“It’s Really Hard to Pump as a Teacher!”: An Inquiry into the Embodied Experiences of Lactating Teachers

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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September 2022
Acknowledgements

Thank you to each person who has supported me in the completion of this work. I had a gracious journey through my PhD because I could call you and you listened and shared, because you came over with dinner, because you rocked Win on your hip while I showered, because you invited me to writing retreats, because you encouraged me to keep doing the work, and didn’t doubt that I could.

I want to especially thank a few people for extraordinary gifts of time and resources.

Thank you to the teachers who participated in the study. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. Thank you to the community experts for sharing your insights.

To my committee - Working with you has been a great honor and honestly, a healing experience. Thank you for your spaciousness and your integrity. Thank you, Dr. Timothy Lensmire, for being what everyone told me you were: a supportive, eloquent, and critical presence. Thanks for encouraging me to trust my voice, to be creative, and to do the work I felt I needed to do. Thank you, Dr. Justin Grinage, for your thoughtful comments and engagement, for introducing me to Sarah Ahmed’s work, among others, and for your sense of groundedness. Thank you, Dr. Jasmine Kar Tang, for encouraging me to find the joy in the process of writing, and the tip to “write for just five minutes.” Thanks for your steady engagement in the dissertation writing process and for inviting me to address the practical implications of this work. Thank you, Dr. Betsy Maloney Leaf, for your support of artistry and for challenging me to consider art-based research in the context of social justice work.

To my parents – Thank you for your support and encouragement. I appreciate you both so much, and that you have been open to how I’ve changed over time.

To colleagues who have become dear friends during this journey—it has been an honor to learn from and with you. And especially to Emina, Abby, Anna, Diana, Amanda—I am so grateful to you for reading drafts, walking, traveling together, check-ins—all the things. I am inspired by you and wouldn’t be here without your encouragement and care.

To the many friends and family who teach me about love and acceptance—thank you for being gentle and teaching me more about reciprocity and love. Thank you especially to Hannah, Stephanie, Laura, Rachel, and Joe for talking through these ideas with me and for your tangible support.

And thanks to all the healers I have encountered over the last five years who have taught me to listen to my body and about the importance of rest.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to Winter. The gift of your delightful presence in my life brings me so much joy.
Abstract

This qualitative research study is the first in education to explore the daily, visceral experiences of K-12 lactating teachers in the United States. Across disciplines, scant research has been conducted that focuses on the embodied and emotional experiences of lactating people at work (Gatrell, 2019; Ryan, et al., 2011; Stearns, 1999). Bodyfeeding is a marker of “good” citizenship and “good” parenting, yet teachers, charged with reproducing state ideologies of citizenship, don’t have the space or time needed to express milk at work. This research fills a gap in cross-disciplinary literature focused on remedying the ways capitalist, patriarchal institutional structures sidestep the bodily needs of workers for the sake of workplace efficiency. It shows how lactating teachers navigate and make sense of two conflicting imperatives: On the one hand, the engrained ways they have learned to orient their time towards the reproduction of schooling norms, and on the other, their embodied need to produce milk.

Informed by feminist approaches to qualitative research, I conducted 20 in-depth qualitative interviews with teachers in the Twin Cities metro who have expressed milk at work since 2010, and another 15 interviews with union leaders, administrators, and public health officials across Minnesota. I frame my study using social reproduction theory (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2014) to show how reproductive labor like expressing milk is framed as “not-work” within a capitalist understanding of production. I use poetic transcription to foreground the firsthand accounts of teachers and to demonstrate the embodied and emotional resonances across participants’ accounts (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018; Faulkner, 2016). For data analysis, I take up cultural historical activity theory (Engeström, 2001) to argue that the need to express milk functions as a crucial moment because teachers cannot fulfill their role as professionals as mapped out by current expectations. I take up Garland-Thomson’s (2011) concept of misfits and Sarah Ahmed’s (2017) subsequent application of this concept to show how the onus is put on lactating teachers to navigate incompatibilities between their bodily needs and the school day regime and positions them as “misfits” in schools. I draw from the concepts of outlaw emotions (Jagger, 1989), pleasure activism (Brown, 2019), and the uses of the erotic (Lorde, 1984) to highlight the how the emotional experiences of lactating teachers need to be considered when creating policies and practices about lactation.

Findings illustrate how patriarchal, capitalist logic is at play in how time and space are organized in schools, and how lactating teachers’ bodies are positioned by this logic, while they also resist and transform the organization of schools. My study shows that a lack of structural support for lactating teachers contributes to an inequitable work environment in schools. Implications include that individuals, buildings, and districts can create more humane conditions for lactating teachers by enacting modest reforms like creating school lactation spaces and providing additional time, outside of existing break times, to pump. Yet while stop-gap reforms in schools such as creating lactation spaces are one step in the right direction, more sweeping change is necessary.
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Guiding Quotations

Sometimes the only thing more dangerous than confused, desperate people looking for solutions is frightened, confused, desperate people finding and settling for truly bad solutions. (Butler, 1998, p. 412)

If capitalism has been able to reproduce itself it is only because of the web of inequalities that it has built into the body of the world proletariat, and because of its capacity to globalize exploitation. This process is still unfolding under our eyes, as it has been for the last 500 years. (Federici, 2014, p. 17)

Bless my mother’s body, the first song of her beating heart and her breathing, her voice, which I could dimly hear, grew louder. From inside her body I heard almost every word she said… Bless this body she made, my long legs, her long arms and fingers, our voice in my throat speaking to you now.
(Howe, 2008, from “My Mother’s Body”)
Chapter One

Everyone Else’s Kids

When you think about how you feel supported in a school, being told that you can only pump in a bathroom or in a room that doesn't have a lock makes you feel not valued. It makes you feel as though pumping is an obstruction to your job. Versus, you know, my priority should be my children, my priority should be my family life and not giving everything to the school itself.

It adds to a lot of conflicting feelings, because as teachers, you know, we're expected to care for everyone else's kids. But when it comes to our own, it's almost frowned upon—we have to go through such a process to have a baby or do something like pumping. There is a sense of shame that comes with expressing milk in schools. When instead, we should be embracing the individuals that are there, giving them the support they need to feel like they can survive and be their best.
Introduction

The Research Problem

Ava, the participant narrator in “Everyone Else’s Kids,” is a high school English teacher. Over the course of four years, Ava needed to figure out when and where to express milk at work. Where could she take off her shirt, cup two flanges to her breasts, turn on a whirling machine, and sit for 20 minutes while the milk was extracted? Where could she put the milk, which needed to stay cold, afterwards? Was there time to do this every two or three hours? I faced similar challenges to Ava, finding my institution’s timetable did not match my body’s timetable for producing milk. In addition, my workplace did not have a private, clean place for me to express or store milk. My and Avas’s dilemma is one echoed by lactating teachers across the United States. Societally, bodyfeeding is a marker of good citizenship and good parenting, yet teachers, charged with reproducing state ideologies of citizenship, don’t have the space or time needed to bodyfeed at work (Gatrell, 2019).

Lactating teachers whose wage-earning work requires separation from their babies stand at the nexus between public health directives to bodyfeed, job requirements, and feeding their child. Given the health benefits of bodyfeeding for infants and birthing parents, the World Health Organization and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that babies be exclusively breast/chest fed for six months and, after the introduction of solid foods, for at least another six months. This regimen can be difficult for lactating parents who work. To make bodyfeeding more feasible for working parents, the “Federal Break Time for Nursing Mothers” law, passed in 2010, requires employers
to provide a clean, private space with an electrical outlet and to provide unpaid breaktime for employees to express milk. Yet even when the law is applied, it does the bare minimum, functioning as a business-friendly workaround for employers, preserving the patriarchal underpinnings of the workplace (Jung, 2015).

In 2012, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released an official statement identifying breastfeeding as a public health issue. Since then, U.S. based lactation discourses increasingly frame breastfeeding as a mandate of good maternal citizenship in specific (Jung, 2015). Yet compared to other developed nations, the U.S. does not have adequate policies in place to support lactation, such as a national paid parental leave policy, access to affordable healthcare, and reasonable workplace accommodations for lactating employees who bodyfeed (Jung, 2015). Few workplaces offer paid parental leave, and of those that do, “only 4 percent offer it to industrial workers” (Jung, 2015, p. 134). (A note about the terms breastfeeding, bodyfeeding, breast/chestfeeding: In current national discourses, lactation is consistently framed using the terms “mother” and “breastfeeding.” However, clearly people across gender identities lactate, and for a variety of reasons. Please see the “terms” section for how I take up terms related to lactation).

The experiences of lactating workers are of particular relevance in teaching, a historically female dominated field. Since the nineteenth century, when men exited the teaching profession for more lucrative, prestigious work, teaching has drawn a workforce of predominantly working and middle-class women (Grumet, 1988). Yet schools have remained a patriarchal enterprise, organized and run by men, mimicking factory
relationships (Dooley, 1990; Kliebard, 2004). Capitalist social relationships are reproduced in schools through a structure and curriculum that encourages compliance from students as they prepare for their role as workers, and that re-affirms capitalist logics of individualism and property rights (Grumet, 1988). To be “good,” teachers need to be accepting of the structure of schooling and their role within it. As middle management, teachers are implicated in reproducing a social structure where students across race, gender, class, and sex differences are not educated or treated equally (Love, 2019). Many of the white, cisgender, straight, female, able-bodied teachers who decide to breastfeed are experiencing an important, temporary, and novel visceral experience of not fitting the school space and commonplace role of a teacher, providing an opportunity for lactating teachers to question how the institution of schooling is designed and for whom.

**Significance of the Study**

Studying the experiences of lactating teachers in K-12 schools is significant in the field of education for numerous reasons: First, it draws attention to current, practical needs of lactating teachers in schools, and to how lactating teachers navigate institutional constraints in order to produce milk. Second, it draws attention to how school spaces are used, and to ways schools are designed to fit some bodies better than others. It shows how the white supremacist capitalist, patriarchal underpinnings of schools are manifested in the ways time and space are organized. Third, this research continues the conversation about how within a majority female profession, lactating teachers complexify and blur the boundaries between personal and private life. Lactating teachers must express milk for their child while at work, yet carework like expressing milk is considered “not work”
within a capitalist conception of labor. I draw attention to the “dialectical relation between our domestic experience of nurturing children and our public project to educate the next generations” (Grumet, 1988, p. 5). Pragmatically, my research on the experiences of lactating teachers demonstrates concrete ways to do better by lactating teachers. Theoretically, my research highlights how gendered, capitalist social relations are both manifested and challenged in the experiences of lactating teachers.

