, because I experienced a lot of doubt, while initially writing this piece, and being able to kind of bounce it off of my peers was very helpful. They were very supportive of me, because I kind of approached them with this, like—you know, I don't know, if this is as big a deal as I'm making it. I don't know if I'm just being, you know, weak in a sense. And there were other students, other non-white students that were in my group that were able to tell me like, no, this is a very real experience that you had, and you're legitimate for this, this is not something that you're making up or stretching with, you know. So that was very helpful, it allowed me to feel secure in what I was doing.

Madison and Levi's stories illustrate the impact of their mutual contact on each other's affectual experiences with writing personal narratives. Madison recounted how

Levi's vulnerability in sharing about his family history and his experiences with antisemitism opened up the possibility for her to "go deeper" and write honestly about her experiences growing up as a Black woman in the Midwest. It is clear these students made an impression on each other. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2014) studies the word "impression":

> To form an impression might involve acts of perception and cognition as well as an emotion. But forming an impression also depends on how objects impress upon us. An impression can be an effect on the subject's feelings ("she made an impression"). It can be a belief ("to be under an impression"). It can be an imitation or an image ("to create an impression"). Or it can be a mark on the surface ("to leave an impression"). *We need to remember the "press" in an impression.* It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, and affect that leaves its mark or trace. So not only do I have an impression of others, but they also leave me with an impression; they impress me, and impress upon me. (p. 6, emphasis in original)

This particular impression required both participants: at a level likely below full awareness, Madison and Levi were both testing whether their writing group was a site capable of receiving their identities and histories. What is implied but not explicitly stated in their stories is that each of them, without the other, would not have made the decision to share as honestly and fully as they did. The pleasure they experienced in and through that honesty, in and through sharing in community, and in and through standing tall in who they are—it would not have been available to them without each other. Ahmed

(2014) speaks to the relational nature of affect and emotions, explaining that "emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have," but that it is through emotions, "or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (2014, p. 10).

Another way to think about the ways that circulated affect impacted multiple writing group members is to consider affect as contagious. In "Happy Objects," Ahmed (2010) references Anna Gibbs' (2001) argument that bodies can catch feelings "as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear—in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion" (Gibbs, 2001, p. 1). In Madison and Levi's situation, vulnerability and honesty were the affects "caught," taking the place of the guardedness with which they both arrived. In his recounting, Levi describes that pleasure to him in this moment felt like the absence of anxiety—the "tightness" he was used to feeling "lightened up," and he was able to "breathe in the topic" whenever antisemitism or his Jewish identity came up. I think it's important, here, that what became contagious wasn't this anxiety itself, but rather its antidote. Ahmed (2010) describes anxiety specifically as sticky: "rather like Velcro, it tends to pick up whatever comes near" (p. 36). Ahmed also argues that:

> Anxiety is, of course, one feeling state among others. If bodies do not arrive in neutral, if we are always in some way or another moody, then what we will receive as an impression will depend on our affective situation. [This] argument…suggests that how we arrive, how we enter this room or that room,

> will affect what impressions we receive. After all, to receive is to act. To receive an impression is to make an impression. (pp. 36-37)

In Madison and Levi's case, the writing group members responded to each other in real time, bringing affect with them and forging new affect. Being open to vulnerability led to being able to be vulnerable, and there is no separating where one affect began and another took off. Ahmed (2010) explains that while "the moods we arrive with do affect what happens" (p. 37), we don't always keep our moods. Speaking almost directly to Levi's experience, Ahmed says that sometimes she herself arrives to a space heavy with anxiety and everything that happens makes her feel more anxious, while at other times things happen to ease that anxiety, "making the space itself seem light and energetic" (p. 37). Affect and the ways it circulates and sparks are unpredictable:

> We do not know in advance what will happen given this contingency, given the hap of what happens; we do not know "exactly" what makes things happen in this way and that. Situations are affective given the gap between the impressions we have of others, and the impressions we make on others, all of which are lively. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 37)

This gets at the liveliness of the writing group and classroom spaces as a whole, and how a space entered with anxiety might shift into a space of honesty and healing.

Over five months after the course had ended for them, Madison and Levi both spoke to the lasting impact of their affective experiences as writers and writing group members in Writing 101. Madison referenced "how I had gone from not being comfortable with myself and really struggling with that. Like, depression with not being

comfortable myself, to where I am now." In his freewrite, shared with me after our conversation, Levi reflected:

> While the initial task was difficult, the feeling at the end was more than worth it, and the writing piece that resulted from this effort has become one of the most important pieces I have ever written. I can acknowledge that it may be far from perfect, either with formatting, grammar or otherwise, but those things mean nothing to me compared to the content, which was honestly life-changing to see expressed.

Ahmed (2010) explains that "to be affected in a good way can survive the coming and going of objects" (p. 31)—in this case, the writing, the writing group, the course. I'm not sure if Madison and Levi will ever see each other again, or speak. But the impressions they made on each other—and the writing that those impressions made possible—will last.

Our Orientations

> I arrived at phenomenology because, in part, the concept of orientation led me there. It matters how we arrive at the places we do. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2)

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed (2006) explores the question of orientation, or "how we come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way we turn" (p. 1). While orientation lives within Ahmed's broad writings around affect, it didn't stand out to me as a singular concept to think with in this dissertation until I listened to study participants describe, over and over, the impact of choice in their

experiences of pleasure. In a self-reflexion entry on October 19, 2023, I recorded my noticings and wonderings from the nine conversations I'd had so far. "Choice," I wrote. "This is huge. Many, many students have talked about the ability to choose their writing topic, or choose their reading, as significant to their experiences of pleasure." How did I draw the line between choice and Ahmed's orientation? Like all the theories I think with here, orientation has worked on me as a reader, writer, and learner for a long time. Six years ago I thought with Ahmed's affect theory for the first time in a paper for a Sociocultural Theory, Education, and Literacy course, where I explored how orientations toward and away from certain texts move them from what Vygotsky (1978) calls a tool, or an object humans take up for external purposes, to a sign, an internal marker that merges with identity and shapes subjectivity. A year later, in the heart of the pandemic, I wrote about orientations of care for my Interpretive Research course, arguing that care has an explicit orientation towards abolition.[22] I've thought and written with orientation consistently since, I think because the question of how we come to find our way in the world resonates so deeply with me. I'm not able to let it go.

This provocation explores orientation as a "sticky object," both for my study participants and for me. Here, the balance of the PIP Triangle shifts, with more of my analysis focused on my self-reflexive histories and present understanding of orientation,

[22] While not a theory I think with in this dissertation, abolition has significantly shaped my thinking over the years. My understanding of abolition includes the specific histories and context of slavery and prison abolition and is also a more expansive ethic-onto-epistemic (Barad, 2007) orientation that echoes Ruth Wilson Gilmore when she says that "abolition is about abolishing the conditions under which prison became the solution to problems, rather than abolishing the buildings we call prisons" (Haymarket Books, 2020).

with excerpts from study participants shared as a launching off point. When thinking about how to share this phenomenological material, I decided to draw from Patricia Leavy's (2020) *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, specifically concrete research poetry as a form of poetic inquiry. Concrete research poetry is "a method whereby poems grounded in research are presented in a physical shape that reinforces the poetic content" (Leavy, 2020, p. 95).[23] Marcy Meyer (2017) calls this method "word-imagery," and explains that concrete poems "provide the reader with a visual object to be perceived as well as a text to read…creating a shape that serves as a container for the text…the reader's interpretation is shaped by the poem's physical form" (p. 34, as cited in Leavy, 2020, p. 95). I've also been inspired by fellow graduate students and friends who have shared their research in nontraditional forms (e.g., Boehm-Turner, 2020; Shopa, 2023; Sterner, 2019; Toedt, 2022)—when I felt called to do that here, I listened.

The concrete poem I share below—"Orientation Path"—is formed in the shape of a cobblestone path. It is "participant-voiced" (Prendergast, 2009) and draws directly from my conversations with study participants as well as their study freewrites.[24] I decided to keep this phenomenological material anonymous, so when I refer to various excerpts in the subsequent analysis, I avoid identity descriptors and use gender-neutral pronouns.

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[23] I wrote my first concrete poem as an 11th grader in a Creative Writing elective course that my high school offered, taught by my favorite teacher. In a true display of teenage earnestness and angst, I remember expressing my overflowing emotions in the shape of rain falling down the page and forming a puddle at the bottom. I think that poem is still in a box in my parent's garage. Writing it was just one of the thousands of what Ahmed (2006) calls turning points that led me to writing this today.

[24] As with previous phenomenological material, I have left the words largely as students expressed them with light editing for filler words and phrases such as "like" and "you know."

Following “Orientation Path,” I bring my self-reflexions into conversation with Ahmed’s (2006) theoretical concept, threading that analysis with excerpts from the poem.

Orientation Path

I experienced pleasure when I was given a lot of options to do my course projects on. The freedom of that was really good, because then I got to like, evaluate what *I* wanted to look into. And I feel like that was really valuable.

Reading for classes is so hard for me, I just hate it so much. Because it's topics that I don't care about, like my marketing class is so boring. And all of the readings, I have to force myself to do it. So it's hard for me to find pleasure in reading when it comes to something I don't care about. But when it comes to—I also have like a lot of animal classes, too. And some plant classes, and I'm really interested in plants. So I like reading the textbook for that. So it's a very huge difference between something I don't care about at all, and then something I actually really care about. So, yeah. It's hard to find pleasure in something that literally gives me no pleasure.

What brought me pleasure was just having creative freedom, on our topic and on our presentation of that topic. I think that what draws me in as a writer is just being able to freely express thoughts and ideas, and being creative. And actually, that final project that we did, the topic that I chose ended up—I enjoyed writing about it so much that that's what inspired me to change my major last year.

I think a lot of it was excitement. Like, whenever I found new material source, and got to interpret it in my own way, and had the ability to actually write about how my opinions aligned with this material, and put it all together. I think it was mostly exciting, how I was able to take charge in an expression of thought. Yeah...how did I feel in my body... I would say—I guess also rewarding and satisfying. It just felt kind of like it clicked in a way. I would never feel a sense of like, I didn't really feel stress in that way. It was mostly just exciting. Which is a good sign.

For a reading experience, if I'm reading an academic book or something like that that I'm told to read for a course, I don't find pleasure in that at all. Like, I can't force myself to enjoy what I'm reading, because it's just so arbitrary and like, emotionless if that makes sense. And I'm the type of person that really likes to feel things.

> Within the recent year, my roommate introduced me to a book series that her and I both find pleasure in now. Once both of us have read a book, we go through a “debrief” as we like to call it and pick out our favorite parts of the book and see how it flows with the rest of the book.

In my political science class, the professor gives us a bunch of articles that we can read and choose from, they're all kind of like in the same aspect, which I really enjoy. And just being able to choose the article and read a little bit of each one, and then finally choosing which one to fully read is really beneficial. Because you still get a little bit of chunks of the other ones because you briefly read them, but you get the option of choosing just one that you want to read fully. And it makes you like *want* to read and *want* to write.

> I think I could compare it to elementary school, when you were given free range over everything. You could just draw a picture about whatever you wanted, write about whatever you wanted. But then, as you got older, and like, through high school, things became so much more structured and—the expectations, and the guidelines. And so I think that this class kind of reverted back to that elementary school, just kind of being able to write about like, anything. So you get that little box, but it was like—instead of a little box, I guess it was more like a room. So like, you had like a just a lot more like free range to do stuff.

> It was the first time since your class, which was almost a year ago, that I had total freedom. I was allowed to pick my topic, I was allowed to find all of my sources, it just had to somehow be arguably related to one of the topics we'd talked about over the last six weeks. And I remember just kind of feeling stuck, because I was like, I'm not used to having all this freedom. And there wasn't even like a structured rubric. And I remember I was trying to think back to how we did things in your class and how I was able to like, accumulate ideas after picking my own topic. And I think those can be really hard to start. But I ended up—once I found my topic, which is probably the hardest part, I feel like I really enjoyed writing the essay, because I was able to completely write a big opinion-based paper on something that I cared about, related to the course. And I could tell, in my writing—they were all things that I felt strongly towards or felt like I had a strong connection to, and I could write about them confidently. And I was impressed with my own writing, not because I thought it was perfect writing structure—because I don't think I'm like, the strongest writer in the world—but I could tell that I enjoyed doing it.

So, my past experience with reading and writing is one that's just a begrudging. I'll do it. You know, it's not something I typically want to do or do often. The truth of it is, is that looking back after this project, I realized that I experienced the most joy in reading and writing when I'm allowed to either express myself or read a piece that relates to me strongly.

I read a lot. I'm a big reader. And I feel like the thing that like all, everyone who reads will tell you this, that if it's their book, they love it. They can, like plow through it like crazy. But as soon as you say you have to read this, like you *have to read this*, it's like, all of a sudden, it's a million pages, and it sucks, no matter how good it is, even if your best friend's like hey, read this—it's not going to work. That's just not how the brain works. And I think it's similar with writing. So I don't know if somehow with Writing 101…I guess we kind of tricked the brain and thought like, oh, you want to do this, you want to do this. This is fun. I had a great time. If we're going for like a specific example, the final project I loved. First of all, the topic wasn't dull. It was like here, pick, pick, and as long as you cover one of these issues, it's like you get to pick a topic that you love. I got to talk about frickin cartoon pirates and I made a video essay. And it was cool, God it was great.

I also truly enjoyed the amount of freedom we had with each of our projects, especially Project 3 where I did a podcast episode. I got to do a podcast about true crime, which is a complete 180 degree turn from my major. But it allowed me to have a creative outlet and dive into my hobbies, which I truly found pleasure in.

I mainly focused on the last writing piece, our last project, because I do feel like our first two kind of built up to that last project and putting it all together. And what I found the most pleasurable was that, first of all, you gave us the freedom to choose a topic that we were passionate about, which is something I think—throughout my schooling beforehand is not something that was up for debate, or like, an option to me. Besides your class, I was running exclusively lab reports. Having freedom and passion for a topic really made it pleasurable in a way where I was invested, and felt like I was kind of like discovering and diving into something I cared about, which is just a rewarding experience.

I loved every minute of it.

Ahmed (2006) says that to be oriented is "to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us find our way. These are also objects we recognize, so that when we face them we know which way we are facing" (p. 1). What is clear to me after talking at length with 12 study participants and teaching Writing 101 for three semesters is that students' ability to choose what objects they turn toward is vital to how they experience pleasure in and through their reading and writing, both in and outside of the course. All throughout "Orientation Path" there is evidence of students' desire to make this determination for themselves, as well as the feelings—excitement, joy, passion, flow—that being able to make that determination provokes.

In *Queer Phenomenology,* Ahmed (2006) explicitly takes up the concept of orientation "as a way of putting queer studies in closer dialogue with phenomenology." (p. 1). A chapter of the book is spent exploring sexual orientation, where sexuality is "understood in terms of 'having' an orientation, which itself is understood as being 'directed' in one way or another" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 68). We can think about sexuality and how desire orients us towards other humans, but the concept extends beyond sexuality as well, to all the things we spend time near and with. "Orientations involve different ways of registering the proximity of objects and others," Ahmed (2006) explains. "Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance, as well as 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention toward" (p. 3). What I learned from talking with study participants and from self-reflexively investigating my own past and present orientations is that the freedom to self-orient is significant to how pleasure takes shape. This self-orientation isn't simply a

matter of having agency, or choice, but connects to our ability to be to known to ourselves: "The question of orientation becomes, then, a question not only about how we 'find our way' but how we come to 'feel at home'" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 7).

Multiple self-reflexions demonstrate how being able to follow my own orientations has been central to how pleasure takes shape for me as a reader and writer, both as a child and now. In a self-reflexion I wrote for my preliminary exams titled "The First Essay", I explore one of my early memories of experiencing pleasure in and through writing.

The First Essay[25]

My mom loves to tell the story of when I came home from middle school exclaiming that I "got to" write an essay! I got to! I don't remember any of the specifics of this moment, but I think I was in eighth grade, oddly one of my favorite years of school (odd, since middle school can be so painful for so many). Piecing together what I can recall about that year, about my teachers, and about myself, I think I know why I was so excited.

My school combined English and social studies into a long Humanities block, which was inquiry-based and expansive. I'd been with the same cohort of students all three years; I felt comfortable and known. At the end of three years of this structure, I remember feeling confident as a scholar, and I had a teacher who I knew was truly curious about me as a person and a student—he wanted to know more about what I wanted to know more about. I know that I got to choose the

[25] This and the two subsequent post-reflexions in this chapter were originally written in 2023.

focus for my essay, and that this choosing was central to my feeling of excitement. The possibilities of all the ideas I might put together and write down on the page were all in front of me, waiting. It felt, looking back, like an artist might feel looking at a blank canvas—the beginning of imagination.

This self-reflexion echoes what students expressed in "Orientation Path," that the act of making a choice is in itself invigorating and, in the words of many of my study participants, "exciting." Being able to connect that choice to our own interests and identities matters, and repeated opportunities to explore what matters to us creates the repeated actions and behaviors that accumulate to shape who we are. Ahmed (2006) explains that bodies acquire orientation through the repetitions of some actions over others, "as actions that have certain 'objects' in view, whether they are physical objects required to the work…or the ideal objects that one identifies with" (p. 58). According to Ahmed:

> The nearness of such objects, their availability within my bodily horizon, is not casual: *it is not just that I find them there, like that.* Rather, the nearness of such objects is a sign of an orientation I have already taken toward the world as an orientation that shapes what we call, inadequately, "character." Bodies tend toward some objects more than others given their tendencies. These tendencies are not originary but instead are effects of the repetition of the "tending toward." (2006, p. 58, emphasis in original)

What we do now opens up and gives space to the possibilities of what we may do next—this is why choice of orientation is so important. If we are to have self-directed lives, we need opportunities for self-direction.

Ahmed (2006) also discusses the importance of disorientation in the "homing" act of orientation: "It is by understanding how we become orientated in moments of disorientation that we might learn what it means to be oriented in the first place" (2006, p. 6). A few students in "Orientation Path" contrasted opportunities to follow their own orientations with literacy activities that were more restricted. "Reading for classes is so hard for me, I just hate it so much. Because it's topics that I don't care about…I have to force myself to do it," said one participant; "If I'm reading an academic book or something like that that I'm told to read for a course, I don't find pleasure in that at all," another shared; "I can't force myself to enjoy what I'm reading, because it's just so arbitrary and like, emotionless if that makes sense. And I'm the type of person that really likes to feel things." A third participant used a metaphor of a box and a room to describe the difference in their embodied, affectual experience of writing with too many rules (a box) and writing with supported autonomy (a room). In the first semester of my PhD program, I experienced what I now realize was a disorientation, a writing experience that—while painful at the time—ultimately helped me learn what it means for me to be oriented.

Welcome to Graduate School

My first semester of graduate school I felt like I was constantly moving between pleasure and pain—pleasure at getting to read and discuss incredible

ideas among brilliant peers, and pain at feeling like I had no idea what I was doing. My first academic paper, halfway through the semester, made me feel like an inexperienced athlete climbing Mount Everest: I did not know how to do it or what was expected of me, but once I got to the top, I would surely feel great and like I belonged. Right?

Unfortunately, my instructor in that course was full of expectations that went unstated and untaught. We were asked to write a paper taking up some of the theories we'd read. It could be a narrative or an analysis, personal or not. That was all.

Not having written an academic analysis yet, with no idea or models as to how to approach that, I chose to write a narrative, weaving in my recent experiences becoming a parent of twins through infertility with Gloria Anzaldúa's (2002) theories of liminality *and* nepantla*. I wrote about letting go of "old consciousness's death rattle" and the mythology of who I was and what my world looked like (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 549). I wrote about how "living between stories" had changed my being fundamentally, and how putting my experiences into words had allowed me to forge a "bridge home to the self" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 540). The process of plugging theory into my memories felt good, and healing. It helped me continue to make sense of the insensible. I remember feeling the particular vibrations that always move through me when I'm writing something true.*

A week or so later I got the paper copy of my essay back from my professor and turned to the back page. There was a grade on it, crossed out, with

a lower grade written below it. I have not saved that piece of paper, but it said something about how I had not done what I was supposed to do—my essay wasn't academic enough, it was too personal. There was too much story, not enough…whatever else they'd been looking for. Beyond that, there was no constructive feedback. No explanation of what, actually, had been expected.

I remember my eyes pricking. I felt instant shame. I tucked the paper away, into my backpack, realizing that just as my story of infertility was often not welcome in personal and communal spaces—it is hard to know what to do with someone else's grief—neither was it welcome in the academy. I had better learn how to do all of this "right."

This story illustrates the disorienting feeling of being tricked, of being offered a choice and then being told that choice was wrong. Ahmed (2006) explains that "disorientation happens when the ground no longer supports an action. We lose ground, we lose our sense of how we stand; we might even lose our standing" (p. 170). Thankfully, this was a singular experience for me in graduate school, and what followed were repeated opportunities to explore my orientations through scaffolded support, models of how to employ writing as thinking, and affirmation that what I was writing about was of value—not because my professors necessarily valued it themselves, but because they could see that I did.

Ahmed (2006) writes about how "the lines that allow us to find our way, those that are 'in front' of us, also make certain things, and not others, available" (p. 15). In other words, the consequences of our orientations—and our ability to follow them—are

real. When we follow specific lines, some things become reachable, and others remain or become out of reach. These exclusions—"the constitution of a field of unreachable objects"—are not necessarily created consciously; instead, "the direction we take excludes things for us, before we even get there" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 15). This, to me, amplifies the need for freedom of orientation; if our affective movements toward and away from objects shapes our futures so significantly, we must have agency. One study participant described how their choice of topic for our third course project—a multimodal research project—led to them changing their major area completely, from psychology to strategic communications. It took my breath away when the student shared this—the weight of knowing that a course experience I was part of framing led to such a momentous shift in a student's path. "Life, after all, is full of turning points," Ahmed (2006) says—"depending on which way one turns, different worlds might even come into view" (p. 15). It makes sense to me that when we do have agency, when we are able to follow our orientations to different worlds, it *feels good*. "Orientation Path" demonstrates that pleasure takes shape for students when they follow the lines of their orientation: "I loved every minute of it," the poem ends. There is a sense of knowing I can feel deep in my body when I am following the lines meant for me, and that knowing provokes pleasure for me, too.

I ended my preliminary exams with a post-reflexion called "Writing, at the end." I share it now as a close for this section and as evidence for Ahmed's (2006) claim that "we don't know what it means to follow the gift of the unexpected line that gives us the chance for a new direction and even a chance to live again" (p. 18).

Writing, at the end

It has been four and a half years since my first graduate school paper, and in that time we've experienced a global pandemic, I've held three different jobs, recovered from two surgeries and multiple medical procedures, awakened to my own mental health needs, sent my kids off to Kindergarten, and have a much different perspective on whatever "right" might be when it comes to writing, academic or otherwise. I have learned what I am here for and what I am not, what I will participate in and what I refuse. I have read the words of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, who teaches that "my body and my life are part of my research, and I use this knowledge to critique and analyze. I will not separate this from my engagement with academic literature, because in my life these things are not compartmentalized" (p. 31). Even though it still requires bravery, putting all of these words down on this page, wondering how they will be received and assessed, I no longer attach my self-worth to how my writing is judged. I do care deeply about joining and contributing to scholarly conversations in communities of trust. I am excited to talk about my questions and ideas. This paper feels somewhat messy and incomplete, and I'm sure there are many opportunities for critique. But the process taught me.

The vibrations are back.

It wasn't, of course, the end. It has been two and a half years since I wrote this self-reflexion, and my lifelines have continued to take new directions, bringing me to both hoped for and unexpected places. It continues to matter how I arrive at the places I do.

I end this chapter by returning to the becoming-question that shaped this analysis: *How do affect's "sticky" objects circulate to provoke and produce pleasure?* Through working the PIP Triangle, I explored how the circulating and relational nature of affect means that we matter to each other—the impressions we make on each other have affectual impacts, some of which stay long after an object is gone or a moment is over. Our orientations matter as well, and "Orientation Path" along with analysis of my own self-reflexions illustrated how individual's orientations are themselves "sticky"—the people and things we are turned toward stick to us and become part of our life's forward motion. In other words, pleasure happens when we are able to follow our sticky orientations.

What strikes me about all of these aspects of affect is that while they might be intentionally fostered in the classroom, they cannot be scripted, controlled, or even predicted. In "Happy Objects," Ahmed (2010) describes the "idiosyncratic nature of happy object choices; different people are made happy by different things, we have a diversity of likes and dislikes" (p. 44). What affects us is never going to all be the same. Instructional design and pedagogy, therefore—if it takes pleasure seriously—must work to build diverse opportunities for affectual spark, for pleasure and other affects and emotions to be provoked. This is the production of pleasure—the room my study participant described, a place that holds shape but is more spacious and less restrictive than a box. Intentional production of pleasure matters especially in a writing course, where we as educators are asking students to create. Ahmed (2010) says that "we are moved by things. And in being moved, we make things" (p. 33). The being moved and

the making go hand in hand; in being moved, we write things that matter to us, and to others. And it feels like pleasure.

Chapter 5: Thinking with Presencing

> Our most important work is internal, and the kinds of transformations we are compelled to make, the kinds of alternatives we are compelled to embody are profoundly systemic. (Simpson, 2017, p. 6)

As I wrote about in Chapter 3, *presencing* (Simpson, 2011, 2017) was not a theory I had in mind when I planned this study. I did not prepare any potential becoming-questions related to presence, process, or freewriting, and yet those are some of the most common ideas and topics student participants talked about when sharing how pleasure was provoked and produced for them in Writing 101. I knew after only a handful of interviews that this was going to be a significant theory to think with. In the end, 11 out of 12 participants spoke explicitly to the impact of process-based learning on their experiences of pleasure. Six of those 11 shared about the impact of freewriting specifically and how this pedagogical routine laid the groundwork for some of their most pleasurable experiences with writing both within and outside of the course. For example, when I asked what aspects of the course sparked pleasure for study participant Rose, she answered:

> I would definitely say the freewrites, that was a very effective way for me to like, get into the zone or kind of lock into class in a way. Not only because I would be in touch with writing, but because it made me very present, in both my work and just in the classroom, because I knew that everybody around me was also just doing their own thing. And I like too that there was no pressure to share whatever

> you wrote with anybody in the class. And that was really a time to just tune in and get into your writing groove.

Elena, another study participant, spoke at length about her experience with the course freewrites and how her feelings about freewriting changed over time. In the freewrite I asked study participants to do at the start of our semi-structured conversations, Elena wrote:

> Always before any assignment or before class [Kristin] would make us do a freewrite just like I am doing right now. At the beginning I will admit I thought it was really boring and unnecessary to do it but as the semester started moving forward, I really enjoyed it and started realizing I can use this in my everyday life. I have taken tons of writing intensive classes since [Writing 101] and I always start with a 10-minute freewrite whenever we have to read and analyze anything. I just feel like those 10 minutes really help my brain develop and process everything that I read, and I go back and reread my thoughts whenever I want to. I remember vividly when we had an assignment on something a bit more personal that I found really difficult to write about, but with the freewriting and with the support of Kirstin it was just so much more bearable to do. Freewriting to me has just become a natural thing that I have added into my daily life. For example, when I can't let things off my chest verbally, I freely write for 10 minutes just to let it all out.

My post-reflexion journal for October 13, 2023, written after just four interviews, captures the impact of this topic on my own thinking:

> *Many participants have also talked about how what we did in class together, like freewrites, has stayed with them and impacted them both personally and academically. I had NO idea anyone would bring up freewrites in these interviews, and it makes me want to be sure that I'm using them enough in my course this semester. It's wild to me how such a simple activity, writing for process, writing for the sake of writing and no other reason, makes such an impact. Maybe I shouldn't be surprised, as so many other reasons for writing are external with specific requirements.*

This felt like a true provocation for me as a researcher, a place where my own thought "took off" (Vagle, 2025) and left a path I knew I needed to follow. I also knew that Simpson's (2011, 2017) presencing was the theory I needed to think with here—not only because it connects directly to the idea of process, but because of how impactful Simpson's writing has been on my own thinking-being-doing. As Simpson (2017) says, "our most important work is internal" (p. 6), and presencing has worked on me significantly, fundamentally impacting how I see and understand the world.

In this chapter I think with Simpson's (2011, 2017) presencing and explore the becoming-question: ***How does presencing make visible the embodied act of writing?*** The phenomenological material focuses on one student participant, Christopher, and I connect my own post-reflexions with Simpson's theoretical concept and Christopher's words to create a layered analysis.