My research questions are as follows:

1. What are common discourses concerning time and space evoked by teachers that situate the lactating body in schools, and what might they reveal about institutional values?

2. How do teachers describe their bodies and milk production in school spaces in terms of emotions and bodily sensations?

3. To what extent do lactating teachers collaborate to change school policies and practices that hamper expressing milk at work?

4. How does situating the experiences of lactating teachers using social reproduction theory illuminate patriarchal, capitalist approaches to school design?

In this introductory chapter, I begin by storying how I came to this work through my own journey expressing milk at work and my experience as a K-12 teacher. I define my key terms. I trace the history of the feminization of teaching. I discuss what focusing on the experiences of breast/chestfeeding teachers offers for understanding how patriarchy in schools functions in relation to a predominately female identifying workforce. Then, I map out how current lactation discourses frame a “good mother” as a
mother who breastfeeds. I end the chapter with an overview of each chapter of the dissertation.

My Experience as a Lactating Worker

I had my first baby in 2019 when I was in my second year of my PhD program. It was a busy and exciting pregnancy—I plowed full charge ahead with PhD work and also became fully invested in planning for a natural labor. I finished and defended my masters when I was 38 weeks pregnant and turned in my master's completion form ten hours before I went into labor. For me, giving birth was a positive experience. In an Instagram post, I wrote:

Baby Winter came on Saturday at 1:01pm. I am so in love! I had a wonderful natural labor at Roots Community Birth Center. I got to labor in the tub for lots of it — standing helped too. Props to the Roots midwives and my doula for helping Winter turn from sunny side up during early labor using stretches and slings and for just being incredible, affirming supports. I learned so much from the birthing experience, especially about the power of embracing release and trusting my body is enough and knows what to do, a continual learning edge for me.

I felt supported during the birth, but I was not prepared for the early weeks of establishing a breastfeeding routine while healing from a painful vaginal tear. I thought breastfeeding was something that just “happened” and had no idea that it is a learned skill.

For the first month of Win’s life, Win had an undetected tongue and lip tie and so he couldn’t latch properly. However, I didn’t know at the time that this was the reason he
couldn’t get enough milk. Win was always hungry: He nursed 18 of 24 hours. A month after giving birth, I hadn’t slept more than three hours consecutively, because he was feeding so much. Even still, he ended up with terrible jaundice. Jaundice is caused by extra bilirubin, a part of the pigment released in the breakdown of red blood cells. Win turned deeper and deeper shades of yellow; even the whites of his eyes turned yellow. He wasn’t alert anymore, wasn’t really opening his eyes. I was terrified—was I already failing as a mother? Every 24 hours I took Win to the pediatrician for blood draws. At home, Win lay wrapped in the fluorescent blue light of a Billi blanket—an LED pad whose light broke down bilirubin in Win’s blood. The doctors and midwives told me to breastfeed more, because with enough hydration and caloric intake, the jaundice would resolve. I slept in snippets. At some point I couldn’t stop crying, and my sister flew in from Ohio. She taught me how to pump and she found a lactation consultant to help me with my numerous infections caused by Win’s issues with latching. And finally, after visiting three different nurses and doctors, Win’s tongue and lip tie was identified and resolved via laser surgery at a pediatric dentist. Once that was fixed, things got easier and less stressful. I got to enjoy nursing and Win quickly began to gain weight.

I went back to work as a full time PhD student and instructor when Winter was four months old. In an Instagram post a month into my return, when Win turned five months old, I wrote my feelings about the balance:

Happy five months, Winter! I delight in your new squeal and big smiles. This month has been full of balancing momming and full-time work. I am so joy-filled by both, I am also exhausted. Like I have a new eye twitch haha. I think there is a
lie that as women we should do it all and act like it is easy and it just is not. Teaching two undergraduate courses and being a full time PhD student and wanting to be present with Win and continue nursing him is a lot to balance and it is not always balanced well. I literally eat lunch walking between buildings on campus while toting a bag filled with my pump and expressed milk on ice. Our bodies matter and the relationship our bodies have to others matters —especially this most essential one to our young. Our systems for work don’t usually reflect this. I need my friends and family and colleagues who understand that I can love Win and care about my work and who help me navigate trying to do both.

I continued pumping from September 2019 until March 2020 —eight months —until the COVID pandemic meant working from home. When pumping at work, I experienced a tension between the structured time of my workday and my body’s need to produce milk. I hated being late to meetings or to PhD classes. I felt that to others, I could be perceived as slacking or as less rigorous or committed to my work. It is important to me to be someone who shows up 100% to the task at hand. I felt viscerally how my body as a parent producing milk for my baby did not fit in educational institutions. But other parts of my socialized mother identity—being nurturing, putting the needs of students before my own needs, orienting my time and social actions to the needs of students before considering my own needs—were expected of me as an educator.

I pumped because like many new parents, I found the cultural and social messages about the benefits of breast/chest milk inescapable. I wanted to be a good parent so badly, and from every corner—midwives, doulas, doctors, WHO, the American Academy of
Pediatrics, parenting literature, neighbors, friends, colleagues—the message was that “good” parents feed their kids breast/chest milk—or at least give it a valiant effort. While there are researched health benefits to breast/chest milk, which I detail later in my dissertation, there is very little attention paid to why people don’t breast/chestfeed, or when it may serve a family not to.

So, I started my dissertation study while I was still pumping at work and also at home for Win when he was overnight once a week at his other parent’s house. My embodied experience of expressing milk every few hours for over a year, of lugging around my pump as an instructor and PhD student, of waking up every four hours in the night to pump when my kid stayed overnight with their other parent, informed my embodied and emotional understanding of what pumping entails, at least from my personal vantage point. I was curious about questions like: What do other people’s bodies feel like when they pump at work? What emotions do they have? Do other parents who express milk at work experience a tension related to the space or time available? I felt compelled to understand what I was experiencing better, and to understand how my bewildering bodily experiences while pumping milk for my baby at work were one manifestation of the capitalist, white supremacist, patriarchal design of schools as institutions.

**My Connection to Teaching and Teachers**

I was a middle and high school English teacher for two years outside Jakarta, Indonesia, and for five years in Minneapolis, Minnesota. During the summers as I worked on my PhD, I taught 10th-12th grade English in the summers. Often as I’ve done this
research, people ask, “Why does it matter what teachers experience?” They mean, why are you studying the experiences teachers have in schools, and not the experiences of students? In terms of social justice education, I believe that if we want to have systems that work for all students, we also need systems that work for teachers. If we want more humane schools, we need more humane working conditions for everyone in schools. How can teachers who are totally tapped out engage in abolitionist, transformative teaching? How can we retain a diverse workforce if the way workers are treated affirms oppressive capitalist logics? How does the oppressive design of schools contribute to the continuing lack of racial diversity in the teacher workforce? Bettina Love (2020) writes that “We must struggle together not only to reimagine schools but to build new schools that we are taught to believe are impossible; schools based on intersectional justice, antiracism, love, healing, and joy” (p. 11). She goes on to remind us that education from the outset was built on white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and sexism. The first public schools in the United States, often called grammar schools, were only for white, wealthy males. And over time, when any group outside of that established norm fought for the right to educate their children, particularly by way of their culture and/or language, they were met with white rage. (p. 22)

By critically analyzing the experiences of lactating teachers and by pointing to the systems and structures that entrench disembodiment and overwork for teachers, I hope to show how schools are structured in a way that is antithetical to the goal of transformative justice.
After surviving a pandemic where the rich just got richer, where current inflation rates are continuing to squeeze the working and middle classes dry of physical and emotional resources, and where racially motivated violence and gun violence send us through waves of shock and anger, I want to know what can be done right now to make schools more humane. I want to know how we can, on individual, relational, and systemic levels, create pragmatic change while we are moving in current systems. In that way, my dissertation explores the daily and practical experiences of teachers expressing milk at work and practical changes that could make schools more humane for them.

I resonate with the question: Whose imagination are we living in? And how do we imagine—and make—something better? Adrienne Maree Brown (2019) writes:

I believe that we are in an imagination battle, and almost everything about how we orient toward our bodies is shaped by fearful imaginations. Imaginations that fear Blackness, brownness, fatness, queerness, disability, difference. Our radical imagination is a tool for decolonization, for reclaiming our right to shape our lived reality. (p. 10)

Teachers can be major players in imagining schools differently. But to do so means bucking the systems in place. I think often people are drawn to teaching because they imagine that by teaching, they are contributing to creating a more kind world, a more safe planet. In this dissertation, I attempt to illustrate the structures in place that protect white supremacist capitalism and how they are not serving even teachers who are normalized by being white, straight, and able-bodied, as is true of most participants in my study. I attempt to show how the women I talked to are experiencing a profound tiredness with
taking on individual responsibility for structural failures. I show how their experiences expressing milk at work can also lead teachers towards choosing balance, boundaries, and small rebellions to change the system for themselves and others.

**Terms**

**Lactation, Lactating Bodies, Lactating Workers**

Lactation is a biological process of producing milk, often for infant feeding. Those who are lactating need to release milk at regular intervals throughout the day in order to avoid infection and to maintain milk supply. People across identities lactate and/or express milk. In this study, I am focused on those who are expressing milk at work for infant feeding, typically with a pump or handpump, and saving the milk in containers for subsequent infant digestion. Lactating workers can include biological parents, surrogates (as was the case with one participant in the study), milk donors, adoptive parents, and anyone else who is continuing to lactate while at work and needs time and space to do so.