Christopher's Timeline

I mentioned Christopher in the previous chapter—he was one of the students that raised his hand on the first day of Writing 101, when I asked who was attending their first college class on that bright Tuesday morning. It was my first class of Writing 101, too, and by chance of timing and personalities and that idiosyncratic nature of affect (Ahmed, 2010), that particular group of students made an impression on me. In the post-reflexions that open this dissertation,[26] I described how students' experiences of finding deep pleasure in writing as children, only to have that pleasure squeezed out of them as they moved through their education, inspired my interest in pleasure as a phenomenon. It was Christopher, specifically, who made the most impact on my thinking, as I witnessed over the course of the semester his transformation from a student very invested in getting things "right" to a writer unafraid to follow his own inquiry, his own mind. Vagle (2025) describes phenomenology as a study of vibrations, and I focus on Christopher in this chapter in large part because his story vibrates strongly with presencing (Simpson, 2011, 2017), and because that vibration was itself a provocation for me as an educator, researcher, and writer.

When deciding how to share Christopher's phenomenological material, I was drawn again toward art as method (Leavy, 2020). I drew inspiration from a genre called the "hermit crab essay"—an essay written in a borrowed shell, or form (Adrian, 2018). This type of essay originated "as a way to explain, through metaphor, how a writer can play with form to deal with difficult material that might not be able to live in the world

[26] See "Narrative Framing" in Chapter 1.

without its own borrowed 'shell'" (Miller, 2018). These shells might look like grocery lists, how-to instructions, recipes, flow charts, menus, knitting patterns—literally anything. While the content of the phenomenological material I share here is not so difficult or tender, I still found that moving Christopher's words into the "shell" of a different genre helped to open up new thinking for me as I read and wrote. I chose the shell of a historic timeline, which illustrates change over time. What follows is a timeline that illustrates the impact of process-based writing on Christopher's experiences of pleasure.[27]

[27] These excerpts are drawn from Christopher's first course writing project (a personal narrative) and his study freewrite.

Christopher's Timeline

FIFTH GRADE

My creative spark began quite early in my childhood. Some people find their capabilities during high school, some in college, and some even after, yet I was able to build a greater foundation and connection to writing in the fifth grade. My teacher, Mrs. M., was adamant about various different learning styles, topics of education, and most importantly, writing. I vividly remember walking into her class for the first time, and on the desks were black marble composition notebooks with our names on each of them. She immediately introduced herself once we sat down and began our class with thirty minutes of freewriting. She told us, "Everyday, we will come into class and the first thing we will do is write. You can write about anything and everything you want to. The time is yours to let your imagination guide your writing." From that day on, I arrived at class ready to write the most childish and creative stories that my ten year-old mind could fathom. From stories about far away lands that didn't exist, to designing my future on the blank lines that stared me down once I opened the notebook; I was encapsulated by the feeling of writing whatever I wanted during those thirty minutes.

HIGH SCHOOL

Moving forward with my high school career, I reminisced on those times of freewrite and almost envied my younger self. The boundaries were endless then, and my creativity could flow effortlessly. Now, having people tell me what to write about, what length it has to be, and how long I have to write it, I felt trapped within a run-on sentence that was never ending until the 11:59pm due date. Though I was unable to freewrite as I was during the fifth grade, I realized how much of an impact those thirty minutes had on the growth and development of my writing. Essays can be dreadful and most of the time, I procrastinate until the last possible second, yet I feel that sometimes I do take for granted the art which writing is and the possibilities it creates for society as a whole.

As we grow up we are presented with many tasks of writing that challenge not only our minds, but our writing skills in general. However, I began to feel trapped by the ideas and topics of someone else. I remember times where I was writing an essay for English and I would be stuck upon a sentence or paragraph for hours deciphering what sounded best and what would attain the best grade. I possessed a fear of my own writing which was emotionally draining and held me from completing my best work.

SENIOR YEAR

Heading into senior year, I had many ideas for my college essay that reflected my growth as a person as well as my educational growth. When sitting with my Honors English 12 teacher, Mrs. R., she asked me a simple question, “What do you want the audience to know about you?” I giggled slightly when she asked me this because how am I supposed to decide what the audience thinks about me or about my writing. Yet, that challenge became a reality when I started my essay and picked my topic. Throughout life, I never had the stable family which my classmates had. Since I was young, my family has maintained its issues and I am continuing throughout college to learn how to deal with these issues. At the time, I was immature and only had dance as a constant throughout my parents’ separation. It seemed minuscule at the moment, but dance truly led me to be successful throughout my high school education. It taught me time management, the importance of responsibility, and how to be honest and open-minded through various situations. Hence, I tied those two together to create my college essay that drove me to [the university]. Within the writing process, I caught myself overthinking every sentence and how I wanted to portray this “story” of my life. That's when I remember the stories I used to write in fifth grade.

FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE

One particular experience that led me to feeling pleasure [in Writing 101] was when I met one-to-one with Kristin for the first time. I remember feeling nervous and anxious about our first paper, since it was my first time writing one in college, and during the meeting, Kristin helped relieve a lot of that stress. We met in the [building] where her office was located for about an hour discussing the first draft I wrote of the assignment. When giving me feedback on my draft, Kristin made me feel confident in the writing that I produced and helped me to understand that writing is a process. This experience provided me a feeling of pleasure because it changed my outlook on writing essays, especially at the college level. Writing throughout high school was always such a stress for me because teachers expected near perfection when it came to academic essays. Meanwhile, Kristin allowed me to understand that writing doesn’t have to be perfect all the time and most of the time, writing can be a deliberate process that takes time, effort, and patience.

Furthering that thought, [Writing 101] brought me pleasure through freewrite. Within the course, Kristin preached that freewrite was a way to begin the writing process in a carefree and safe way. She taught us that freewrite doesn’t have to accomplish the goals of the assignment, rather it is a unique tool that can be used to formulate brainstorms, cultivate ideas, and provide a base for the writing process. I used to enjoy freewriting a lot throughout my middle school years, yet, like I mentioned previously, high school teachers demanded a more intense style of writing. Being able to feel liberated while writing was something I missed about the experience and this course brought me back to that same feeling of sitting in my fifth-grade classroom, starting our day with 30 minutes of freewriting.

In elementary school, Christopher experienced the pleasure of writing just for writing's sake. That black marble composition notebook became home for his fantasies, dreams, and plans for his future. The pedagogical purpose of that daily activity was the act of writing itself. As Christopher progressed through his education, the open room that served as a container for his writing became a much smaller box, and his focus shifted from writing in ways that felt good and provoked pleasure to writing to achieve a grade and meet another person's specific expectations. This led to feelings of being "trapped by the ideas and topics of someone else." I cannot count how many times students in Writing 101 asked me about my own specific expectations for their work—how many words each project should be, which font they should use, how they should format their heading. These expectations clearly held more weight than the ideas they were expressing, or even their experience of expressing them in writing. It took many conversations as well as trust built over time for students to understand and really believe that I was not evaluating them on how well they followed my rules for writing, but on how they engaged in the writing process and whether and how they met their own rhetorical goals.

During his senior year, Christopher was able to connect back to his experiences freewriting in fifth grade while writing his college entrance essay. While this essay still held a very significant external weight—how someone judged it impacted whether or not he got into college—the ability to choose a topic that was meaningful to him clearly impacted his experience of pleasure in and through that writing, much like I wrote about when thinking with Ahmed's (2006) *orientation* above. It wasn't until Writing 101, however, that Christopher got to experience writing as process again.

In the freewrite he wrote at the start of our study conversation, Christopher described an experience in Writing 101 that stood out to him as a moment of pleasure: our first 1-1 writing conference. I remember that conference as well, both because of how it impacted Christopher's approach to writing and how his shift to understanding writing as process mirrored my own. Christopher also names frequent freewriting as a provocation of pleasure, connecting back to his experiences with the black marble notebook in fifth grade. Significantly I think, Christopher is a dancer, and in our study conversation much of our talk about writing as process came back to his experiences of embodied movement and the ways that movement impacts his experiences of pleasure.

I see so much of myself in Christopher's experiences. In my second year of graduate school, I had a professor who emphasized writing as inquiry, employing Peter Elbow's (1973, 1985) pedagogy and inviting my classmates and I to write frequently and without predetermined roadmap. It was at this same time that I was wrestling with my understanding of critical theory and critical literacy, as I described in the "Why Simpson?" section in Chapter Three. My reading of Simpson's presencing as a theory came at the same time that I was learning how to lean into presencing in my writing. This next section explores more of my own transformation as a writer and thinker based on Simpson's (2011, 2017) work, which I layer onto Christopher's story to think more about how presencing makes visible the embodied act of writing.

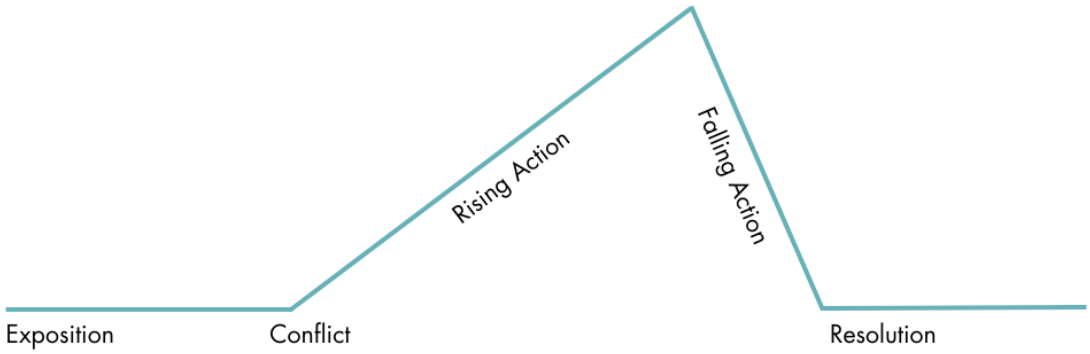
My Internal Work

In a Culture and Teaching course in fall of 2019 we read chapters from Simpson's (2017) *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance.*

Leaning into writing as inquiry, without predetermined thesis or roadmap, I wrote a paper titled "Presencing the Present: Explorations of an Ontological Shift," capturing my response to Simpson's work. As I described briefly in "Why Simpson?", at this time in my doctoral study I was wrestling deeply with my understanding of social change, and the role of English Language Arts as a discipline within that understanding. I am a very visual thinker, and for most of my life I've thought about time and my life experiences as happening along a traditional storyline (see Figure 7)—exposition as childhood, conflict as adolescence, rising action as college years and my 20s and 30s, with a climax around age 40 and everything after categorized as falling action. Death, of course, as resolution.[28]

Figure 7

Life and Progress as Traditional Storyline



[28] I think a large part of this age-related visual for me is the common language of the 80s and 90s that turning 40 was "over the hill," which, if we exist on a storyline, looks exactly like cresting the climax of one's life. Turning 40 challenged all of this for me, quite predictably. How do I think about life—the life I've lived and the life I have left—if I haven't experienced any sort of climax? If the years ahead look as sweet, or sweeter, than the ones behind? I'm grateful to aging for helping me let go of these types of visuals of my time on this earth, and a lot of that ability to let go was influenced by Simpson's theories.

I thought about social change and the work of critical literacy in the same way: any goal I was working to contribute to was out ahead of me at some unknown climax, a place and time hard to picture but definitely concrete—somewhere *there*. Yet that external *there but not here-ness* was beginning to feel unsatisfactory. I needed help either re-visualizing or developing a new understanding of how change happens and when and how it matters—and Simpson arrived as that help. The following excerpt from that course paper illustrates the ways that Simpson's theory was disrupting and re-orienting my assumptions about myself and the world, specifically within the work of social justice.

From "Presencing the Present: Explorations of an Ontological Shift"[29]

> *This semester's Culture and Teaching readings have cracked open my understanding of progress and purpose, not answering any of my questions about the feasibility of social justice goals but instead challenging me to reframe the questions themselves. My first glimpse that I might need to ask different questions was when I read the introduction and first chapter of Simpson's (2017)* As We Have Always Done*. Simpson centralizes internal, embodied work in the creation of a Nishnaabeg presence and present (p. 6). She does not deny that her goals require struggle, sacrifice, and fight, but also shifts the transformation she seeks from a distant future to an embodied present. Simpson claims that it is "*how *we live,* how *we organize,* how *we engage in the world—the process" that not only "frames the outcome, it is the transformation.* How *molds and then gives birth to*

[29] Originally written in 2019.

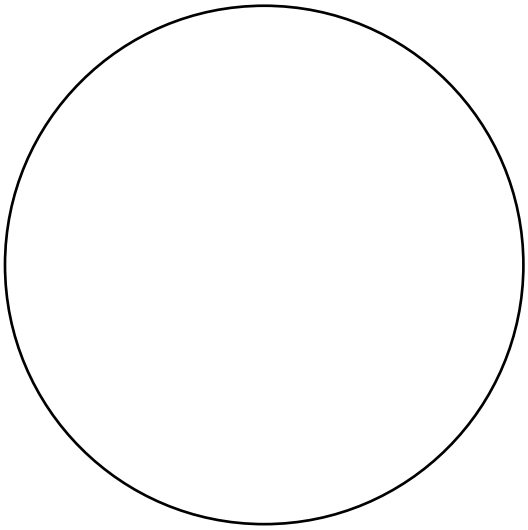
the present. The how *changes us.* How *is the theoretical intervention" (p. 19, emphasis in original).*

When I first read these words, I felt a shift in my mind and my body, a turning of sorts that was epistemological but also deeply ontological. I realized that the binary of present and future that is the foundation for much of my conceptualization of progress needs to be questioned—and possibly even disregarded—in order to create room for a new understanding of what knowledge and transformation look like when I let go of that temporal continuum. I felt almost as if I'd been looking down a long road, trying to see the goal at the end, and finally turned around to examine my surroundings, only to find that the possibility and potential of the goal are within and through the spaces and people around me. It was a shift of being. Simpson goes on to discuss that the focus on how changes modes of production, changes relationships, and changes us "because it constructs a different world within which we live… If we want to create a different future, we need to live a different present" (p. 20). This focus on an embodied process places the work of justice within the relationships and actions we take in the present day. Simpson's "presencing of the present" (p. 20) allowed me to begin to think of what social justice is and is for in dramatically new ways.

Simpson's (2011, 2017) theoretical concept of presencing served as a provocation for me, a moment where a new ontoepistemology[30] was forged. Instead of thinking about progress—and my life—along a narrative storyline, with a concrete and distinct past, present, and future, I began to visualize all of life and action as happening within a circle (see Figure 8). All past, present, and future action is here. I am who I have always been and who I will become.