**Woman**

I troubled over the effects of using the constructed gender of “woman” as I drew parallels between a majority female profession and the way reproductive labor (that often women do) is made to seem like “not work” in a capitalist society. Current lactation discourses still typically assume that women who are mothers breastfeed for their biological children. This faulty but prevalent language undergirds most scholarly and national discourse about lactating workers.
Ultimately, I drew from the Marxist feminist Silvia Federici (2014) in my reasons for using “women” and use the term especially as it is taken up within social reproduction theory. Here, “woman” is a performed identity that is of use within capitalist systems where the biology of the female sex is intertwined with constructed social roles of “women” and is exploited as a means to create and maintain the workforce. When I use the word “women,” I mean anyone who identifies with that term. Federici argues that sexual identity is intertwined with work-functions as mapped out in a capitalist system. She argues:

If “femininity” has been constituted in capitalist society as a work-function masking the production of the workforce under the cover of a biological destiny, then “women’s history” is “class history,” and the question that has to be asked is whether the sexual division of labor that has produced that particular concept has been transcended. If the answer is a negative one (as it must be when we consider the present organization of reproductive labor), then “women” is a legitimate category of analysis, and the activities associated with “reproduction” remain a crucial ground of struggle for women. (p. 14)

The plight of lactating workers is contextualized by the ways female reproductive labor has been inscribed with gendered significance, as well as how lactation has been assumed to be a function of female-identified, maternal bodies as a way to continue to exploit and naturalize this work. Lactation is nestled inside a conception of women and the maternal that assumes the lactating body is a cis-gendered female body. I take up Judith Butler’s (1993, 1999) understanding that gender performances become habitualized; thus,
gendered norms become disguised as natural or common-sense. The very reason why lactation at work is a gender equity issue is because lactation is tethered to gender performance. Gender is “always a sign of subordination for women” (Butler, 1999, p. xiv).

All participants in my study identified as cis-gender women. This was the result of who responded to recruitment efforts, and not due to a choice to study this particular group of people. By paying attention to how gender is constructed in lactation discourses, I hope to be critical about how gender is produced within social context, while individuals use agency to challenge the discourses which frame experiences.

**Breastfeeding, Breast/Chestfeeding, Bodyfeeding**

Since all my participants identified as cis-gender women, and used the term breastfeeding in their interviews, I use the term breastfeeding when referring to their experiences. I also use the terms breast/chestfeeding and bodyfeeding when I am discussing more general discourses related to infant feeding. I hope soon, the terms we use will decouple bodyfeeding from a naturalized but false correlation between infant feeding and cis-gendered women. I hope policies and practices create systems with equal access to parental leave and time and space to pump for whoever is doing so. I sometimes talk about breastfeeding mothers in particular and the correlation between breastfeeding and the maternal, because that is the demographic I worked with most in my study. It is also the demographic that is typically referred to in legislation, in research, and in national discourses about infant feeding. Most often, participants in my study were pumping milk for their biological children while at school and breastfeeding when they
were with their child. Two participants exclusively pumped and did not breastfeed. One participant pumped for an infant for whom they were a surrogate.

In the next section, I move to answer the question: How does the feminization of teaching, and especially Grumet’s theorization of schools as spaces that reproduce patriarchal, capitalist relationships, relate to teachers who are bodyfeeding? I discuss what focusing on the experiences of breast/chestfeeding teachers offers for understanding how patriarchy in schooling functions in relation to a predominately female identifying workforce. Then, I briefly trace the ways breastfeeding is mapped with conceptualizations of “good mothering” in U.S. discourses.

**Embodiment**

I use the concept of embodiment throughout this dissertation. While there are many ways to define embodiment, I draw from critical disability studies and in specific from Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011), who defines embodiment as “our particular ‘shape’ in the broadest sense,” which “is always dynamic as it interacts with world” (p. 595). Embodiment is about our physical form, which changes moment to moment, and about how our bodies interact with, are shaped by, and shape the environments we inhabit. As we move through the world in our bodies, we experience our physical selves in relation to the social constructions that position us, such as by race, gender, and class, and in relation to the physical world we move within. As such, “embodied life has a narrative, storied quality; the shifting of our shapes knits one moment to the next and one place to another” (Garland-Thomson, 2011, p. 595-596). In this dissertation, I am especially interested in how the physical and sensory changes lactating people undergo
alters their experience of the social constructions they move within and the physical environments they navigate. I am interested in how a concrete change in the needs of one’s body leads a person, by necessity, to interact differently with space and time.

Sarah Ahmed (2017) understands embodiment as contextual and contingent on the norms in place within institutions, which are built for some bodies more than others. Ahmed points out that majority bodies, such as in the US, those that are white, male, heterosexual, and able-bodied, tend to “fit” and can move smoothly through institutional environments. Ahmed compares institutions to an old garment. She says an institution “acquires the shape of those who tend to wear it; it becomes easier to wear if you have that shape. Privilege could be rethought of in these terms: easier to wear” (p. 125). When a person’s body does not fit the environment, they register discomfort. In this way, embodiment is entangled with how people navigate what is considered “normal” embodiment and the ways in which the built environment accommodates dominant forms of embodiment more than non-dominant forms.

**Situating the Experience of Lactating Teachers in Sociocultural Context**

**The Feminization of Teaching**

In 2019, as I was beginning work on my dissertation, I sent out a text to former K-12 teacher colleagues: “Did you pump at work? If so, what was it like?” Teachers responded to say they didn’t have time or space to express milk at work: One pumped in her car, another perched on a broken toilet seat in an abandoned bathroom, another in her classroom’s stuffy storage closet. On the one hand I found this startling: Since the 19th century, teaching in the U.S. has been a feminine profession. And as Madeleine Grumet
(1988) points out, the “image of the ideal woman and the ideal mother were extended into the training and work of the ideal teacher” (p. 41). Further, national discourses associate breastfeeding with the “ideal mother” (Jung, 2015). Given that teaching is a field dominated by women, and historically grounded in a conflation between the maternal and our conceptualization of a “good” teacher, one would think that teaching would provide for the needs of bodyfeeding employees. On the other hand, I was not surprised at the lack of accommodations for bodyfeeding. Longhurst (2008) reminds us that bodyfeeding is a cultural practice sanctioned “at some times, in some spaces, for some bodies” (p. 114). Specifically, bodyfeeding is considered “in place at home (private space) with her baby, but ‘out of place’... in public space” (p. 103). Even though most teachers identify as women, schools are public spaces defined by the typical functions of a cisgender male body, as I will continue to unpack in this dissertation (Grumet, 1988).

Since the nineteenth century, most U.S. teachers have identified as women. Madeleine Grumet (1988) traces the history of the feminization of teaching to the antebellum period in the 1820s, and to the common school movement. She reminds us that prior to the 1820s, teaching was a male-dominated profession, often fielded by itinerant employees who needed to make a living wage while finishing their college, professional or minisorial education. In the summers when men were farming, young single women were recruited alongside men, earning $5.38 per month compared to the $15.44 earned by men doing the same job (Grumet, 1988, p. 37). Teaching became more organized as a profession, requiring attendance at a normal school or teacher’s institute. “Young men who were just teaching for a while to get by were loath to invest either time
or money to gain accreditation” while women, even if also able to teach for short stints, “had fewer options and acceded to the training requirements as they evolved” (Grumet, 1988, p. 37). Women therefore began to populate the profession of teaching more fully: In 1870, 60% of teachers identified as women; by 1900, 70%; by 1910, 80% (Grumet, 1988, p. 43).

Strober and Lanford (1986) explain that as schools became more formalized in urban centers in the mid 1800s, organizing around grade levels rather than taking place in one room schoolhouses, “Officials believed that women teachers would be much more compliant in carrying out centralized directives… The graded school carried with it a specific demand for female teachers (p. 219). The explicit project of schools became to educate children into self-discipline and productivity; meanwhile, the young, single women who taught in common schools were encouraged to engage in channeling maternal care within schools. Grumet points out how Catherine Beecher, the daughter of a Calvinist minister,

argued for placing educational responsibility in the hands of women, maintaining their submissiveness and elevating feminine self-sacrifice, purity, and domesticity into moral superiority that could be dispensed in schools. The good daughter had found a way to advance women into the public sphere without disturbing the dominance of the patriarchal authority. (p. 40)

Erica Meiners (2002) echoes this, politicizing the role white women in specific played: “White women were appealed to as ‘republican mothers’ to go west as teachers to civilize the new frontiers” (p. 86). She explains that “[White] women were the ideal bodies to
reproduce patriarchal values and colonial epistemologies but not to challenge these frameworks” (p. 87).

In her article “Disengaging from the Legacy of Lady Bountiful in Teacher Education Classrooms,” Erica Meiners (2002) uses the image of Lady Bountiful to trace the intersections between colonialism, heteronormativity, and white femininity (p. 86). Like Grumet, she looks back to the nineteenth century, where, as there was a surge of immigrants to the U.S., white middle class female teachers became essential as colonizing forces of the state. Meiner writes: “The white lady teacher is charged, implicitly, with colonizing her ‘native’ students and molding them into good citizens of the republic” (p. 87). The structure of schools and the roles teachers play are inextricably tied to the ways patriarchy and whiteness are embedded in capitalism in the United States. “Good” white female teachers initiate students into a value for productivity, for institutional routine, and for following rules, preparing them to be fit workers.

Herbert Kliebard (2004) notes that in the late nineteenth century, with the rise of industrialism, schools “became an ever more critical mediating institution between the family and a puzzling and impersonal social order, an institution through which the norms and ways of surviving in the new industrial society would be conveyed” (p. 1). Grumet likewise recounts how a centralized education system emerged that “exploited the status and integrity of the family to strip it of its authority and deliver its children to the state” (p. 39). Tracing the history of curriculum development within teaching, Grumet draws from reproduction theory to argue that schools are integral to cultivating a social system where capitalist ideology becomes nearly invisible, ingrained in religious,
education, and family institutions, so that power remains in the hands of the few elites, while most citizens have very little capital.

**Grumet and Reproductive Labor in Schools**

In her seminal book *Bitter Milk*, Madeleine Grumet theorized that female teachers could bring healing to themselves and to schools by mediating between public and private worlds, and by critiquing (in her case using Marxist and psychoanalytic lenses), the role female teachers play in schools. In this section I use Grumet’s work, among others, to situate and address the question: How does the feminization of teaching, and especially Grumet’s theorization of schools as spaces that reproduce patriarchal, capitalist relationships, relate to teachers who are bodyfeeding? I take up Grumet’s argument that women are socialized to value, and are valued for reproductive labor, yet reproductive labor is seen as less important than productive labor. I take up her argument that the feminization of teaching has “both promoted and sabotaged the interests of women in our culture” (p. 32).

In the preface to her book *Bitter Milk* (1988), Madeleine Grumet tells the reader it took her seven years to write the book, and that each day when her children got off the bus, she stopped working. She says, “Their arrival, their presence, interrupted my work and made it possible” (xvi). This view—that reproductive labor is part of and also an interruption to productive labor—is woven throughout her book. Arguably, teacher’s engagement in reproductive labor at home continues to be largely ignored in educational philosophy, and in the way pre-service teachers are trained into the norms of
professionalism without addressing the patriarchal underpinnings of the teacher’s role (Gould, 2011, p. 130).

Grumet writes that schools are the father’s world, and teachers lead the “great escape” from the domestic world of the mother to schools, which “imitate the spacial, temporal, and ritual order of industry and bureaucracy” (p. 24). Grumet theorizes that one reason schools have been so successful in using teachers to transmit capitalist ideologies is because “the intimacy, spirituality, and innocence that teachers and students were to inherit from the mother/child bond—the prototype of their relationship—collapsed into strategies for control. The ideal teacher was one who could control the children and be controlled by her superiors” (Grumet, 1988, p. 43). Female teachers therefore became a core component of a patriarchal education system. Others have taken up Grumet’s argument that when female teachers accept the patriarchal structure of schools, they perpetuate “gender bias, gendered stereotypes, sexism, and misogyny when they teach their future students” (Jones and Hughes, 2016, p. 161). This happens in part because in teaching, the social values that undergird Western ideals of maternity, femininity and womanhood—especially purity, obedience, and nurturance—are integral to commonsense notions of teachers and teaching (Grumet, 1988; Meiners, 2002; Schick, 2000). Yet these traits have been integral to maintaining a teaching force that reproduces a patriarchal, capitalist structure through the compliance of teachers, who function as middle-management. The lack of accommodations for lactating teachers is thus a particularly instructive example of how, though the institution of schooling benefits from social enactments of femininity, schools disregard the biological imperative of even those
teachers performing “the maternal” in the most culturally and socially encouraged manner, by breastfeeding.

Grumet (1988) points out that while women were recruited to teaching and to the project of reproducing white supremacy, the profession of teaching was originally not made for them either. She traces the movement of women to teaching during the nineteenth century, pointing out that women became teachers to “escape the horrifying isolation of domestic exile” (p. 56). Even so, she writes that teachers continue to “deliver children over to the language, rules, and relations of the patriarchy” (p. 56). Writing to female teachers, she claims “we have burdened the teaching profession with contradictions and betrayals that have alienated teachers from our own experience, from our bodies, our memories, our dreams, from each other” (p. 57).

Grumet (1988) questions why in educational theory, we are often silent about the entanglement of reproduction and teaching. When we express milk at work, we have a physical experience of blurring the line between private and public worlds. As teachers, when we express milk, we cannot ignore the mediating role we play between public and private life, or the ways that schools are not designed to honor our embodied experiences. In fact, the widespread way that bodyfeeding parents are expected to use mechanical pumps as a substitute for their child while as a nation we fail to develop parental leave, universal childcare, or other systems which honor the visceral embodied components of infant feeding and parenting, is a concrete example of how capitalist practices infused in schools work against the embodied experiences of the people in it.
More can be learned about how schools reproduce patriarchal, capitalist relationships by focusing on the experiences of bodyfeeding teachers. What happens when we pay attention to how the needs of our bodies while we bodyfeed are incompatible with the timetables of schools, and incompatible with the image of the ideal female teacher body? For many of the white, cis, straight, female, able-bodied teachers who decide to breastfeed, they may be experiencing an important visceral, embodied experience of “not fitting” the school space and commonplace role of a teacher. Noticing our bodies while we produce milk in the “not fitting” setting of schools can be an avenue for also noticing the reproduction taking place in schools every day, as we “reproduce our lives and the lives of our families in the classrooms where we both work and live” (Dooley, 1988, p. 528). I continue this line of argument in Chapter Two, when I delve more deeply into social reproduction theory.

**National Conflation of Breastfeeding with Good Maternal Citizenship**

As I have already mentioned, national discourses conflate breastfeeding with mothering and with a female gender identity. Even the law that protects the rights of lactating workers is called “Breaktime for Nursing Mothers.” Since 2010, when the United States federal “Break Time for Nursing Mothers” law went into effect, there has been a proliferation of research about lactation and working across disciplines that is focused on working mothers. As access to expressing milk at work has increased, so has the social pressure to breastfeed. Thus, in this section, I am addressing the ways that national discourses frame breastfeeding as a facet of maternal citizenship in particular. Women’s bodies can be controlled in any number of ways: when institutions are not
designed to honor the need and choice to lactate, and when women are policed and penalized for choosing not to breastfeed. Meeting the needs of each body is a worthy endeavor as part of a larger, more cohesive effort to create a just society. Sonya Renee Taylor (2018) says,

As has been true throughout history, changing the systemic and structural oppressions that regard us in perfunctory and myopic ways requires sweeping changes in our laws, policies, and social norms. Creating a world of justice for all bodies demands that we be radical and intersectional. (p. 9)

Since 2010, breastfeeding has increasingly become a marker of “good” citizenship in the United States. The Center for Disease Control, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the U.S. Surgeon General officially identified breastfeeding as a “public health issue” placing “formula feeding on par with smoking and unsafe sex as a form of risky behavior that threatens not only individual health but American society at large” (Jung, 2015, p. 7).

Breastfeeding—and in our current era by extension, pumping—has long been “sticky” with social values related to citizenry (Ahmed, 2017). In A History of the Breast, Marilyn Yalom (1997) writes extensively about how breasts function as symbolic to projects of nation-building and to establish who is a “good” citizen. For instance, in the late eighteenth century, breastfeeding in France was mandatory in order to be eligible for state support (p. 115). During the Nazi regime, German women “were required to breastfeed at regular intervals and to undergo tests to establish exactly how much milk they were producing” (p. 140). Today in the U.S., breastfeeding is incentivised by the
WIC program for low-income mothers, who receive more food for themselves and their babies the more that they breastfeed.

National discourses regarding breastfeeding create a double bind of shame for individual women. For those who want to reproduce the national ideal of the good breastfeeding mother, they must do so in the appropriate spaces because where milk comes from, and baring breasts in public, is shameful. In fact, workplace lactation laws inherently preclude that the extraction of milk is shameful, and must be hidden (Porter & Oliver, 2016). Even when workplaces do have lactation spaces, the standards are focused on workplace efficiency, and function under the assumption that milk expression is a publicly inappropriate human activity that must be hidden from view. And as feminist scholars have noted (Lee, 2018; Porter & Oliver, 2016) lactation spaces are one small reform that, while a step towards gender equity at work, still maintain the patriarchal underpinnings of workplace structure and relationality.

On the other hand, when women do not breastfeed, they fail to be appropriate lactating bodies, and are shamed by national discourses such as the “Surgeon General’s 2011 Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding,” where Surgeon General Kathleen Sebelius claims that breastfeeding is “one of the most universal and natural facets of motherhood, the ability to breastfeed is a great gift” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). The statement that breastfeeding is “natural and universal” quickly shifts the onus for contributing to national goals of increasing the number of women who breastfeed to individual mothers, while failing to address the complex reasons why people choose not to, or are unable to, breastfeed.
As discourses reiterate the positive effects of breast/chestmilk, those who do not breastfeed become framed as “bad” citizens, unable to take care of their infants the way national discourses frame is best. Catherine Jung (2015) points out that breastfeeding is less common among women who are not only poor, African American, and less educated, but also unmarried. Over and over again, the habits and conditions that are identified as threatening to public health are habits and conditions that have also been prominently associated with traditionally marginalized and excluded categories of people. (p. 210)

Today in the U.S., low-income women who choose not to breastfeed are penalized. The WIC page titled “What your WIC package offers if you’re breastfeeding” states that “WIC’s goal is to encourage mothers to breastfeed without supplementing with infant formula. What's in your food package depends on how much you are breastfeeding and how much infant formula your baby may get from WIC” (U.S. Department of Agriculture). Mothers who “partially breastfeed” get a wide variety of extra food for the mother; however, they are penalized compared to mothers who “fully breastfeed.” These mothers get extra food, with the addition of cheese and baby food once their child is over six months. WIC’s initiative is indicative of a larger trend in attitudes towards breastfeeding in the U.S., which encourages an attitude of moral disgust towards those who do not breastfeed. Breastfeeding, then, is not just about the contact of a mother to her baby—it is about the contact of the state, it is about the state’s role in enforcing social norms around breastfeeding. State messaging about breastfeeding is important because it is impervious. State laws related to lactation at work create the world women step into
when they express milk at work, which is very much connected to state attitudes about breastfeeding.

**Overview of Chapters**

In Chapter Two, I overview research about lactating workers across academic disciplines and fields. Next, I position my inquiry within an understanding of schools that is situated in Marxist critique, especially in social reproduction theory (SRT). I discuss how Althusser frames schools as sites that reproduce capitalist ideologies. I build on this using contemporary scholars within SRT and Freire’s articulation of a banking model approach to education. Finally, I introduce SRT as the core theoretical framework evoked throughout my dissertation, though I also use supporting feminist and Marxist theory in each main body chapter to enrich analyses.

In Chapter Three, I provide background and context for my methodological choices. Then I outline the strategies of inquiry that form the methodology of my study: a feminist approach to qualitative inquiry and poetic inquiry. Next, I give an overview of how I approached qualitative interviews. I describe my context for data collection, types of data, the participants, and community experts. I walk through my process for logging and coding data, and my process for choosing interview excerpts to transform into poems. I give an example and explain my process for writing, editing, workshopping, and member-checking transcription poems. Finally, I overview my approach to data analysis, drawing on the framework outlined in *Thinking with Theory* (2012) by Jackson and Mazzei.
In Chapter Four, I focus on how the organization of time and space in schools are incompatible with the bodily needs of lactating teachers. After introducing cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) as a theoretical lens, I focus on the experiences of two teachers: June and Fera. I briefly introduce each participant and then share a poem written from their interview transcripts. I analyze each poem using cultural historical activity theory with additional support from social reproduction theory. I argue that the need to express milk functions as a crucial moment because teachers cannot fulfill their role as professionals as mapped out by current expectations, and therefore teachers have an opportunity to critically question their role. They can prioritize their bodily needs, directly challenging the system, which may lead to subverting the system and their role and creating change in the current regime. At the same time, issues teachers face could be alleviated by addressing the lack of structural support in systematic ways.