Figure 8

Life and Progress as Circle



Simpson (2017) says of herself that "my body and my life are part of my research, and I use this knowledge to critique and analyze. I will not separate this from my engagement with academic literature, because in my life these things are not compartmentalized" (p. 31). My work here is also not compartmentalized—the knowledge generating I did

[30] "Ontoepistemology" is a word that signifies a combination of "knowing concerns," or epistemology, and "being concerns," or ontology (Vagle, 2025, p. 152). Ontoepistemology as a single term signifies the inseparable nature of being and knowing.

during that Culture and Teaching course and over the subsequent years is fully connected to my analysis of phenomenological material in this study. I think back to who I was that fall and notice how the unlearning and relearning I was doing—and have continued to do—prepared me to hear what my participants were saying when they talked about the importance of presence and process in their work.

Writing, Presencing, and Pleasure

Simpson's (2011, 2017) theory of presencing is inseparable from Indigenous, Nishnaabeg way of life. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Simpson (2011) explains that the most striking thing about the lives of her pre-colonial ancestors is that they were "constantly engaged in the act of creating: making clothes, food, shelter, stories, games, modes of transportation, instruments, songs and dances" (p. 92). According to Simpson, "Indigenous societies were societies of doing; they were societies of presence. Our processes—be they political, spiritual, education or healing—required a higher degree of presence than modern colonial existence" (p. 92). Simpson draws a stark contrast between Indigenous ways of life and post-colonial, Western, capitalist culture:

> In the space of the modern empire, society is a culture of *absence* because consumer culture requires both absence and wanting things in order to perpetuate itself. Without wanting, consumer culture simply cannot exist. In terms of representation, modern society primarily *looks* for meaning (in books, computers, art), whereas Indigenous cultures engage in processes or acts to create meaning. Indigenous presence and process—storytelling, ceremony, singing, dancing, doing. (Simpson, 2011, p. 93)

When I map this analysis onto writing I can see how traditional literacy education *looks* for meaning in objects—in the final writing product, for example—whereas honoring presencing in writing places meaning within the act of writing itself.

In our conversation Christopher expanded on the stories he shared in his course paper and freewrite to talk more about the impact of process on his experiences of pleasure. As I mentioned above, Christopher is a dancer, and dance is a significant part of the ways that he has come to know himself and his world. When I asked if he experienced pleasure in and through literacy experiences outside of Writing 101, Christopher told me about his dance team binder, where he and his teammates reflect on their performances and write down their goals. "We usually like to write things down and like, voice them," he explained. Speaking to the power of writing as process, he said "it's interesting that putting ideas on a piece of paper can just like, *make* the experience of writing." Christopher's coach clearly knows that the kinetic act of writing produces knowledge and can lead to outcomes not possible through just thought alone. In *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson (2017) connects living different futures to living different presents, which is "a strategic, thoughtful process in the present as an agent of change—a *presencing of the present*" (p. 20, emphasis in original). Continuing on, Simpson explains that:

> Kinetics, the act of doing, isn't just praxis; it also generates and animates theory within Indigenous contexts, and it is the crucial intellectual mode for generating knowledge. Theory and praxis, story and practice are interdependent,

> cogenerators of knowledge. Practices are politics. Processes are governance. Doing produces more knowledge. (p. 20)

In our conversation, Christopher explained more about this writing routine and its impact on him and his team:

> We also do monthly check-ins, because my coach is super big on team culture and mental health and physical health and all of that stuff. So throughout like the binder, it's like October Check-In, November Check-In, all that stuff. So in the first 30 minutes of our practices, the first practice of every month, we'll sit down in a circle and just take like 10-15 minutes to just fill out the questions that are on there. And it's like, what teammate made the most impact on you and why? We do something called "greats" at the end of practice, and it's basically like anybody that has something that was funny that happened, or a skill that felt good or something like that, we share that out. So on the paper, it's like, what's your monthly great? What's a team monthly great? What's a personal great, what's an academic great, stuff like that. And it's just good to put that stuff on paper and reflect on it and like, *see* it, rather than just like, think about it. Because I think when you put stuff on paper, and when you are able to exercise writing in a way that is pleasurable for you, it brings back those experiences, and it brings back a feeling of, you know, why you're doing all this.

It's clear to me that the process of writing in this binder, recording "greats" and reflecting on successes and future goals, is central to Christopher's experience of pleasure in and through dance, a fundamentally embodied art form. The binder doesn't get turned in at

the end of the year and isn't written for a grade; it's written because the process of writing produces knowledge that is central to the greater dance experience. Simpson (2017) argues that "the only thing that doesn't produce knowledge is thinking in and of itself, because it is data created in dislocation and isolation and without movement" (p. 20). I think I'm drawn to Christopher's words because of that thread of movement that connects the ways that pleasure takes shape for him in and through both dance and writing. Dance lives in the center of the re-creation story Simpson (2011) tells in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, where after destruction, animals "danced the new world into existence on the turtle's back" (p. 69).

I am not a dancer. I am absolutely a thinker, and for most of my life have been a writer who understood writing as simply transcription, a one-way act that moved fully formed thoughts from my brain to the page. I don't think it's coincidence that learning to understand writing as inquiry and writing as process happened at the same time that I was learning to understand theory and change as process, too. This learning and un-learning has led to some significant shifts for me, both internally and externally, as I work to build more creating, doing, and making into my life. It's difficult and requires both risk and trust, coming to this page without fully knowing what type of knowledge the act of writing is going to generate. But the thrill born of that risk and trust provokes pleasure, as almost all of my study participants described as they named how freewriting and writing as process made them feel. "Living is a creative act," Simpson (2017) says,

> with self-determined making or producing at its core. Colonized life is so intensely about consumption that the idea of making is reserved for artists at best

> and hobbies at worst. Making is not seen as the material basis for experiencing and influencing the world. (p. 23)

Returning to this chapter's becoming-question, *how does presencing make visible the embodied act of writing?* What I've learned from my own transformations as a writer and from the words of students is that honoring the embodied act of writing is essential when attempting to catch glimpses of the ways that pleasure takes shape. Simpson's (2011, 2017) theoretical concept provides a frame within which we can understand that embodiment as not just *of the body* but also of community, of relationship, of tradition, of place. Generously, Simpson (2017) writes that Nishnaabeg intelligence, within which presencing as theory and praxis is formed, "is for everyone, not just students, teachers, and researchers. It's not just pedagogy, it's how to live life" (p. 166).

Chapter 6: What Might Pleasure Provoke and Produce? Thinking with Neoliberal Multiculturalism, Pleasure Activism, and Resistance

In the previous two chapters I explored the first half of my research question: *How might pleasure be provoked and produced for undergraduates in and through their literacy experiences?* I now turn to the second half of the question: *What might that pleasure provoke and produce?*

I ask this question because I entered this study with a political commitment, interested in pleasure not just for pleasure's sake but because of what I felt to be its liberatory potential. My inquiry has been guided and influenced by adrienne maree brown (2019), who writes in *Pleasure Activism* that her first intention for readers of the book is that we "recognize that pleasure is a measure of freedom" (p. 3). As much as I have questioned the use of critical theory broadly and critical literacy specifically, I am still fundamentally committed to the goal of working together to generate a more abundant world—abundantly just, abundantly equitable, abundantly joyful, abundantly free. It is important to me, therefore, to spend time with pleasure's role in that goal.

Two of my preliminary becoming-questions, crafted at the start of this dissertation study, reveal how I began this work thinking about pleasure and neoliberal multiculturalism. *What is the relationship between pleasure and neoliberal multiculturalism in the academy?* I asked. And *does pleasure act as a resistance to neoliberal multiculturalism or other tenets of higher education? If so, how?* I tried to get at these questions by asking my study participants about their experiences with literacy in higher education broadly, comparing and contrasting those experiences with moments

when pleasure was provoked and produced in Writing 101. I also asked them if they think that aspects of their identity impact their experiences of pleasure, and if so, how. I asked this question as a way to try to get at the roles that various identities take up within neoliberal multicultural systems, but it was a tricky question for me to explain and for participants to answer. It felt forced, and therefore false. In the end, I glimpsed this sociopolitical aspect of the phenomenon in and through other parts of our conversation; neoliberal multiculturalism, its work on students, and pleasure's work on it was only viewable at a slant. My final becoming-question (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023) for this analysis—***what does pleasure do?***—illustrates the broader lens I decided to take.

The theoretical concepts I think with in this chapter—brown's (2019) *pleasure activism*, Hersey's (2022) *resistance*, and Melamed's (2011) *neoliberal multiculturalism*—help me to explore the question of what pleasure provokes and produces in the context of the university. This is the second of my two-layer analytic approach, as depicted in Figure 6. I begin this analysis by setting the stage with an exploration of Melamed's *neoliberal multiculturalism*, considering the ways our current sociopolitical context informs how I think with this theory. I then bring brown and Hersey into the conversation to think about what pleasure does and can do within that context. Throughout, I add phenomenological material and post-reflexions to serve as additional discourse partners in this inquiry.

Is This Still Neoliberal Multiculturalism?

In a post-reflexion written just after my first full read-through of the study's phenomenological material, I wrote about neoliberal multiculturalism and my questions

about whether this term is still accurate to describe our social, political, and cultural context. “I’m not sure that’s the right descriptor for this time anymore. I think we are in some sort of new phase…maybe just straight up, full frontal racism?” I wondered. This was a week or so after Trump was inaugurated as president for the second time. It seemed clear to me that Trump and his supporters no longer cared about the “post-World War II racial break, where in order to convince the world that it was no longer on the side of white supremacy, the U.S. adopted official antiracisms” (Melamed, 2011, p. xi). They didn’t seem concerned about appearing on the right side at all; instead, many were quite proudly on the side of white supremacy, as evidenced by Elon Musk’s Nazi salute the day after the inauguration, which was followed by a systematic dismantling of anything connected to diversity, equity, and inclusion that continues as I write this chapter.

A few days after writing this post-reflexion I met with my advisor, Dr. Justin Grinage, and talked through my questions about whether neoliberal multiculturalism is the right description for this moment. What I drew from that conversation is the understanding that, while some forces may be currently working in blatantly racist and white supremacist ways, the larger cultural and political ethos still sees neoliberal multiculturalism as the goal, the “norm” that Trump and his ilk are deviating from. Higher education, specifically, continues to embrace neoliberal multiculturalism, and as the context of this study higher education’s embrace is salient. Melamed (2011) cites higher education and universities as key disseminators of official liberal antiracisms, largely through literary studies. According to Melamed (2011), official antiracisms and literary studies are:

> liberal modes of institutionalizing power that have worked in the value form of difference by constructing orders of difference that have created and imposed normative systems. I attribute the uniquely powerful and effective ideological work that literary studies has accomplished to how it has been persistently defined within postwar orders as a privileged tool that white Americans can get to know difference—to learn the supposed inside stories of people of color, to situate themselves with respect to racial difference, and to know the truth about the difference that racial difference makes (or does not make). (p. xv-xvi)

This is the context within which my study participants live, learn, think, and write. While Writing 101 exists more within the academic discipline of composition than literacy studies, the connections are still there and strong.

We can also see how neoliberal multiculturalism has re-flourished in the past few years as a direct response to the radical, materially antiracist movement inspired by the murder of George Floyd in 2020 at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer. In *Represent and Destroy*, Melamed (2011) argues that at the same time that official antiracisms were being disseminated and taken up through multilayers of U.S.-led national and global capitalism, radical antiracisms emerged and sustained as resistant movements and politics that connect intentionally to the materiality that official antiracisms deny. According to Melamed (2011), radical antiracisms are "antiracist thinking, struggle, and politics that reckon precisely" (p. 47) with the aspects of race and racialization that official antiracisms close off. They are material antiracisms that prioritize the uneven distribution of power and goods within global capitalism and

understand material inequality as primarily a race matter. In other words, radical antiracisms grapple with racial capitalism in ways that official antiracisms, specifically neoliberal multiculturalism, do not.

After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it became increasingly clear that the Cold War civil rights platform, which "stressed desegregation, symbolic equality, and the goodwill of tolerant whites," (Melamed, 2011, p. 26) was inadequate to address the material needs of disenfranchised people of color. Race-based social movements that emerged during this time included Black Power, Black feminism, Chicano nationalism, Asian American civil rights, American Indian sovereignty, queer, third worldist, women of color, the New Left (Melamed, 2011). Melamed explains that, although diverse, these movements have all sought decolonization, nonexploitative ethico-economics, and new collectivities. Importantly, for radical antiracisms, cultural and political activism are seen as a practice of liberation—"of bringing a transformed world into concrete being by performatively (re)constituting communal life*:* its institutional and social structures, everyday experiences, and expressions of personhood" (Melamed, 2011, p. 27). In direct contrast to official antiracisms, which dematerialize culture, radical antiracisms place culture, art, and politics at the heart of communal, functional, and material life and living. In the wake of George Floyd's murder, radical antiracist discourse spread across the United States; for a brief time it felt like we as a society were ready to think about racism systemically and do something about it materially. But just as liberal multiculturalism consolidated as a response to the radical antiracisms of the 1960s and 1970s, as a "means of containing and managing the social movements' deployment of culture by turning it into aesthetics,

identity, recognition, representation" (Melamed, 2011, p. xix), neoliberal multiculturalism has consolidated and closed off the radical and materially antiracist potential of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, evidenced best by the re-election of Donald Trump. According to Wendy Brown (2015), author of *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, neoliberalism "cauterizes democracy's more radical expressions, those erupting episodically across Euro-Atlantic modernity and contending for its future with more robust versions of freedom, equality, and popular rule than democracy's liberal iteration is capable of featuring" (p. 9). Now, as universities across the country hurry to remove diversity, equity, and inclusion from their courses, programming, and websites to capitulate to Trump's will, it is even more clear the role that higher education plays in sustaining this de-materialized ideology.

Having established that this is still neoliberal multiculturalism, my inquiry turns to what pleasure might do within this context. What does the pleasure my study participants experienced provoke and produce? In the next section I bring in brown (2019) and Hersey (2022) as conversation partners to explore this question in the context of the dissertation study.

What Does Pleasure Do?