In Chapter Five, I utilize Garland-Thomson’s (2011) concept of misfits and Sarah Ahmed’s (2017) subsequent application of this concept to show how the onus is put on teachers to navigate incompatibilities between their bodily needs and the school day regime. I do this by analyzing three transcription poems, written from the interview transcripts of Christine, Rachel and Lilly. The first poem, “Gross,” illustrates how an inadequate space to pump results in Christine’s choice to stop pumping, because the school does not have a space that is clean, private, and accessible. The analysis focuses on how women come to a feminist understanding of the world through bodily experiences of not fitting the patriarchal design of social structures. The second poem, “Your Problem,” tells a story from Rachel, whose breasts leak while she is at work. Her
poem illustrates how the incongruences between her body’s timetable and the school day timetable are framed as her personal problem, rather than as a problem with how different needs are not accommodated within the school day schedule. I also read this poem through a social reproduction theory lens to discuss how reproductive work is obscured in capitalism. In the final poem, “Tip of the Iceberg,” the participant situates time and space to lactate as “just the tip of the iceberg” when it comes to creating a structure that honors the bodily needs of a lactating teacher. I conclude by discussing how misfitting can function as a catalyst for challenging the norms of an institution.

Chapter Six addresses the question: How do teachers describe milk production in school spaces in terms of their emotions? I start by introducing how emotions have been construed in Western thought as articulated by Alison Jagger (1989) in her essay “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology.” I overview the field of pleasure activism as articulated by adrienne maree brown (2019) and the role of erotic energy within anti-capitalist social justice work as articulated primarily by Audre Lorde in her essay “Uses of the Erotic” (1984). I draw from the concepts of outlaw emotions, pleasure activism, and the uses of the erotic to analyze three poems. Each poem was written by compiling participants’ responses to questions about what emotions were provoked when they pumped at work. In my analysis of the poems, I focus on outlaw emotions, including stress, loneliness, and self-negation, which can lead to anger. I show how the desire for pleasurable emotional experiences can motivate resistance. I conclude by giving an example of an administrator whose emotional experiences pumping at work and whose
struggles as a parent led her to adapt what she calls a “big-hearted” approach to leadership.

In Chapter Seven, I review how the study illustrates the importance of reproductive labor and what a social reproduction theory frame for analysis offers for understanding the plight of lactating teachers. I provide an overview of my main findings. Then, I spend much of my conclusion walking through the practical implications of my findings in terms of actions we can take to change the current situation for lactating teachers. I write practical implications for the following groups of people: Lactating teachers, colleagues, community members, school administrators, those with decision making power at the school district level, and for anyone interested, avenues for advocacy at the state level. I provide brief examples from participant and community expert narratives to illustrate how daily actions have created changes in the material conditions of lactating teachers. Next, I discuss the potential implications of my work for teacher education, which include framing professionalism in the context of capitalism; using critical theories of embodiment to contextualize social happenings in schools; and further developing a critical pedagogy of the body (Jones and Hughes-Decatur, 2012). I discuss the limitations of my work and areas for future study. I end with a concluding story to show what I have learned from my own experiences expressing milk at work and in advocating for better working conditions for lactating workers.
Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Because my dissertation study is the first in education to explore the daily, visceral experiences of lactating K-12 teachers in the United States, in this chapter, I briefly overview research about lactating workers across academic disciplines and fields. Next, I position my inquiry within an understanding of schools that is situated in Marxist critique, especially in social reproduction theory (SRT). I discuss how Althusser frames schools as sites that reproduce capitalist ideologies. I build on this using contemporary scholars within social reproduction theory and Freire’s articulation of the banking model in education. Finally, I introduce SRT as the core theoretical framework evoked throughout my dissertation.

A Brief Overview of Research Related to Lactating Workers Conducted across Disciplines

Studies in numerous fields like business, nursing, higher education, public health, gender studies, medicine, and sociology situate the importance of lactating workers’ experiences. It is important to note that most studies across disciplines work from the premise that we need to focus on lactating workers to save money (as a nation, and/or in workplaces), to retain employees, and to increase health outcomes for bodyfeeding parents and infants (Jung, 2015; Porter & Oliver, 2016). It is also important to note that research and policy discourses typically frame lactation as an issue that exclusively affects mothers and babies, and their use of language reflects this. In this section, I first briefly overview existing literature across disciplines.
Bodyfeeding Increases Health Outcomes and Saves Money

The World Health Organization (WHO) makes the claim that children and adolescents who were breastfed as babies are less likely to be overweight or obese. Additionally, they perform better on intelligence tests and have higher school attendance. Breastfeeding is associated with higher income in adult life. Improving child development and reducing health costs results in economic gains for individual families as well as at the national level. (WHO, 2021)

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the WHO, benefits for babies include: protections against infectious and chronic diseases, a reduced infant mortality rate, lower rates of childhood obesity, decreased risk of asthma, and quicker recovery during illness (CDC, 2022a; WHO, 2021). Thus, WHO, the CDC, and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend that babies be exclusively breastfed for six months and, after the introduction of solid foods, for another six months (AAP, 2022; CDC, 2022b; WHO, 2021). Studies about lactating workers often frame the relevance and importance of lactation accommodations using research about health benefits from these organizations (Farquhar and Galtry, 2004; Monk, 2013, et. al).

Since 2019 when I started my study, WHO and the AAP have revised their online materials about infant feeding to explicitly acknowledge that workplace barriers are a key reason why parents have to stop bodyfeeding before the recommended time. Both organizations list structural changes that need to occur, including increased community and workplace support (AAP, 2022; WHO, 2021). In their recently updated policy
recommendations, the AAP explicitly asserts: “Not everyone can breastfeed or continue breastfeeding for as long as desired for various reasons, including workplace barriers” (AAP, 2022).

To get businesses to provide accommodations, some writing has been done about how supporting lactating workers saves money. For instance, in 2008 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services created “Business Case for Breastfeeding,” which pitches lactation spaces as money savers for businesses. The document cites relevant research studies to prove that providing lactation spaces decreases the amount of time employees take off work to care for sick babies, lowers health care costs, and reduces turnover rates. The “Business Case for Breastfeeding” shows up on resource lists across organizations, including in a recent presentation about the rights of lactating workers hosted by the Minnesota Department of Health during August 2022 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

A financial case is also built to motivate parents, workplaces, and nations to prioritize breastfeeding and to follow health organization guidance about exclusive breastfeeding. For example, Bartick and Reinhold’s (2010) study in the journal *Pediatrics* makes the claim that if women all breastfed as recommended, the U.S. would save $13 billion a year in health care, infant deaths and lost lifetime earnings of babies who died. The CDC claims that “Low rates of breastfeeding add more than $3 billion a year to medical costs for the mother and child in the United States” (CDC, 2022a).
Social and Cultural Practices Affect Breastfeeding Duration

Other studies think about bodyfeeding as a social and cultural practice, and consider the extent to which relationships, social systems, and cultural norms affect its initiation and duration of bodyfeeding, especially related to workplace accommodations (Johnson, 2019). For instance, in international early childhood journals, much of the existing research focuses on the impact of early breastfeeding support systems on duration (Cameron, et al., 2012; Farquhar & Galtry, 2004). These studies consider how early childhood centers can better support parents who express milk and consider how this support correlates to lactating workers’ ability to breastfeed for longer. In higher education, several studies document the availability of lactation spaces in university settings and make an argument for why universities need to increase funding, policies, and awareness that support bodyfeeding students and employees. Studies cite gender equity issues and increased health outcomes for moms and babies as primary reasons for creating lactation spaces (Bai & Wunderlich, 2013; Dinour, et al., 2020).

A Need to Focus on Embodied Experiences of Lactating Workers

Across disciplines, scant research has been conducted that focuses on the embodied and emotional experiences of lactating workers (Gatrell, 2019; Ryan, et al, 2011; Stearns, 1999). Writing in the late 1990’s, Stearns points out that at the time, hers was one of few studies focusing on the personal experiences of lactating workers and that more research needed to be done which engaged participants in recounting their experiences with breastfeeding. In 2011, Ryan, Todres and Alexander helpfully reviewed the expansion of studies in this area. They write that studies since the 1990s engage the
physical and social aspects of breastfeeding, or focus on identity construction, morality, and ethics, or on rhetoric and decision-making processes. They point out that little research has been done concerning the embodied and emotional experiences of breastfeeding workers. Gatrell (2019) further points out that research on the embodied experiences of lactating workers is limited.

To fill gaps in research that focuses on the experiences of those who breastfeed, Stearns (1999) uses the phenomenon of breastfeeding in public to theorize about cultural considerations of the maternal body. She considers how the sexualization of women’s bodies in the U.S. results in public stigma against feeding babies in public. She analyzes participants’ comments on when and where they feel they can breastfeed in public, pointing out the trend that women feel they must be covered and be discrete. She highlights that participants reported that certain places, like work, felt incompatible to breastfeeding.

Cook (2016) considers cultural attitudes of disgust towards women who breastfeed or express milk in public spaces, including at work. The cultural expectation that lactating women are covered and hidden from view illustrates their lack of equal access to public life, forcing them to experience public life from a disadvantaged position. Gatrell (2019) further analyzes how the cultural abjection of breastfeeding bodies leads to a stigma around lactating at work. She theorizes that this contributes to lack of accommodations for lactating workers. Gatrell notes that the experiences of breastfeeding workers are an opportunity to examine the tension between the desire for equality, difference, and mothering in feminist theory.
Public Work Versus Private Work

In their article, “Breastfeeding Bodies: Intimacies at Work” Lee (2018) traces conflicting ideals of mother and worker bodies, with special attention to the division between public and private work. Lee notes how private work is often “women’s work,” and remains undervalued. Porter & Oliver (2016) also write from a similar thread and are helpful in illustrating that even if appropriate lactation spaces are created, additional education is needed to use the formation of spaces as an opportunity for planned education about gaps in gender equity and about what it means to be a worker and a mother. Hausman (2004) reviews feminist literature about the maternal, breastfeeding body in her article “The Feminist Politics of Breastfeeding.” She argues that breastfeeding necessarily positions women’s bodies in relationship to their infants and partner, forcing a “reconceptualization of the idea of the autonomous individual that is the basis for Western conceptions of the civic polity and, thus, citizenship” (p. 274). She also troubles through why she genders mothers as “women,” and feminist arguments for and against doing so. Lastly, she considers the ways maternal labor remains undervalued.