One of the tenets of neoliberalism multiculturalism is that all of our collective and individual actions, choices, and behaviors—our identities—have become a part of market commodification. Wendy Brown (2015) explains that:

> As a normative order of reason developed over three decades into a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality, neoliberalism transmogrifies every

> human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic. All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized. In neoliberal reason and in domains governed by it, we are only and everywhere *homo oeconomicus.* (pp. 9-10)

It is easy to see how, within this understanding of the world and human behavior and interaction, all experiences of pleasure are acts of extraction or consumption—"all conduct is economic conduct." Brown traces the principle of *homo oeconomicus* from its conception over a hundred years ago as an avoidance of pain and pursuit of pleasure, to an entrepreneurialized turn at the start of neoliberalism forty years ago where, still oriented by interest and profit seeking, *homo oeconomicus* was formulated as human capital, to present day's significant reshaping as financialized human capital, where "its project is to self-invest in ways that enhance its value or to attract investors through constant attention to its actual or figurative credit rating, and to do this across every sphere of its existence" (Brown, 2015, p. 33). Pleasure in this framework is understood as a self-focused pursuit within a worldview where only some people are allowed to have enough.

But this study's phenomenological material and the theories I am thinking with demonstrate that we are not only limited to thinking about ourselves, our lives, and our choices economically. Not all pleasure is an extraction of goods in a zero-sum game within racial capitalism—some pleasure, of course, but not all of it. Neoliberal multiculturalism alone does not account for the pleasure this study's participants

described taking shape in and through their literacy practices and experiences, and in and through relationship with each other. It also does not account for the ways that even small moments of affective pleasure can disrupt the ways that neoliberal multiculturalism and racial capitalism do work on us the majority of the time. While I don't disagree that neoliberal multiculturalism both describes and motivates our current world order, I do not think it is the only thing at work, nor do I think it is the only option. adrienne maree brown (2019) offers an understanding of pleasure that is abundant and non-extractive, a pleasure that is more "than capitalism believes in" (p. 7). This understanding necessitates acceptance of what feels a little bit like magic, the possibility for us to generate more pleasure without taking from the pleasure of others. brown's *pleasure activism* as a theoretical concept depends on this generative potential; according to brown (2019), "pleasure activists believe that by tapping into the personal goodness in each of us we can generate justice and liberation, growing a healing abundance where we have been socialized to believe only scarcity exists" (p. 13). I think much of what I've written about so far in this dissertation is an example of that generation. Hersey's (2022) *resistance* also offers a framework for thinking about pleasure as a disruption of neoliberal multiculturalism. "Capitalism has cornered us in such a way that we only can comprehend two options," she argues:

> 1: Work at a machine level, from a disconnected and exhausted place, or 2: Make space for rest and space to connect with our highest selves while fearing how we will eat and live. This rigid binary, combined with the violent reality of poverty, keeps us in a place of sleep deprivation and constant hustling to survive. There are

> more than two options. The possibilities are infinite, although living under a capitalist system is to be confronted with a model of scarcity. This space makes you falsely believe there is not enough of everything: not enough money, not enough care, not enough love, not enough attention, not enough peace, not enough connection, not enough time. There is abundance. (Hersey, 2022, pp. 15-16)

Thinking with brown (2019) and Hersey (2022) offers me a way of understanding pleasure that does not negate the reality of neoliberal multiculturalism but insists that it is not the only story we have to tell.

How, then, does pleasure disrupt neoliberal multiculturalism? Have the student experiences I've written about here somehow shifted the role of neoliberal multiculturalism in the university and society at large? Are we moving on to a new post-neoliberal age?

No, of course not. In a post-reflexion from February 2, 2025, I wrote about the disorientation of beginning and end a seven-year doctoral program with Trump as president:

> *Okay! I am done with my first line-by-line read through and analysis. Also, Trump is president again. I was thinking on my drive to this coffee shop that I started my PhD while he was president, and I'm ending it when he's president again. It feels like such a negative bracket around an experience that has been truly transformative for me. It also gets at what I've been thinking about around my students' experiences of pleasure and the connection to neoliberal multiculturalism. I feel like all of this transformative, progressive learning I did*

> *really had no effect on the larger social and political structures, right? But it's given me a very different frame with which to view things, and it's also taught me about the importance of caring for self…not the shallow self-care that Instagram coaches shill out, but true caring of the self. I don't know if any of my participants' experiences of pleasure have done anything to change the trajectory of neoliberal multiculturalism in this country. And in reality…I'm not sure that's the right descriptor for this time anymore…*

Later, in the same post-reflexion, I wrote about where I was feeling uncertain within the dissertation study:

> *I think the area I am most uncertain of is how all of my students' experiences connect back to the liberatory orientation of this work, within the container of neoliberal multiculturalism (or whatever I decide to call our current state). I don't want to overly force connections…and yet I see they are there. They are just small cracks, not large fissures. I am uncertain about how to talk about racial capitalism in this context, because like I've described before, I don't think my participants' experiences have done anything to disrupt racial capitalism. BUT, in their words—these experiences have impacted THEM, and that also matters.*

After leaning into writing as inquiry and thinking with Ahmed (2006, 2010, 2014)'s *affect* and Simpson's (2011, 2017) *presencing* in the previous two chapters, I've come to understand that this is pleasure's role within neoliberal multiculturalism, at least within the context of this study: it can resist and protect and heal, for the person experiencing it.

The pleasure that took shape for my study participants did not change the society within which they live, but it changed *them*.

From Flat to Whole

One of the impacts of neoliberal multiculturalism on education—both K–12 and higher education—is a flattening of the student learning experience into a product, most often a physical artifact, that can be ostensibly seen, understood, and assessed by someone external to the learning experience itself—the educator. Though one can reasonably argue that classroom assessments are meant to service as evidence of the learning that has happened within the student, internally, it is clear from the experiences of students in this study as well as my own experiences as a learner and educator that it's a short and slippery slope to viewing the external product as the learning itself. It's the essay that gets the grade, after all, not how the student moved through the writing process or their metacognitive reflection of the learning journey. As study participant Christopher described in Chapter 5, constraints such as being told what to write about and what format and length the writing product had to be led to feelings of "being trapped by the ideas and topics of someone else." Rather than focusing on his own learning experience, Christopher recalled writing an essay and being "stuck upon a sentence or paragraph for hours deciphering what sounded best and what would attain the best grade." This emphasis on the external expectations of his teacher as opposed to an internally-driven desire to express his own learning led to Christopher developing "a fear of [his] own writing." I don't believe that any educator wants students to be afraid of their own writing, yet this is what happens when education is shaped by market neoliberalism,

which, in the words of education scholar Michael Apple (2001), "demand[s] the constant production of evidence that one is in fact 'making an enterprise of oneself' (Olssen, 1996, p. 340)" (p. 416). What are assessments and grades if not a way to prove our enterprising worth?

Making space for pleasure as phenomenon within the broad context of education and the specific context of literacy education offers the possibility to return shape and wholeness to that flattened student experience. I don't see our traditional teaching and learning patterns of instruction and assessment changing significantly any time soon, at least for the majority of educators, students, and schools. But the phenomenological material in this study is testament to the fact that allowing for pleasure—and not just allowing for it but intentionally working to facilitate it—can shift the learning experience *for the learner*, even when a final product is still created, submitted, and assessed. Thinking with affect (Ahmed, 2006, 2010, 2014) helped me to understand that the affects that circulate within and amongst groups of students can greatly impact not just those students' experiences of pleasure, but their very identities and feelings of self-worth. As Madison and Levi described in Chapter 4, they felt pleasure when they were able to write honestly and vulnerably, and that honest and vulnerable writing led to changes in their sense of self that lasted long after their writing projects were concluded. Levi reflected on this transformation in his study freewrite:

> The experience of being able to effectively communicate my history and the impact it has had on me was one that is hard to put into words. It can be summed up as almost like a relief of sorts: a pent up feeling of anxiety and low self-worth

> had been released, lightening an emotional load and toll that had been bearing down on me for much of my life. While the initial task was difficult, the feeling at the end was more than worth it, and the writing piece that resulted from this effort has become one of the most important pieces I have ever written. I can acknowledge that it may be far from perfect, either with formatting, grammar or otherwise, but those things mean nothing to me compared to the content, which was honestly life-changing to see expressed.

Levi received a grade for his project and his course grade is captured on his transcript. His whole education might still be thought of as a project in making an enterprise of himself, especially in light of his working-class background, which I haven't discussed as much in these pages, but which contributes significantly to his identity. But in our conversation Levi did not talk about pleasure felt through getting an A, or how his eventual degree will open up traditional neoliberal opportunities within the middle class—he talked about how pleasure took shape through honest writing within a group of students who showed him they could handle his honestly. That they wanted his honesty. Levi's experience is a resistance to what Hersey (2022) describes as the "grind culture" of higher education and society at large, a "collaboration between white supremacy and capitalism" that "views our divine bodies as machines" (p. 12). Hersey, much like Ahmed (2006, 2010, 2014) and Simpson (2011, 2017), believes that our worth is not connected to how much we produce; instead, our bodies "are a tool agent for change. A site of liberation. Our bodies know" (Hersey, 2022, p. 12). Levi found worth and pleasure in his

authentic connection with other human beings and through the process of writing his story down.

From Information Bits to Pleasure-Feeling Humans

> It is risk-taking to do the opposite of what the dominant culture wants. (Hersey, 2022, p. 31)

The flattening of the learning experience I described above is compounded for students from marginalized groups, whose identities are commodified within neoliberal multiculturalism as "information bits" (Melamed, 2011) that people from dominant groups (white, straight, cis-gender) can learn about—often through reading literary texts—to get to know difference without necessitating any material change. In *Represent and Destroy,* Melamed (2011) does not write at length about the personal impacts of those whose identities inform those information bits, but it's undeniable that dehumanization is inherent within this construct; whole, complex, dynamic human beings are incongruous to the neoliberal multicultural goal of flattening and parceling out identities into digestible, consumptive bits of diversity. In our study conversation, Madison and I talked at length about the ways that educational norms and culture—norms that neoliberal multiculturalism inform—have impacted how pleasure has taken shape for her in and through literacy and schooling experiences throughout her life. Significantly, for much of her education Madison has actively held herself back from pleasure, out of a desire to fit in and of a fear of standing out. Pleasure has often felt too conspicuous for Madison, whose identity is shaped by her experiences of growing up as

one of only a few students of color in a small rural town, moving to a much more diverse midwestern city during high school, and then landing in another midwestern—but less diverse—city for college. Our conversation touched on how these experiences have informed the push and pull Madison feels between allowing herself to feel deep engagement and pleasure in her work, and the desire to appear the same as her classmates.

Much like I did in Chapter 4 when applying Madison's experience with our first course writing project to thinking with affect (Ahmed, 2006, 2010, 2014), I've decided to share the full excerpt of this portion of my conversation with Madison below. While lengthy, I think it's important for Madison to tell her own story. Following this phenomenological material, I consider what brown (2019) and Hersey (2022) might say in response to Madison's experiences with pleasure.

Kristin: One of the big things that I've been asking people is about identity and pleasure. And I feel like we've already we've been sort of talking about that this whole time, but I'm curious if you feel like if there's anything else that you would have to add to that sort of intersection, like how your various identities as a Black person, as a woman, other pieces of your identity, impact your like, ability to access pleasure in coursework, or on your own, sort of the whole picture. Do you have any more thoughts about that?

Madison: I think, yeah, I think the way I was raised even plays into that, like, a feeling like you can't find pleasure in work, if that makes sense. Like, basketball was basketball and, yeah, I should enjoy it, but it was like…basketball. And same with school, it was like *school*, not something you enjoy. And that's definitely something that I still struggle with now, feeling like, okay, I really do—yeah I'm at school, but I do want to enjoy it. And so I think that has definitely warped my perception a little bit on like, pleasure in terms

of writing, and taking pleasure from writing something in class, if that makes sense. Because I can think of countless times I wrote drafts or something and maybe felt like I was really getting into it and sharing my opinion and stuff like that. And then it's like, okay, I'm too deep into it. I need to come out and look at it from like: this is school, not pleasure, I guess.

Kristin: Does that voice telling you not to go too deep, is that sort of wanting to match the assignment description? And make sure you hit the marks on the rubric? Or is it connected to that childhood experience you were saying, or maybe both?

Madison: I think it's probably a mixture of both. But also, I think stemming from when I was younger, and I think probably a lot of people struggle with this, but if you have friends who maybe don't take school super seriously, I feel like I always feel the need to act like I don't take school super seriously, even if I do. And so I think some of that is like, I'll get really deep into like a paper or deep into an assignment, and it'll be worth like five points or something, and my friends will be like, why are you taking it so seriously? And that'll kind of be like, [sigh] *oh all right*. And I know my parents have definitely said stuff like that too, I think I maybe go a little too deep into assignments. And that can definitely play into it, but I think I more so get concerned about looking like I care too much, if that makes sense.

Kristin: Yeah, it does. I mean, I definitely think that other people's attitudes about school impact ours. And you're in a social world, constantly in different social situations and that definitely influences things. Do you feel like when you are in too deep—and I'm almost picturing a depth here—and you pull yourself out, is that a little bit of a voice? I've heard you say, *this shouldn't be giving you pleasure. This is just five points. You don't need to do this.* Like if you feel sort of embodied in that way that you feel when you're reading a thriller,[31] but when it's school, you're like, *oh, that's too much*.

Madison: Yeah, that's 100%. And I remember, this is the most recent example, I was doing a discussion post, it's like 250 to 500 words or whatever. And I was actually really

[31] Earlier in the conversation, Madison and I talked about her current love of thrillers and how good it feels to be absorbed in a book.

into it and into what I was reading. And then I remember I posted my response, and I was reading my classmates', and I was like, I went too deep, no one else is going as deep as I went—that kind of embarrassment, I guess, and feeling like I look like I'm trying too hard. And it is definitely a voice of like, if I'm mid-discussion post or mid-essay, and I feel like *oh, I'm so into it*, I'm like hold on, your professor might think you're trying to connect too much, or they're gonna think you're trying to do too much, or you're just going way too deep into it. It's only worth five points. Like, I bet if you look at everyone else's posts, or essays, or whatever they posted, it's gonna be like half of what you wrote.

Kristin: Yeah, that's so interesting. And it sounds like comparing it back to what you were describing in Project One, you were met with equal depth. And so you felt—I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but sort of in summary, putting this all together, it sounds like that gave you a chance or some confidence to do that without feeling like you'd be the only one.

Madison: Yeah, and I definitely like—I am a rambler. And like, I know, when I write, I'm a rambler, for sure, because it's just like the endless page. And so I just keep going. I think when I was met, when I met with, like, equal participation—I feel like I'm seeing that in my other sociology class now, like my table, we all have chosen to stick together, sit together every class because we *all* participate equally. And anytime someone new will sit at our table because we have an open seat, it's kind of awkward, cause they're not giving what we're giving back. And we're feel like we're sharing, like everyone on my table will share super vulnerable stuff. And I know if I was late to class and I had to sit at another table, I wouldn't speak because I'd be worried, or not feeling like everyone else was putting that in.