How My Literature Review Informed My Study

By reviewing literature across disciplines, I learned that my study fits in a larger, interdisciplinary body of work examining the experiences of lactating workers (Johnson, 2019; Regan & Ball, 2013; Ryan, et al, 2011; Stearns, 1999). I learned from my literature review that advocates of exclusive breast/chestfeeding attempt to make a connection between lactation and economic value in order to convince workplaces and nations to provide more accommodations for lactating parents who work (Bartick & Reinhold,
However, an economic argument for breast/chestfeeding is difficult, because within current discourses, expressing milk is viewed as biological or “natural” and is not considered as work within a capitalist conception of labor. The economic arguments were one reason I chose to frame my study using social reproduction theory, to consider why, how, and to what affect care work like bodyfeeding has been made to seem value-neutral in capitalist societies.

I learned that to fill a gap in literature about the experiences of lactating workers, more studies need to focus on the embodied and emotional experiences of pumping at work, as recounted by lactating workers in their own words. This informed my choice of a qualitative research methodology and my use of in-depth qualitative interviews for data collection. In addition, the sociocultural attitude that lactation does not “belong at work” contributes to a lack of workplace support for lactating employees. This informed my focus on how teachers’ professional roles are understood in schools and how expressing milk at work fits into this understanding.

In the next section, I frame my study within a Marxist understanding of how schools function within capitalism, and I overview what social reproduction theory is and how it relates to my study. In this way, I build a frame for my research question, “How does studying the experiences of lactating teachers illuminate White supremacist patriarchal, capitalist approaches to school design?”
Part Two: Theoretical Framing

Capitalism Requires Oppression in Schools

Schools contribute to the project of capitalism’s continued expansion. In Marxism, social institutions like schools are “tied to the means and relationships of production. Ideas and institutions that do not conform to the dominant relationships of production receive little or no support within the system” (Watkins, 2001, p. 10). Thus, schools need to be places that in form, function, and in the ideas they provoke, support the continued production of goods for the primary benefit of the ruling class.

Maybe today a “ruling class” seems far away. In the United States, we have a strong mythology that capitalism is an inherent and essential feature of U.S. democracy, that we are far away from the bourgeoisie and proletariat social organization where Marxism emerged. We have a well-worn image of billionaires who are benevolent and admirable people who worked really hard to make money and are now solving the world’s problems through philanthropy (just check out the Bill Gates docuseries on Netflix). Yet the rich continue to amass wealth at the expense of the world’s poor. Bettina Love (2019) puts the income gap in the United States in perspective. She writes:

In 2017, 95 percent of wealth created went directly to the top one percent of society. Meanwhile, the median income for a family of four was $54,000, with $16,000 in credit card debt, more than $172,806 in home mortgages, $28,535 in car loans and just under $50,000 in student loans. This economic state is what our country calls the middle class—folx in debt, barely hanging on, living paycheck to paycheck. (p. 18)
In fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the gap between the rich and poor worldwide became wider than ever. An early 2022 press release by Oxfam demonstrates how the most wealthy benefited from the COVID-19 pandemic. They write:

The world’s ten richest men more than doubled their fortunes from $700 billion to $1.5 trillion—at a rate of $15,000 per second or $1.3 billion a day—during the first two years of a pandemic that has seen the incomes of 99 percent of humanity fall and over 160 million more people forced into poverty. “If these ten men were to lose 99.999 percent of their wealth tomorrow, they would still be richer than 99 percent of all the people on this planet,” said Oxfam International’s Executive Director Gabriela Bucher. “They now have six times more wealth than the poorest 3.1 billion people.” (Oxfam, 2022)

Education is an important instrument for reifying and naturalizing individualism and property rights, tenants that underlie a capitalist social organization, ultimately benefiting the ruling class (Watkins, p. 10). Schooling contributes to an efficient, organized, and compliant workforce that accepts the structure it works within.

Louis Althusser’s articulation of the ideological state apparatus is helpful for understanding how capitalist ideology is reproduced in schools through the everyday actions and functions of schooling. The ideological state apparatus refers to those social institutions that function firstly by ideology. Althusser defines ideology as “The system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a person or social group” (p. 158). Social institutions that transmit the ideology of capitalism include schools, churches, and families.
Ideology “is for Marx an imaginary assemblage (bricolage), a pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the ‘day’s residues’ from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence” (Althusser, 1971, p. 160). In this way, ideological state apparatuses are less suspect than state apparatus’, which contains those public, state institutions like the army, the police, and prisons that functionally uphold a capitalist society. State apparatus’ function primarily by repression, including physical repression, and secondarily by ideology (Althusser, 1971, p. 145).

To make ideology visible, we can look at how an institution functions. Althusser points out that “Ideology always exists in an apparatus and its practice, or practices” (p. 166). What are the daily rituals and practices of the institution, and how are they related to the capitalist organization of that institution? For instance, in schools, we can ask how the ritual of following a bell schedule relates to the capitalist organization of schools. Similarly, we can look at practices and policies related to student attendance and student behavior and ask how these relate to capitalist organization. To understand the role teachers play in schools, we can look at the rules for their role: How are they expected to organize their classrooms? What are they expected to teach? How are they expected to treat students who break the rules? We can also look at the terms for employment: What do teachers have to do to stay employed? How much are they compensated for employment? What happens if they miss work? The ideological state apparatus is made visible by examining the link between daily routines and rituals of schooling and capitalist values. But what are capitalist values exactly?: Althusser points out that while
there are a plethora of means and contradictions to how ideologies play out, they are unified by their function, which is to protect the interests of the ruling class. He writes that regardless of the form an ideological state apparatus takes (schools, families, religious institutions), they “contribute to the same result: The reproduction of the relations of production, i.e., of capitalist relations of exploitation” (p. 154).

Althusser claims that of all ideological state apparatuses, schools play the primary role, “Although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: It is so silent!” (p. 155). The ideological state apparatus is essential to sustaining the relations of production within capitalism. In schools, there are a few key components to how relations of production are reproduced: 1) By teaching how people relate to one another within a hierarchy; 2) by teaching material that maps into the ruling ideology; and by 3) organizing students into categories of capability that later determine their role within the capitalist organization of workers. Freire (1970, 2008) offers that education “becomes an act of depositing,” with teachers imparting knowledge that students “patiently receive, memorize, and repeat… the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (p.72). This results in people themselves being “filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge” (p. 72). This system serves the interests of capitalist social order, and an oppressor/oppressed dichotomy because “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the worlds as transformers of the world” (p. 3).
Schools are such effective ideological state apparatuses because this work is largely hidden:

It is by an apprenticeship in a variety of know-how wrapped up in the massive inculcation of the ideology of the ruling class that the relations of production in a capitalist social formation, i.e. the relations of exploited to exploiters and exploiters to exploited, are largely reproduced. The mechanisms which produce this vital result for the capitalist regime are naturally covered up and concealed by a universally reigning ideology of the School, universally reigning because it is one of the essential forms of the ruling bourgeois ideology: An ideology which represents the Schools as a neutral environment purged of ideology…where teachers respectful of the “conscience” and “freedom” of the children who are entrusted to them. (p. 156)

Althusser says that teachers who resist the structure are rare, because it is so naturalized that many don’t realize the role they are playing. He points out that many teachers don’t realize that by unquestioningly fulfilling the duties of professionalism, they reproduce state ideologies of capitalism:

How many [teachers] (the majority) do not even begin to suspect the “work” the system (which is bigger than they are and crushes them) forces them to do, or worse, put all their heart and ingenuity into performing it with the most advanced awareness (the famous new methods!). So little do they suspect it that their own devotion contributes to the maintenance and nourishment of this ideological representation of the School… the dominant Ideological State Apparatus. (p. 157)
Similarly, Freire (1970) writes that “As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition they fatalistically ‘accept’ their exploitation. Further, they are apt to react in a passive and alienated manner when confronted with the necessity to struggle for their freedom and self-affirmation” (p. 64).

Althusser does point out that there are teachers working within schools who actively challenge its oppressive design within their curriculum and relationality. He says,

I ask the pardon of those teachers who, in dreadful conditions, attempt to turn the few weapons they can find in the history and learning they “teach” against the ideology, the system and the practices in which they are trapped. They are a kind of hero. (p. 157)

Likewise Ferguson (2017) writes that “schools and families in particular are not simply reproducers of labor power. They are also reproducers of life. As such, they become sites of struggle over the types of determinations that will hold sway in the process of subject formation” (Ferguson, 2017, p. 130). In what follows, I turn to social reproduction theory to frame how schools and families also “produce life” outside of capitalist ideology, resisting capitalist orientations to work and life.

**Social Reproduction Theory**

Theorist Teeple Hopkins (2017) writes that social reproduction itself can be understood three principal ways:

The biological reproduction of people (e.g., breastfeeding, commercial surrogacy,
pregnancy), the reproduction of the labor force (e.g. unpaid cooking, caring and cleaning tasks) and individuals and institutions that perform paid caring labor (e.g. personal home care assistants, maids, paid domestic workers). (p.132)

In her introduction to *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) writes: “The fundamental insight of SRT is, simply put, that human labor is at the heart of creating or reproducing society as a whole” (p. 2). Bhattacharya goes on to explain that while Marx defined work within capitalism as what the worker performs for pay in the market, Marxism needs to account for the labor that happens outside of the workplace but is necessary to reproduce workers, and thus to reproduce a capitalist system. Bhattacharya points out, “The tremendous amount of familial as well as communitarian work that goes on to sustain and reproduce the worker, or more specifically her labor power, is naturalized into nonexistence” (p. 2). SRT seeks to make the work that produces the worker visible. It expands Marx’s understanding by proposing two core understandings. First, our understanding of how capitalism functions must account for the systems that produce the worker in families, schools, prisons, and other institutions which ideologically and practically sustain capitalism. Second, oppression is central to analysis, and is seen as “structurally relational to and hence shaped by” capitalist production (Bhattacharya, p. 3). I borrow a few key questions from Bhattacharya (2017) to guide my adaptation of SRT:

> If a worker's labor produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the worker? Put another way: What kinds of processes enable the worker
to arrive at the doors of their place of work every day so that she can produce the wealth of society? (p. 1)

And: “How are categories of oppression (such as gender, race, and ableism) co-produced in capitalist production?” (p. 3).

SRT is critical to how I situate the labor lactating teachers do, because socially, their efforts to produce milk for their baby while simultaneously fulfilling their role as teachers is considered “not work.” In addition, their work to provide milk for their babies is made to seem “natural” through the construction of heterosexual cisgender femininity.

To give a concrete example: The name of the U.S federal law for unpaid time to express milk at work is “Break Time for Nursing Mothers.” This name suggests that when a worker pumps milk for their baby, they are not doing work. They are doing something else—something that is a “break” from work. The assumption that when workers express milk at work they are taking a break from work illustrates the very crux of the arguments laid out in social reproduction theory. The name of the law helpfully makes apparent how capitalism relies on invisibilizing care work. Social reproduction theorists offer that capitalism invisibilizes “women’s work” by naturalizing it as a function of a gendered way of relating in the world: Women enjoy taking care of children and it is natural to them. Women take care of their homes and family as an act of love. Women express milk because their bodies biologically produce the milk, and it is therefore “natural.”

The Wages for Housework movement marks an important expansion of visibility for SRT. Wages for Housework was an international campaign in the early 1970s. Silvia Federici (2020), who was a key player in the movement and who wrote “Wages for
Housework” to articulate the concerns of the movement, says that they came to focus on “an analysis of housework as the crucial factor in the definition of the exploitation of women in capitalism” (p. 2). In a 2013 interview, Federici recalls that

In a sense we saw the campaign as a vehicle to …. counter the whole trend which has made [housework and care work] invisible as work and at the same time, also to challenge a whole capitalist organization of work, a whole division of labor that has really concentrated on wage work— on production for the market— as the only type of work and activity that produces social wealth.

Women’s subordinate position in society was traced to the devaluation of reproductive labor within capitalist economies. By failing to assign value to reproductive work, capitalism failed to understand domestic work as valuable. In her essay “Wages against Housework,” Federici (1975) lays out that though every worker in a capitalist society is exploited, the “wage at least recognizes that you are a worker, so that you have entered a social contract to perform the work, but you are not that work” (p. 12). On the other hand, housework has been “imposed on women but also transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of female character” (p.12).

Angela Davis was a key player in the Black Women for Wages for Housework (BWfWfh). BWfWfh officially declared itself a group in 1976 in a “Birth Announcement” where they described themselves as a “rainbow of Black women” and established that the concerns of Black women were particular and at odds with the mostly
white WfH movement, who were not adequately accounting for the ways that race, sex, and class co-produce (Capper and Austin, 2018). Capper and Austin (2018) describe how drawing on the history of slavery and its afterlives as the basis for its analysis, the group emphasized the racialized “divisions of labor” between white and black women, and especially the labors black women had historically performed for white women, in ways that interrupted (but did not render impossible) alliances over the conditions of reproductive work (p. 451).

The WfH movement prioritized the unwaged mother or houseworker, and often failed to nuance how access to privatized motherhood was racialized. Hill-Collins points out how “By denying enslaved African women marriage, citizenship, and even humanity, slavery provided no social context for issues of privatized motherhood” (p. 51). The BWfWfH movement challenged the assumptions of the majority white feminist movement and called for nuance and proper attention to the positioned, intersectional nature of the oppression of women. This understanding was critical to the later evolution of SRT, which draws heavily from the commitments of BWfWfH.

The reproductive labor women perform is historically particular to the racial constructs they are positioned within. A core premise of SRT is that while the exploitation of reproductive labor is embedded in capitalism, the oppression experienced by individuals varies. Black feminists have called for more attention to how race, gender, and class co-produce in highly specific ways, and how capitalism depends on race as a construct in its continued exploitation of workers. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill-Collins (2014) places the labor of black women in the context of the U.S. notion of
“traditional families.” She points out how definitions of family in the U.S. put forth by elite groups imagine an ideal “normal” family that is racially homogenous, heterosexual, and patriarchally structured with a male “head of household.” Children are biological. Hill-Collins (2014) points out how

idealizing the traditional family as a private haven from a public world, family is seen as being held together through primary emotional bonds of love and caring. Assuming a relatively fixed sexual division of labor, wherein women’s roles are defined as primarily in the home with men’s in the public world of work, the traditional family ideal also assumed the separation of work and family. (p. 47)

This monolithic family type is supported by government policy, Hill-Collins reminds us, and “it is organized not around a biological core, but a state-sanctioned, heterosexual marriage that confers legitimacy not only to the family structure itself but on children born in this family” (p. 47). There are two elements of this structure that are problematic for black women. First, the public and private divisions of labor have not been a reality for most black women. Since slavery, black women worked in the public sphere without pay and in their personal sphere, their privacy was routinely violated (Hill-Collins, 2014, p. 47). Second, “the public/private binary separating the family households from the paid labor market is fundamental in explaining U.S. gender ideology…. Black women become less ‘feminine,’ because they work outside the home, work for pay and thus compete with men, and their work takes them away from their children” (p. 47). Marxist feminist Angela Davis argued that white feminists often failed to account for how race has
impacted the Wages for Housework movement in particular. She points out that white women, including white feminist women

have rarely been involved in the Sisyphean task of ameliorating the conditions of domestic service. The convenient omission of household workers’ problems from the programs of “middle class” feminists past and present has often turned out to be a veiled justification—at least on the part of the affluent women—of their own exploitative treatment of their maids. (1981, p. 96)

Hill-Collins (2014) offers that a constructive approach to challenging the ideals of the traditional family is to “challenge the constructs of work and family themselves” (p. 47). In this way, I understand social reproductive theory to be an avenue for unpacking how work and family have been constructed in our capitalist relations.

**The Subjugation of Production to Reproduction**

A key aspect of social reproduction theory is understanding how capitalism prioritizes production to reproduction. Therefore, in what follows, I draw from Federici (2014) to map out the subjugation of production to reproduction. In *Caliban and the Witch* (2014), Silvia Federici outlines the history of the transition to capitalism in the Western world while focusing on women to offer

a theoretical understanding of housework in its main structural components: The separation of production from reproduction, the specifically capitalist use of the wage to command the labor of the unwaged, and the devaluation of women’s social position with the advent of capitalism. (p. 8)
She also traces how modern concepts of femininity and masculinity were created to “service a project of domination that can sustain itself only by dividing, on a continuously renewed basis, those it intends to rule” (p. 8). She posits that the political lesson that can be learned from the history of primitive accumulation is that

Capitalism, as a social-economic system, is necessarily committed to racism and sexism. For capitalism must justify and mystify the contradictions built into its social relations— the promise of freedom vs. the reality of widespread coercion, and the promise of prosperity vs. the reality of widespread penury— by denigrating the “nature” of those it exploits: Women, colonial subjects, the descendants of African slaves, the immigrants displaced by globalization. (p. 17)

Federici starts with a description of primitive accumulation as defined by Marx because she is interested in how primitive accumulation positioned women differently in capitalism than in the feudal system. Primitive accumulation for Marx is the violent process whereby land is taken and occupants on the land are violently expelled, enslaved, or murdered. The feudal lord claims the land as his property, and it contributes to his accumulation of wealth. Landowners exploit others to care for the land and create wealth from the land via slavery or kill or expel them. Marx thought that capitalism was necessary in the path to human liberation. “He believed that it disposed of small-scale property, and that it increased (to a degree unmatched by any other economic system) the productive capacity of labor, thus creating the material conditions for the deliveration of humanity from scarcity and necessity” (Federici, 2014, p. 12). Yet whereas Marx “examines primitive accumulation from the viewpoint of the waged male proletariat and
the development of commodity production,” Federici is interested in the changes the move to capitalism evoked for the social position of women (p. 12). Her description of primitive accumulation focuses on how a new sexual division of labor subjugated women’s labor to that of waged labor. A new patriarchal order was put in place based on women’s exclusion from the paid labor workforce, and the proletariat was re-imagined as a site for producing new workers. In the case of women, this meant their role in the new “machine” was, in part, to birth the working class (p. 12).

Federici argues that gender and class were co-constructed within capitalism, since biological sex became mapped with work function. She writes, “The body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers: The primary ground of their exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor” (Federici, 2014, p. 16). Sears (2017) agrees that control of workers' bodies is a necessary component of subordination and that “the gendered division of labor works through specific processes to deprive women of control over their bodies and compel them to socially reproduce free laborers” (p. 177). Social reproduction theory posits that a core component of the subjugation of women in society is first, that the history of women is intertwined with their exploitation in a capitalist system, and that second, to be equal in a capitalist society, the sphere of reproductive labor has to be counted “as a source of value-creation and exploitation” (Federici, 2020, p. 7). Therefore, the subjugation of women will not end when women participate equally as workers in the workforce. For conditions to change, the vision in SRT is
to overcome financialized capitalism’s rapacious subjugation of reproduction to production—but this time without sacrificing either emancipation or social protection. This, in turn, requires reinventing the production/reproduction distinction and reimagining the gender order. Whether the result will be compatible with capitalism at all remains to be seen. (Fraser, 2017, p. 36)

**Conclusion**

I draw from SRT’s theorization of schools as spaces that reproduce patriarchal, capitalist relationships to inform how I position my understanding of participants’ experiences expressing milk in schools. While traditional Marxism thinks about productive relations only in terms of what is produced at work, social reproduction theory has a broader definition of capitalist productive relations and includes “those relations that generate and sustain workers for capital” (Ferguson, 2017, p. 113). Schools are places where children learn how to reproduce capitalism in their work, in their relationship to their bodies and environments, and in relation to others. Teachers are relied upon to teach these capitalist ways of relating. Yet teachers can reify and also challenge the capitalist organization of relationships in schools. When teachers express milk at work, they engage in reproductive labor while engaging in the productive labor of teaching. Thus, the experiences of those expressing milk at work creates a visible manifestation of the way carework gets made to seem value-neutral in capitalist contexts.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Why am I drawn to constructing “texts of illegitimacy,” including the text of my academic life? What is this struggle I have with the academy—being in it and against it at the same time? How is my story like and unlike the stories of other academic women, struggling to make sense of themselves, to retrieve suppressed selves, to act in their own deepest self-interest? (Richardson, 1997, p. 137)

Introduction

I want to start by acknowledging my and my participant’s general exhaustion during the data collection and analysis phase of my research. It has been a hard couple of years. I finished my dissertation proposal in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. At this time, K-12 school classes were meeting online, with no vision for how the next year(s) might look. People were socially distancing and only in physical contact with their immediate households. A few months later, George Floyd was murdered by the police in Minneapolis. Minnesota teachers were working to support their students mentally and emotionally, while still teaching online. For participants who lived in the Twin Cities, violent clashes between the police and protestors were happening on their streets. Personally, I had just moved into graduate student housing in Minneapolis, and was co-sleeping with my infant, who woke up throughout the night to nurse. I didn’t have childcare (like most at the time) until late summer 2020, and wrote or worked during Win’s naps, late at night, any time I could. I taught my courses online with Win on
my lap. Because I am a single mom and my family lives out of state, there were long stretches of time during lockdowns that Winter was the only person I saw “off screen.”