Kristin: That makes that makes so much sense. I'm really impressed with your, like, ability to understand this about yourself. This is complex stuff. So, you talked about being raised in a town where you felt a strong need to fit in. Do you feel like that connects to some of this lasting interest in making sure that you don't appear like too much or vulnerable? Like all the things that women, and especially as a Black woman I'm sure, are part of the cultural narrative, right?

Madison: Yeah, 100%. I feel it—I mean, that's something I think I'll always have to grapple with and overcome, for sure. I think in that town, everybody—I think it was also a bit of the switch from the town I was in before, [where] everyone is seen as advanced and if you're not in like, Algebra 7 as like a freshman, you're behind. And then when I went to school in [larger midwestern city], I was way ahead of all my classmates because of what was being pushed. And then I remember kind of feeling like, oh, I was trying to keep up with everybody there and please people, now here I'm like, above everybody, and I feel the need to dumb myself down. Because my basketball teammates, my friends, they're very smart people, but it was different for me. I was like, *oh my gosh, why am I in this class, in this class, in this class*, where they're all in the normal classes everyone should be in. And there was definitely some, you know, getting teased about like, why are you in calculus? You don't need to be in that, no one does that here unless you're trying to like, go to Harvard. And so it was that narrative of feeling like I need to dumb myself down a bit. And act like o*h, yeah, I don't really care*. Like, *oh, it just happened*. And I think I've carried that on now.

Kristin: Yeah, like it feels silly to care, to show that you care.

Madison: Yeah.

Kristin: I think it's a vulnerability to show what matters to you, you know? And it sounds like that discussion group that you have in your sociology class—does that bring a similar sense of pleasure that we've talked about where you're being honest, you're letting yourself go deeper?

Madison: Yeah, for sure. And I get to share so many other things that connect to what I wrote about in that personal narrative, you know, with my parents being interracial, and me now being in an interracial relationship and like, the expectations of childbearing, like all this stuff with families, and in terms of Black families, white families, that I never would have spoke up on—ever—because I wouldn't have felt knowledgeable enough, or I would have tried to make myself *not* seem knowledgeable enough. Even though that's something I have direct experience with.

Kristin: Right, it's not even like, calculus, book knowledge, it's real lived experience knowledge.

Madison: And I feel like when—I think the biggest thing is feeling like they care, if that makes sense? Like, if you share something, it's so, I feel it's like a heart wrench. It breaks your heart when you feel like you share something vulnerable, and everyone is kind of just like, *Yeah*… and you know, doesn't go off of it. And I feel so much more open to share when I feel like I can say something and they'll be like, *Oh, wow, I never thought of it like that, I have this,* or like, *Wow, that's really interesting.* So they continue to follow up, that type of thing.

Kristin: I mean, I think we probably all—I can think of friendships I have that are important to me but never get to that level of vulnerability that some other friendships have. And I feel so much more connected to the people that I can be that vulnerable with. Do you feel—I'm curious about the institution of higher ed, and how that plays into a part of this, and the institution of schooling. How do you think that—and I guess you've talked about this some already with the culture of trying to only do what's necessary—but is there anything else that you can draw connections between when thinking about like, the culture of higher education, or I guess the pressures of it, or your goals, and how that impacts your experiences of pleasure?

Madison: In your class, one thing that I loved off the bat was that we had fluidity in our assignments, and how we chose to—it was very much open ended and there wasn't a set one right answer. And I think almost all my other classes are very by the book, and that strips away a lot of the pleasure I feel like you get when doing assignments. The classes I've really enjoyed and loved are the ones where I feel like, you know, it's not as set and by the book. I feel like in college, it's true that a lot of the classes are truly just—you're met with a prompt, and you say what you think the teacher wants to hear. Or say what the rubric says. I mean, I had a teacher last year who like specifically said she didn't want you to write what *you* felt like, she wanted you to write what she wanted to hear. And so it just struck that all away, all that pleasure away. And I think that's why your writing class I always felt like was kind of a beacon, because it was like, okay, this is where I can actually express myself, and even if it's not a personal project, it's

something I can—I remember the final project I chose a topic that had always been super interesting to me, and I was able to curate that how I wanted to, knowing that you would keep an open mind. And I think the whole idea of like college, especially now, is very much you do what you need to do to get by. And you don't actually say what you feel. Which is I feel like how it's presented to you in high school, but it's really—I don't really feel like it should be that way.

Kristin: It's so interesting that we spend so many years of our life, because of how our culture is with education and higher education, doing something for the grade or for the GPA instead of—yeah, that's important, but what's the authentic learning experience?

Madison: Mmm-hmm.

Kristin: So, my last question is around a definition of pleasure that I'm working from in my dissertation. Have you heard of the author and scholar adrienne maree brown?

Madison: Yeah, yeah.

Kristin: I referenced her in class when we did our circular agenda—that came from her work. But she wrote a book called *Pleasure Activism*, and it's a book about how so much of social justice movements and organizing is about that external goal of what might actually happen and change. But her argument is that feeling pleasure in the work that we do is in itself an act of resistance, or is in itself—I think her definition of pleasure activism is experiences of pleasure that restore a sense of wholeness to the individual, and sort of work against the oppressive structures in their lives. And I really feel like, from what we've talked about, that rings true in your stories, these moments of pleasure are where you can show up as your whole self, and maybe resist, or at least move more happily within, these other environments that you're a part of. How does that feel, does that resonate at all, that definition?

Madison: Yeah, 100%, especially like I've said, feeling like I can't put—or when I put my full effort, or full intent into something, feeling like that's wrong. And it feels like it's not what I should be doing, as a college student. And so I think, yeah, an act of resistance, that really is true. Finding pleasure in doing school, I feel like 100% comes

across as that's not what you're supposed to find. And I feel like so many teachers preach that, like you might hate me, but you're gonna get through this class. And it's like, that's not what it should be! Yeah, that's like a really interesting quote, I'm marinating on it a bit.

Kristin: Well, I think you'd really like her work. The book that I read first by her is *Emergent Strategies*, and then *Pleasure Activism* is one of hers. But she also does science fiction—you were talking about writing that earlier—

Madison: Oh, yeah!

Kristin: She has a book, co-edited by her and someone else, called *Octavia's Brood*—

Madison: Oh, I've heard of that!

Kristin: Yeah, that's her. And if you're on social media, she's a fun follow because she does these great meme carousels. She just adds so much. I love it because she shares so much of my worldview, but she doesn't deny herself joy and pleasure, and talks a lot about how that's such an essential part of the human experience.

Madison: I think like, I—I don't know if this is going too deep, but I literally had a mental breakdown over the summer of feeling like the career path I was headed on was not going to give me pleasure. And you're being pushed to just—I feel like people always say, you know, just you do your job and that's it, and it really scared me because I don't—that's not what I want.

Kristin: You give decades of your life to just survive.

Madison: Yeah, exactly. And it freaked me out just hearing that, I'm like, I don't want to do that. I felt—when you say it's a resistance, I truly felt that, being like, no, I'm not going to force myself to go down this path of being a lawyer, that's not what I want. I was telling myself that's what I want, but I would rather be a teacher and not make as much and, you know, go against what everyone says. I remember telling my nanny family that I want to be a teacher, and they were like, well, you know, there's not much—talking all about the money—and it was like, that's not even—I want the

pleasure of it. I know that's what I'd enjoy. And I guess just thinking about that in terms of that whole quote, it truly is an act of like, no, I'm not doing what society is telling me to do to fake this career that I don't want.

Kristin: Yeah. And your body knows. I've had jobs that I don't enjoy, and it is just dreadful, to make yourself do it. And you can maybe do that for a few years in high school, a few years in college when you know, there's an end to it.

Madison: Right, right.

Kristin: I totally relate to that feeling. What kind of teaching do you want to do? Do you know?

Madison: I'm thinking high school, and I'm thinking history, which is why I want to do the history minor. I've thought about, like when I nannied, and now I'm doing this mentoring thing at the Y with elementary kids, and it's like, oh, maybe I want little kids. But I think I think as of right now, high school is what I'm thinking.

Kristin: Oh my gosh, Madison, that makes me so happy, you would be such a great teacher.

Madison: Thank you!

Kristin: Your kids would be so lucky, and colleagues. And, you know, I think having worked in lots of schools, it is a place where, if you can find the right school and the right community, people really come *caring*, every day. You really can't do the job without it. And it's not like there aren't hard days or times you're exhausted, but if you're looking for communities where you are met with the vulnerability and the honesty that you bring, I do think I've found that the most in my life among fellow teachers.

Madison: That's reassuring to hear. Because when I look at maybe where I'd want to settle, to teach, as of right now it's finding places where I feel like, people, like you said, are coming in with joy, coming in with the best mindset on how to help the kids.

Madison's was the only study conversation where I brought up brown's (2019) theoretical concept of pleasure activism as we talked—I think because we'd discussed so many related topics, it felt natural to introduce. Of all of my conversations with the 12 study participants, Madison's stands out to me as the most directly connected to brown's (2019) assertion that "pleasure activism is the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy" (p. 13). Madison's story is one of reclaiming wholeness from societal structures that have fractured her identity into manageable bits that don't threaten to complicate or disrupt the hegemonic common sense (Gramsci, 1971). Pleasure as phenomenon takes shape for Madison when she is able to show up as her authentic self—when honesty is met with honesty, vulnerability met with vulnerability, depth met with depth—and those bits are made more whole.

brown's (2019) book *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* includes original writing from brown as well as excerpts and pieces from other writers whose thinking and work inform brown's theoretical concept. This includes Audre Lorde's (1978/1984) "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power."[32] When I re-read Lorde's essay after my conversation with Madison, I noticed so many parallels and connections with what she had shared. One of the main threads throughout our conversation was Madison's feeling that letting herself experience the deep pleasure that comes naturally to

[32] Paper delivered at the Fourth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Mount Holyoke College, August 25, 1978. First published as a pamphlet by Out & Out Books. Published by Crossing Press in 1984 in the collection *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. While I reference brown's (2019) inclusion of this essay in *Pleasure Activism*, the citations and page numbers here correspond to Lorde's 1984 publication.

her in and through activities she cares about—including writing and expressing her ideas—is not okay, not normal. In her words, "finding pleasure in doing school, I feel like 100% comes across as that's not what you're supposed to find." Lorde refers to pleasure as an erotic, feminine power, and argues that "as women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge" (p. 53).[33] This distrust is so clear in Madison's story. So is, however, the sense of wholeness Madison feels when she is able to let herself stay in that deep place of pleasure, when her pleasure is received and mirrored by others as it was in our writing course and in some of her sociology courses. Lorde explains that:

> The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference. (p. 56)

Madison and Levi's experience with our first course project, the personal narrative—highlighted in Chapter 4—is an example of the power and affective pleasure that comes from deeply sharing a pursuit with another person. Both writers felt the bridge that formed between them and the rest of their group members, and it was that bridge that gave them the confidence to step into honest writing and storytelling. This kind of sharing is not easy; in Madison's words, "if you share something, it's so, I feel it's like a

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[33] In a footnote to this essay in *Pleasure Activism*, brown (2019) notes her understanding of a "nonbiological feminine erotic power," which she believes "all bodies can tap into" (p. 27). I hold the same understanding.

heart wrench. It breaks your heart when you feel like you share something vulnerable." Lorde says that "it is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work" (p. 54). But once we have recognized pleasure's integrative power and experienced "the fullness of this depth of feeling...in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves" (p. 54). For Madison and Levi, demanding the most from themselves in one writing project led to lasting feelings of self-worth and pride.

Lorde (1978/1984) argues that the erotic is not only personal, it is deeply political. Once we discover our capacity for pleasure—a "deep and irreplaceable knowledge" (p. 57)—we come to demand from all of life "that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible" (p. 57). This, Lorde asserts, is one reason the erotic and pleasure are so feared, or relegated to the bedroom alone, when they are recognized at all: "For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we been to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of" (p. 57). This demand is in direct conflict with the goals of neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2011), which depend on our complacency. The activism within brown's (2019) pleasure activism is ignited when we see Lorde's erotic as a part of both personal and social change. Madison's story captures the competing forces of external expectations and internal truth that work on all of us. The example she shared of orienting her schooling toward the external directives of the teacher and system as opposed to the internal motivation to learn and express herself is what Lorde calls living outside ourselves. But, Lorde argues:

> When we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within. (p. 58)

Once Madison had experiences of living from within, it became harder—impossible—for her to accept the life path that others had laid out for her, a path that prioritized financial success over pleasure and fulfillment. When asserting that she wants to be an educator instead of a lawyer, Madison is demanding from herself and from her life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which she knows herself to be capable of.

Hersey (2022) describes this living from within—which includes honoring pleasure and rest—as a "politics of refusal" (p. 31), a resistance to the systems that view us only as tools for their production. "I don't belong to the systems," Hersey writes. "They cannot have me" (p. 29). When I asked Madison about whether her experiences of pleasure felt like resistance to the normative pressures she had been describing, the pressure to not put her "full intent" into her activities or to find pleasure in doing school, I could hear in her response how the word resonated with her. Much of Madison's story is about un-learning the idea that conformity and blending in are more important than letting herself experience the full breadth and depth of her feelings. Schooling reinforced

this for Madison for most of her life, with its focus on completion and compliance and saying what the teacher wants to hear. Hersey argues that:

> The stress, anxiety, overloaded curriculum, and pressure we normalize in public schools and higher education are toxic and dangerous for everyone involved, but particularly toxic for young children and young adults who are still developing a sense of self. They are exposed to the lie that their worth is determined by how much they can accomplish constantly and it's reaffirmed and rewarded when they push their bodies to the limit to do well in classes. Many also begin to pour themselves into the life of perfectionism, which is a function of white supremacy. We internalize the toxic messages received from the culture and begin to hate ourselves unless we are accomplishing a task. We seek external validation from a violent system void of love. (p. 117)

The tension between education as a tool of liberation (e.g., Freire, 1970/2018; hooks, 1994; Shalaby, 2017) and schooling as an oppressive system (Meiners, 2011; Rodríguez, 2010) has been at the center of my own work within education systems my whole adult life. It feels like an unsolvable problem—what do we do with systems that can both harm and set free? Over time I've begun to understand this tension less as a problem that needs to be —or even can be—solved, and more an exercise in leaning into the discomforting nature of incommensurability (Tuck and Yang, 2012), or the acceptance that there are portions of projects that "simply cannot speak to one another, cannot be aligned or allied" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 28). I think that Madison's story exemplifies both of these impacts of education; schooling is one of the places where she learned to silence and

stifle her feelings of pleasure, and it is also one of the places where she is learning that it is okay—*good*—to let herself experience pleasure in and through her learning.

While it may not cause an earthquake large enough to topple down the oppressive system of neoliberal multiculturalism, the resistance Madison asserts when showing up as a full, feeling human creates a disruptive space for *her* to inhabit, even as the system surrounding her remains intact. It moves her from "information bit" (Melamed, 2011)—valued only for the function it serves within neoliberal multiculturalism—to complex human, capable of deep pleasure, valued for who she is and what she brings to her relationships with others and her engagement with the world. Returning to Simpson's (2017) presencing, I am reminded that our agentic engagement "changes us because it constructs a different world within which we live.… If we want to create a different future, we need to live a different present, so that present can fully marinate, influence, and create different futurities" (p. 20). In this way, the type of resistance that Madison is carving out for herself is the very thing that might lead to a different futurity, far beyond neoliberal multiculturalism and its constraints.

In this chapter I've considered the question, *what does pleasure do?* Remembering my political commitments, I explored the impacts of pleasure on neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2011) by thinking with brown's (2019) pleasure activism and Hersey's (2022) resistance. What I learned through the process of writing as inquiry (Augustine, 2014; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) is that the pleasure that took shape for my study participants in and through their literacy experiences transformed their own understandings of self and their own engagement with learning. This matters. While I

focused on Madison's story as a way to open up the phenomenon, all of the students' diverse experiences add texture and dimension to the flattening effects of neoliberal multiculturalism, and serve as essential disruptions, however small.

The work of pleasure activism, of reclaiming our "whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy" (brown, 2019, p. 13), is complex. There are no simple or straight lines forward. Hersey (2022), when writing about how "there is no blueprint or cookie-cutter way to get our liberation," (p. 55), references fugitivity as method. Reading Hersey's words, I am reminded of literacy scholar Jamila Lysicott (2020), who, when asked questions of *how*, always answers—fugitivity:

> That is, finding refuge and agency in the critical literacies that forge a clear awareness of the systems of power, while actively pursuing freedom from these systems. And this, with the knowledge that freedom is never one complete, linear thing. Rather, the fugitive moves from refuge to refuge. From freedom to freedom. Building allies, shaping tools, and beating paths along the way. (p. 260)

Chapter 7: Otherwise Possibilities

I've nearly reached the end of this formal process—a process that began with dreaming and was followed by years of learning, unlearning, writing, rewriting, reading, researching, pausing, starting over, moving through. A dissertation is the final artifact of the doctoral journey, but there's no way the words in these pages could capture everything that I have learned over the past seven years and all the ways I've been transformed.

These pages do tell a (partial, fragmented) story of what matters to me right now, and how it has come to matter. Herman (2010) writes that research is personal especially for doctoral students, as it often "involves the students' personal development and is sometimes motivated by the students' need to take stock and make sense of their life and experiences so far" (p. 283). The post-reflexions that open this dissertation[34] illustrate the need I felt at the beginning of this project to take stock and make sense. I think a large part of my time as a doctoral student has been marked by deconstruction (Derrida, 1976)—deconstruction of what I thought I knew about education, deconstruction of my assumptions about our sociopolitical contexts and my place within them, deconstruction of my understandings of power and privilege and progress and change. I end these years so much less certain than I was when I began. Everything, including research, feels incomplete, tenuous, partial, tender. While I was drawn to phenomenology even before I formally enrolled as a doctoral student, my lived experiences over the past seven years—

[34] See Chapter 1: Narrative Framing.

academic, personal, and professional[35]—led me to a place where the only methodology I felt comfortable taking up was one that sought not to generalize, quantify, or find, but simply to glimpse—for a moment—the ways in which we find ourselves intentionally connected to the world (Vagle, 2025). Post-intentional phenomenology has provided me both the process and worldview I needed in order to complete this work. Focusing on pleasure as phenomenon offered me a chance to think and write with desire (Tuck, 2009, 2010) about what, after deconstruction, can generate and grow.

Through working the PIP Triangle (Vagle, 2015) and leaning into writing as inquiry (Augustine, 2014; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), I have asked meaningful questions and explored how pleasure takes shape in the work that means the most to me: reading and writing, teaching and learning. Choosing what phenomenological material to bring to light during analysis and what lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Vagle, 2025) to follow when thinking with theory was by nature an exclusionary practice—every time I made a choice of what to include, I was also making a choice about what stories, experiences, and moments to leave out. So many of my conversations with study participants included lovely tangents about the books and genres that capture us as readers, the ways creative writing such a poetry and songwriting help us feel grounded in the world, and how integrating it feels when our passions and pleasures are met by others with equal passion and pleasure. While I pulled in phenomenological material in Chapters 4-6 that spoke most specifically to how pleasure takes shape within the context

[35] While not a focus of this dissertation, I know that living through a global pandemic as a full-time graduate student while raising young children contributed significantly to these feelings of uncertainty.

of Writing 101, I remain grateful to each participant and each story that was shared, including all the ones that didn't make it explicitly into these pages. They are still here, in layers beneath words, as every conversation informed my own understanding of pleasure as phenomenon.

In the spirit of PIP's recognition of the incomplete, I don't attempt in this last chapter to tie this study into a neat bow. Instead, I reflect on what I learned through working the PIP Triangle and what is standing out to me the most about pleasure at this point in the process. I explore some of the implications of this work for teaching and learning, including in the context of my current professional role, as well as for future research. I end by offering some thoughts on the otherwise possibilities (Crawley, 2014, 2016) of pleasure.

Reflecting on Analysis

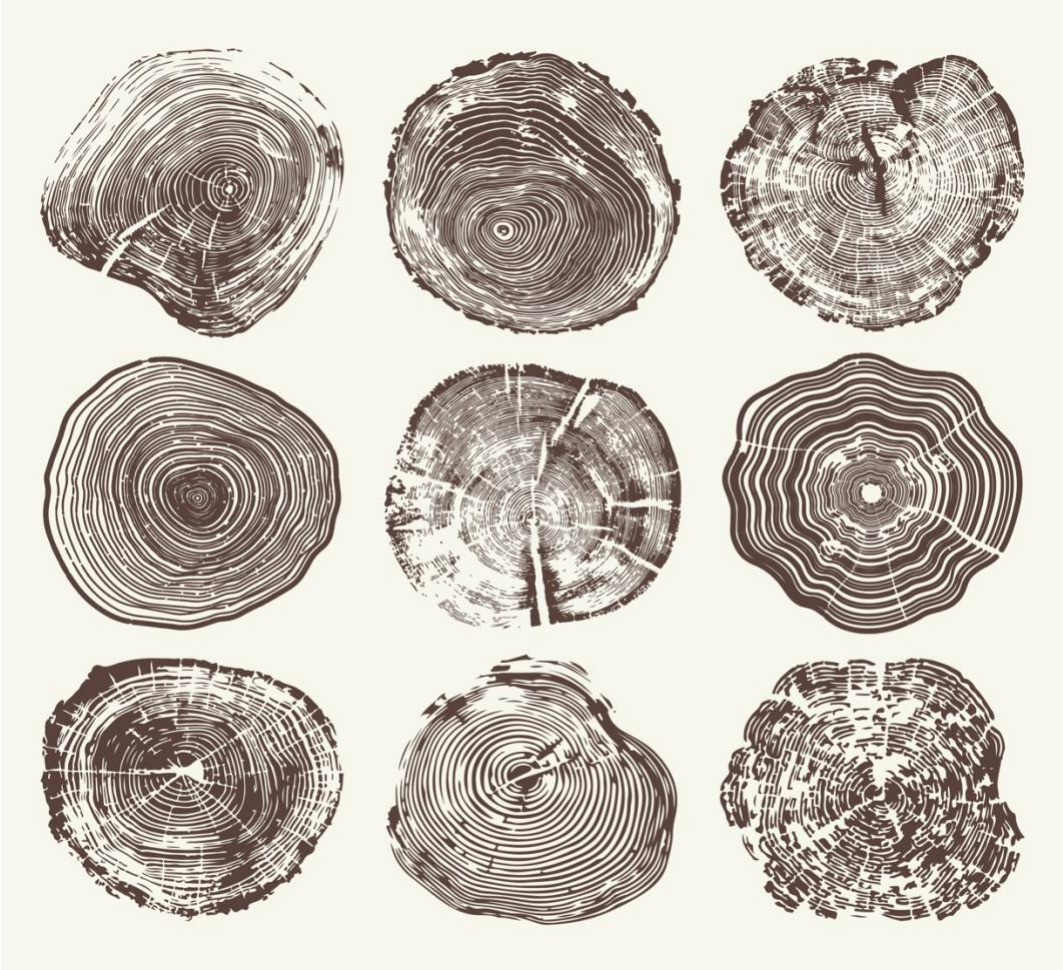
In this dissertation I engaged with analysis in two layers. First, I thought with *affect* (Ahmed, 2006, 2010, 2014) and *presencing* (Simpson, 2011, 2017) to ask: *how might pleasure be provoked and produced for undergraduates in and through their literacy experiences?* Second, I thought with *neoliberal multiculturalism* (Melamed, 2011), *pleasure activism* (brown, 2019), and *resistance* (Hersey, 2022) to ask: *what might that pleasure provoke and produce?*

While I envisioned this two-layered approach as fairly clean and linear, as depicted in Figure 6, the reality is that analysis and writing as inquiry are messy, iterative processes, where ideas and connections "flee, elude, flow, and leak" (Vagle, 2025, p. 114) across any boundaries I try to set. I realized that the image of tree rings better

illustrates both how this process went and how it felt: a nested analysis that allowed for spontaneous lines of connection across and among the layers. I chose this depiction of multiple tree rings (see Figure 9) to illustrate that even with this visual metaphor there is no one single way.

Figure 9

Tree Rings as Nested Analysis



Note: From *Wood Tree Rings Vector Set* [Illustration] by Premium Graphic Design, Adobe Stock (stock.adobe.com).

In this nested analysis, I shared phenomenological material in multiple ways: as conversation excerpts, as concrete research poetry (Leavy, 2020), and as a "hermit crab" (Adrian, 2018) timeline. I explored how Madison, Levi, and Christopher's stories specifically opened up the phenomenon in important and unique ways and layered my own post-reflexing with those stories. Through working the PIP Triangle I wrote about the ways that affect (Ahmed, 2006, 2010, 2014) can circulate between bodies to create a sense of trust and safety, giving students the confidence to write honestly and openly about their identities and lived experiences. Writers matter to each other. I explored how writing activities that ask students to name and follow their own orientations (Ahmed, 2006) allow for deep connection and engagement, and I shared about how important it has been for me as a writer to be able to follow the objects I am turned towards. I wrote about students' love of freewriting and process-based projects and about how presencing (Simpson, 2011, 2017) helps us locate the meaning of writing within the embodied writing process itself. I explored what the pleasure that takes shape for students in and through these affective, process-based literacy activities might do—how it can serve as resistance (Hersey, 2022) to systems such as neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2011), helping make whole (brown, 2019) what the world strives to make flat.

What stands out to me from this vantage point, at the end of this formal inquiry,[36] is that pleasure matters because of what it reveals. Pleasure in and of itself is not necessarily the goal; feeling pleasure is our clue that something important is going on.

[36] I know my informal inquiry around pleasure will continue long after the dissertation is complete.

What was happening for my study participants when they felt pleasure being provoked and produced? Deep learning. Authentic connection with others, in community. (Re)claiming their identities. Autonomy and creativity. Feeling present in their bodies. Showing up honest and whole.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

The main implication I see for this work is the understanding that those of us who have the privilege of facilitating learning spaces, whether formal or informal, need to take seriously the role of pleasure in learning. If pleasure is our clue that something important is going on, we should work backwards to facilitate engaging learning activities and collaboration opportunities such as those that my study participants described as provoking and producing pleasure for them. We should intentionally plan for and consider the affective dynamics of learning spaces and foster opportunities for affective relationships to form. We should allow for as much choice as possible within the learning goals, as study participants spoke over and over again about how important and impactful it was to them to be able to name and follow their own orientations. We should prioritize process over product, and help students build the metacognitive ability to reflect on their own learning as part of a life-long process, one that does not end when the final exam is complete. brown (2019) writes about her own praxis when facilitating collaborative justice work, which captures many of these elements:

> As I facilitate these movements for social and environmental transformation, with a focus on Black liberation, I always prioritize how people feel. Is it a pleasure to be with each other? Does the agenda or space allow for aliveness, connection, and

> joy? Is there a "yes!" at the center of the work? There are so many things that are violent, offensive, unbearable. An embodied "no" is so justified—but I don't believe it moves us forward. "Yes!" has a future. (pp. 23-24).

I appreciate that brown advocates for prioritizing how people feel. Many of my study participants talked about the fact that how they feel as learners isn't often considered or valued, especially in higher education. As Madison said, "so many teachers preach that, like you might hate me, but you're gonna get through this class. And it's like, that's not what it should be!" I think how students feel has always been important to me as an educator because it's important to me as a learner. Since I was a child, I've experienced the reciprocal connection between feeling good and learning well, and my years as an educator have only reinforced that reciprocity. Like brown says, a "no" can be justified, but it doesn't move us forward the same way that a "yes!" does.

A post-reflexion I wrote on October 13, 2023, a week into interviewing participants, captures how these elements of teaching and learning were showing up for me as the researcher during this process:

> *I have completed four interviews now, one on Monday and three today (Friday). I am having so much fun. It feels so good to connect with these former students and hear more about their experiences with pleasure, both in and outside of our course.*
>
> *When talking with each of them I feel so present and engaged. My mind is making connections between what one person is saying and what somebody else said, setting patterns and connections and moments of spark. I think I am a good*

interviewer—I enjoy listening to them and then finding ways to dig further, open up the conversation, make connections, etc.

It obviously feels good to hear that the course brought them pleasure—I expected that because it was a screener for the study. But many of the participants have named the actual course pedagogy, community, and me myself as a contributor to their pleasure, and honestly that makes me feel better as an educator than any grades could or test scores could or anything else.

It feels vulnerable to share these feelings of pride, but I think this excerpt illustrates that the pedagogical choices we make and the way we choose to show up for students matter in real ways. It also captures how energy bounces back and forth between people, how I was positively affected by students sharing their affective experiences. An implication we can take from this is the importance of asking students how they feel about their learning experiences and treating that data with as much value as grades or pass/fail rates.

I am no longer teaching Writing 101, but if I were I would work even more intentionally to foster opportunities for the provocation and production of pleasure. I would ask more questions and listen more deeply to students' affective experiences. I am certain that not every student felt pleasure take shape for them during the course, and the obvious limitation of this study in the traditional quantitative methodology sense is that only students who self-reported having experienced the phenomenon were interviewed. That was by design, of course—my goal was to listen and learn about all the ways that pleasure does take shape, not the ways it doesn't—but it means that there are layers and

perspectives not represented in these pages. In a post-reflexion written on February 2, 2025, I reflected on the areas I might be feeling "certain" about what something means:[37]

> *I think it's important for me to remember that the students I interviewed are the ones who self-identified that they experienced pleasure. Obviously, many of my students did not…either not enough to fill out an interest survey for this study, or just not at all. So I need to be careful that I don't draw any sort of conclusions about what absolutely leads to pleasure, because I just can't do that. Yes, relationship, presencing, and orientation are common productions across my participants, but for many students, I can assume those things did not produce pleasure. In some cases, I know that some of these elements produced anxiety, fear, overwhelm. Some students really did not take to working so closely with their writing groups. Some students did not like the freedom they had to pick their topics and modes of communication. And some may prefer the larger, anonymous lecture hall to the much more intimate class of 19. In my analysis I need to be careful to be clear that I am talking about how pleasure took shape for these study participants…not how it takes shape overall. That's just not doable.*

Post-intentional phenomenology seeks to open up, not define, and I think I did that in these pages. Learning more about how pleasure is provoked and produced for more learners would only add more depth and entangled layers within this understanding.

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[37] This question is one of Vagle's (2025) suggestions for the researcher to consider during analysis.

My professional role has shifted as I've moved through this research process. The semester that I interviewed study participants was my last semester in the first-year writing program; I now work for the state department of education, supporting the development and implementation of state academic standards for English Language Arts. On April 28, 2024, a few months into this transition, I wrote in my post-reflexion journal:

> *Work is going really well. I love my colleagues, I am learning so much, and it feels fun and good to be back in the world of supporting K–12 English Language Arts education. I think so much about the students in this study and what they taught me about what matters in their literacy experiences. Choice has come up constantly in my work, and choice is something almost every participant named as central to their experiences of pleasure. I'm sure it's no coincidence that I am in a deep phase of needing choice in my literacy activities too.*

While I no longer lead a formal classroom, I still regularly facilitate learning spaces, and have seen how the productions of affect, orientation, and presencing matter as much to adult professionals as they do to younger students. For example, even in a virtual meeting with over 100 attendees, opportunities for affective spark and connection have a tangible impact. Choice and identity are emphasized in our new state standards for English Language Arts, and having thought with orientation helps me to navigate conversations around the possibilities and challenges of choice more thoughtfully. Presencing reminds me that the biggest ways to have an impact in neoliberal systems are often the smallest ways, by paying attention to and valuing the *how.* How, as Simpson (2017) writes, is the theoretical intervention.

In addition, thinking and writing through the second part of my research question—*what might pleasure provoke and produce?*—has helped me to see the ways that even the smallest moments of wholeness and connection can serve as resistance to the systems that we participate in, including those we participate in willingly such as our places of employment. While efforts to provoke and produce pleasure in ourselves and others may never change how the system functions and what it produces, I've learned it can impact people's experiences within that system. It impacts my own. Since the self-reflexion where I expressed excitement in my new role, I have faced a variety of challenges, and there are days I wonder about whether working in such an entrenched system is right for me. But I have a much healthier space between myself and my production than I did early in my career. I know I am not defined only by what I do; it is not all of me. I no longer attempt to make clean or neat my very messy participation in the systems that surround me, but try to focus on my spheres of influence, remembering that even when working towards large transformation, "small is all" (brown, 2017). I recognize complexity and practice cultivating moments of pleasure activism (brown, 2019)—reclaiming wholeness—whenever possible. I remember what Hersey (2022) teaches: "I don't belong to the systems. They cannot have me" (p. 29).

Implications for Research

One of my goals in this dissertation was to contribute to the conversation about the role of pleasure in learning, specifically literacy learning in higher education. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is very little current research that exists at this intersection. My hope is that this study adds complexity to our collective understanding of pleasure,

especially as it relates to young adults and their literacy experiences. Much of what I explored when working the PIP Triangle connects with the takeaways from studies I synthesized in the literature review, including the importance of choice, identity, and community. The conditions of the flow experience that Smith and Wilhelm (2002) have described—a sense of competence and control, a challenge that requires an appropriate level of skill, clear goals and feedback, a focus on the immediate experience, and the importance of the social—all showed up in various ways in the stories study participants told and the phenomenological material I shared. My hope is that that higher education as a system continues to grapple with the necessity of pleasure for both learners and educators.

One thing I appreciate about social science research is that different methodologies and questions help us to understand different things about the complex world in which we live. This study focused on pleasure as phenomenon through a poststructural lens of viewing all knowledge as incomplete and partial. I think it would be interesting to explore pleasure and questions about its role and impact in literacy learning from the perspective of critical ethnography, or case study, or portraiture. Each of these methodologies and their philosophical and epistemological commitments might teach us something new and valuable. In addition, thinking with different theoretical concepts than the ones I chose here would open up different facets of the phenomenon—that would be valuable as well. This is one of the things that draws me most to post-intentional phenomenology, that there is no one right way, and that each choice leads to new potential that wasn't there just a moment ago. Had I thought with different theories, I

would have learned different things; that would have been good, too. I hope that other researchers interested in pleasure feel emboldened to take an expansive, curious approach, following their own lines of flight and orientations to see where they lead.

Otherwise Possibilities

> There's nothing new
>
> under the sun,
>
> but there are new suns.
>
> —Octavia Butler, unpublished manuscript

Throughout this dissertation I have positioned pleasure as a phenomenon that opens up Crawley's (2014, 2016) concept of *otherwise possibilities*. Ever since I first read it, the word *otherwise* has captivated me, I think because it provokes such a sense of imagination and potential, a sense of hope that things can be different than the way they are. It reminds me of the feeling I get when reading speculative fiction, the feeling that everything we know and are is only a fraction of what we can know and will someday be. Crawley (2016) writes that "otherwise, as word—otherwise possibilities, as phrase—announces the fact of infinite alternatives to what *is*" (p. 2). In a time when news headlines reveal a daily increase of intolerance and injustice across our country and the world—which is both new and not new at all—I yearn for infinite alternatives to what is.

The pleasure explored in this study is a part of what I see as a collective endeavor to open up the otherwise possibilities of literacy education. Madison, Levi, and Christopher's stories demonstrate all that is possible when we decide that how people feel matters. Madison's story specifically illustrates what pleasure can do for the people that

experience it within small moments of resistance to the neoliberal multicultural norm. My own braided post-reflexions speak to the impact that focusing on and following pleasure has had on me as a scholar and researcher. In many ways, the act of writing a dissertation has been an act of otherwise imagination—I had to believe in something before I saw it, trust myself as a writer and thinker before I knew if I could. Crawley says that "imagination is necessary for thinking and breathing into the capacities of infinite alternatives" (p. 3), and imagination is central to brown (2019) and Hersey's (2022) understandings of pleasure as activism and resistance, too. Connecting to the lineage of speculative and science fiction that informs her work, brown (2019) says, "I believe that all organizing is science fiction—that we are shaping the future we long for and have not yet experienced" (p. 10). Hersey (2022) connects imagination to relationship, saying that "we imagine by being in community. We imagine by receiving and offering radical care. We imagine by embracing and running toward our interconnectedness" (p. 188). My understanding of literacy and the purpose and power of reading and writing is fully entangled with my belief that expressing ourselves through story and in community changes us, and it is that change that makes infinite alternatives possible. My hope is that the readers of this project have the chance to experience these otherwise possibilities of pleasure, too.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment and Information Sharing

Recruitment Email

Hi [name here],

I hope you are doing well! I'm writing today to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting this year, tentatively called "The Otherwise Possibilities of Pleasure: A Phenomenological Exploration of Undergraduate's Literacy Experiences."

I'm inviting you specifically because I think, based on our conversations over the course of [Writing 101] as well as your reflections and writing projects, that **you would be a valuable participant in helping me explore how pleasure takes shape in and through literacy experiences.** These experiences may have taken place in [Writing 101], but we're certainly not limited to talking about that course alone!

If you are over 18 and would like to participate, please see the Information Sheet [LINKED] for more information, including details about the study and procedures.

After reading the Information Sheet, **if you are interested in participating in this study, please complete this Google Form [LINKED] and I will follow up with you within a few days.**

You can reply to this email to ask me any questions.

Depending on the level of interest I may not be able to include everyone who expresses interest, but I will follow up either way. Again, there is NO obligation to participate -- this is simply an invitation.

Thank you for considering this invitation, and I hope you are well and enjoying the beginning of fall!

Warmly,
Kristin

Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH

A Phenomenological Exploration of Pleasure

You are invited to be in a research study of how the phenomenon of pleasure takes shape for undergraduate students in and through their literacy experiences. You were selected as a possible participant because:

1. You were enrolled in [Writing 101] Fall of 2022 or Spring of 2023, with Kristin Bauck (the student researcher) as your instructor.
2. Kristin Bauck believes from multiple interactions, including conversations and observations, that you have experienced the phenomenon of pleasure in and through your literacy experiences, and can lend important insight to the study.

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Kristin Bauck (student researcher) and Dr. Amy Lee (primary investigator)

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in one interview (conversation), with a potential second interview if you're willing and if Kristin has substantial follow-up questions.
    a. Interviews will take place either in Kristin's university office in XXX, or via Zoom according to participants' preference.
    b. Interviews will last one hour.
    c. Kristin will record in-person interviews using her phone's VoiceMemo app and will record Zoom interviews through the Zoom platform. She will create a written transcription of each interview using a website called Otter.ai, which she will edit for accuracy. Kristin will also send participants a copy of the transcript so they can check for accuracy.
2. Write one short free write at the beginning of our interview. Participants can bring a computer or device, and Kristin will also bring some paper/pens. The free write is meant to spark our discussion – participants will have the choice whether to share the free write with Kristin or keep private.
    a. The question for the free write will be: *Write about a time or times you experienced pleasure in [Writing 101]. What were you doing, and how did it feel? Additionally, are there reading or writing activities you engage in outside of our course that include or lead to the experience of pleasure?*

3. Re-share or give permission for Kristin to use for the research study any course materials (writing projects, etc.) that you produced in [Writing 101] that connect with our conversation.

Confidentiality:
During the project, information from this study will be kept private and will be stored securely. Only the research team will have access to information that identifies you. Your identifying information will not be shared with others outside of this research study. However, organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that provides ethical and regulatory oversight of research, and other representatives of this institution, including those that have responsibilities for monitoring or ensuring compliance (such as the Quality Assurance Program of the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP)).

Any personal information that could identify you will be removed or changed before we publish any report or share the results or data from this study.

Recordings and transcripts from the interviews will be stored in the University of Minnesota's Box system, a secure digital storage location. Research material will be stored in Box for 5 years to allow for publication and/or future research; after that time all data will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Will I be compensated for my participation?
If you agree to take part in this research study, we will pay you $25 in the form of a Target gift card for your time and effort at the completion of the interview process.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher(s) conducting this study is (are): Kristin Bauck and Dr. Amy Lee. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at:

Kristin Bauck	Dr. Amy Lee
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 (Toll

Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to z.umn.edu/participants. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Google Form for Recruitment

Identification questions:

1. First Name
2. Last Name
3. Email address

Screening questions:

4. Are you over 18? (yes or no)
5. Were you a student of Kristin Bauck's in [Writing 101] in Fall 2022 or Spring 2023? (yes or no)
6. Have you experienced pleasure in and through your literacy experiences as an undergraduate, either through [Writing 101] course material or outside of class literacy activities? (yes or no)

Participant interest question:

7. Are you interested in participating in Kristin Bauck's dissertation study? Kristin will be confirming consent in a follow up email. (yes or no)

Scheduling question

These scheduling questions will help Kristin plan for the interviews. Please note: there is a chance that not all who are interested in participating will be selected, but sharing this information now will help with future scheduling. In addition, scheduling preferences will not impact study participation.

8. Please select how you would like to meet for the 1-hour interview (two options): in person in Nolte Center 331C or Zoom
9. Please let Kristin know some general times during your weekly schedule that would work best to schedule a 1-hour interview (paragraph answer).

Kristin will follow up with all who indicate interest via email within a few days. At that point you will have the choice to opt-in to the study. Please note: if more participants express interest than the study requires, Kristin will select participants.

Thank you!

Scheduling Email

Hi [name here],

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in Kristin Bauck's dissertation study, tentatively titled "The Otherwise Possibilities of Pleasure: A Phenomenological Exploration of Undergraduates' Literacy Experiences"!

This email is to schedule your 1-hour interview. In the Google Form, you selected [insert: in person or Zoom]. Here are some potential times that fit within the windows of availability you mentioned. Do any of them work for you? Please let me know your first choice and a 2nd choice backup.

[list potential times]

By scheduling and attending an interview, you are opting-in to this study. As a reminder, participation is voluntary, and you can opt-out at any point.

Please review the linked Information Sheet for details about the study and procedures, as well as contact information if you have any questions, etc.

Thank you for letting me know your 1st and 2nd choice for an interview conversation!

Warmly,
Kristin

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Initial Freewrite Question:

Participants will respond on paper or their electronic device and will then have the choice of sharing the free write with Kristin or keeping private.

1. How was pleasure provoked and produced for you over the course of [Writing 101]? In other words, when did you feel pleasure? Additionally, are there reading or writing activities you engage in outside of our course that bring you pleasure?

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about a time you experienced pleasure in [Writing 101].
2. Tell me about a time you experienced pleasure in a literacy experience outside of [Writing 101]. For example, this might be reading, writing for pleasure, creating digital materials, social media, etc.
3. How does your experience of pleasure in [Writing 101] compare or contrast with other literacy experiences you have had/are having at the university?
4. How does your experience of pleasure in [Writing 101] compare or contrast with literacy experiences you had before coming to the university, either as a young child or an adolescent?
5. What did it feel like for you when you experienced pleasure in and through literacy experiences?
6. Do you think that aspects of your identity impact your experiences of pleasure? If so, how?
7. Do you find it easy to experience pleasure in and through course activities? If so, why? If not, why not?
8. What has your general experience been like with writing and reading at the university?