I began my search for participants shortly after COVID-19 vaccinations were rolled out in Spring 2021. I collected data in Summer and Fall of 2021, when many teachers were back in person, in classrooms again, and were maxed out. Finally, I wrote my dissertation in Spring 2022, when some of the teachers I interviewed were on strike in Minneapolis for smaller class sizes, more mental health support for students, and better pay for educational assistants, among other concerns. Personally, I navigated continual five day daycare closures whenever a classmate in my child’s preschool room got COVID-19; this happened regularly. Win and I both got COVID-19 when he was still too young to be vaccinated. I say this to acknowledge that our personal experiences within this sociohistorical context surely come into play in how teachers talked about their experiences of lactating at work, in how I interpreted what they said, and with how all of us were thinking about our roles and capacities as educators. I also want to acknowledge that though I had a straightforward research plan to start, my approach to data collection and analysis were necessarily adaptive as external conditions continued to change.

In this chapter, I begin by giving background and context for my methodological choices. Then I outline the strategies of inquiry that form the methodology of my study: a feminist approach to qualitative inquiry and poetic inquiry. Next, I describe my context for data collection, types of data, the participants and the community experts. I provide an overview of my approach to in-depth qualitative interviews. I walk through my process for logging and coding data, and for choosing interview excerpts to transform into
transcription poems. I give an example and explain my process for writing, editing, workshopping, and member-checking transcription poems. Finally, I overview my approach to data analysis, drawing on the framework outlined in *Thinking with Theory* by Jackson and Mazzei (2012).

**My Methodological Choices and Teachers**

It is important to me that my research methods challenge an understanding of teachers as docile and controllable bodies, and to use methods of data collection and analysis that frame teachers as active and agentic creators of knowledge who both resist and conform to existing power structures. Pointing out the relationship between the structure of schooling and lactating teachers’ bodily experiences in schools is relevant in the field of teaching, because training teachers’ bodies to move in particular ways is important for maintaining the capitalist, white supremacist hetero patriarchy in schools (hooks, 2003). Educational institutions work to create teachers who are docile: whose power is channeled in the service of maintaining larger systems of power.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) outlines the ways the body is used as an instrument of production in modern society, creating a docile and more controllable workforce through “a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior” (p. 138). This “machinery of power” explores the body; it “breaks it down and rearranges it” (p.138). Foucault outlines how, to create a social order, public institutions like schools become efficient in maintaining power by an insidious decrease in personal power and agency. This is done by creating policies that dictate the minutiae of each person’s role: The system is
maintained through “the meticulousness of the regulations, the fussiness of the inspections, the supervision of the smallest fragment of life and of the body” (p. 141). Those working in these systems often do not realize that “It dissociates power from the body... it turns it into an ‘aptitude,’ a ‘capacity,’ which it seeks to increase… it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection” (p. 138). Rather than being committed to the cultivation of personal agency to raise consciousness, teachers are kept busy fulfilling carefully observed requirements. This is evident in the current United States educational climate, where standardized testing, mandatory curriculum, national standards, and teacher observations are all used to ensure teacher’s act in predictable and controllable ways (Casey, 2016; Kliebard, 2004; Kumashiro, 2002; Symcox, 2002; Watkins, 2001). This careful control “produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” (p.138). Often teachers believe that following these requirements is what it means to do their job well.

hooks takes up Foucault’s work in Race and Representation (2015), where she reiterates Foucault’s assertion that no system of power is complete, and that there is always room for personal agency and power in the “margins, gaps, and locations on and through the body where agency can be found” (p. 116). hooks asserts that throughout U.S. history, black folx have used their power to “look back” at systems of domination in order to retain and grow personal power. She writes that “Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency” (p. 116). Spaces like the qualitative interviews I conducted and conversations with teachers can invite
teachers to “look back” at systems of power and to embrace their agency to change them. As hooks writes, this cultivation of awareness “politicizes ‘looking’ relations—one learns to look a certain way in order to resist” (p. 116).

**Strategies of Inquiry**

**Feminist Approach to Qualitative Inquiry**

I am skeptical of approaches to research that claim neutrality, as nothing is free from social construction. In what follows, I overview the framework for feminist research that informed my approach to my study. I address the purpose of using a feminist methodology, with special attention to how gender is taken up.

In Sandra Harding’s (1987) seminal introduction to the book *Feminism and Methodology*, she writes that historically, there has been a flattening of epistemology, methods, and methodology under the umbrella term of “methodology.” Rather than come up with one feminist methodology, she offers three features of feminist research, being careful to point out that these are not exhaustive and will change over time. In using the category “women,” Harding points out that there is no such umbrella category which encompasses all who identify with the term; that “woman” is socially constructed and not biologically contingent; and that what it means to identify and experience life as a woman varies significantly based on positionality such as race, class, and nationality. In what follows I briefly outline each of Harding’s three features for feminist research and connect them to my research project.

First, feminist research asks questions that are important to women. Harding argues that traditional social science research asks “questions about nature and
social life which white, Western, bourgeois men want answered” (p. 6). In contrast, feminist researchers ask questions that are important to women. For instance, my study is based on a question I continued to see come up in social media and heard from teachers in the field: If teachers are mostly women, and many women have babies during their career and choose to breastfeed, why aren’t there accommodations for expressing milk in schools? Harding’s second feature of feminist research is that “The goal of this inquiry is to provide for women explanations of social phenomena that they want and need” (p. 8).

My study explores why, even for women who want to pump at work, structural barriers make it difficult. It is the first qualitative study in the U.S. to explore the embodied experiences of K-12 lactating teachers. I hope this research helps to frame the struggle to express milk in schools as embedded in patriarchal structures that aren’t built to support lactating teachers. The struggle is not due to women failing to work hard enough; it is due to inequitable policies and practices. Harding’s third feature of feminist research is that it is conducted from the perspective of women. This, Harding says, is new: Women have been studied for a long time, but not “from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world” (p. 8). Harding goes on to point out that “While employers have often commissioned studies of how to make workers happy with less power and pay, workers have rarely been in a position to undertake or commission studies of anything at all, let alone how to make employers happy with less power and profit” (p. 8). This point is critical to my study because often, if lactating workers are researched, it is not from their perspective or considering their experiences. Rather, current research often focuses on how to create enough lactation accommodations
to satisfy federal requirements and to show that lactation accommodations save money for employers.

I now turn to the work of education researcher Patti Lather (1991) who built on Harding’s work to articulate what feminist research is and does. In her book *Getting Smart*, Lather agrees with Harding that feminist research views gender as a social construct. Feminist research explores how gender functions as a category. The goal of feminist social science research, she writes, is overt: It is “to correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position” (p. 71). Lather uses her empirical research to walk readers through what feminist research might entail. She reminds us that the phrase “research as praxis” is a response to Gramsci’s call to intellectuals to develop a bridge between theory and practice. Lather (1991) writes, “In praxis-oriented inquiry, reciprocally educative process is more important than product as empowering methods contribute to consciousness-raising and transformative social action” (p. 72). In this kind of praxis-oriented inquiry, Lather points out that research should be reciprocal, theory should be built dialectically, and centers social advocacy (p. 72-73). To notice their role as an authority figure, researchers also are called to be self-reflexive and to deconstruct their participation in the research process. Lather chides researchers to ask themselves:

How have I policed the boundaries of what can be imagined? What has been muted, repressed, unheard? How has what I’ve done shaped, subverted, complicated? What are my “Others”? What binaries structure my arguments?... and did it go beyond critique to help in producing pluralized and diverse spaces
for the emergence of subjugated knowledges and for the organization of resistance? (p. 84)

I have returned to these questions as I shaped research questions, conducted interviews, and analyzed data.

In the last thirty years since Lather and Harding articulated their visions for feminist approaches to research, feminism has continued to transition, grow, and be shaped by collisions and affirmations with queer theory, critical race theory, intersectionality, disability theory, and more. As with its beginnings, feminist research continues to ask how power is at play and holds to its post-positivist commitments. In their recent book Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science, Ackerly and True (2020) write that today, a fundamental concern of feminist researchers is “the study of power and its effects” (p. 19). They draw attention to the many ways feminist research has developed and continues to be taken up, and how theoretical orientations inform how research is structured. They highlight the importance of intersectionality to avoid universalizing or essentializing the experiences of women (p. 27), and of queer theory to highlighting the ways that feminist epistemology runs the risk of re-inscribing gender and sex binaries, and heterosexuality as the norm (p. 24). Ackerly and True’s work was influential in my choice to use social reproduction theory as a core theoretical frame, and my choice more generally to engage numerous theoretical frameworks in an explicit manner to reveal how power structures are at work in personal experiences.

A fundamental understanding within feminist theory continues to be that it is impossible to be a dispassionate investigator, because each researcher is affected by our
positions within social constructions in what questions we ask, how we seek to answer research questions, and who we include in our study. Indeed, “No one is simply a person but instead is constituted fundamentally by race, class, and gender” (Jagger, 1989, p. 163). In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill-Collins pointed out that a clear drawback of primarily white feminist theorizing in the 1990s was the perception that feminism was anti-family, anti-motherhood, and entrenched in whiteness. She noted that while feminism was “advancing important analyses of motherhood,” it was limited by “its perceived whiteness and antifamily politics” (p. 175). A similar critique holds true when it comes to lactation advocacy work. Many of those within lactation and breast/chestfeeding advocacy are white feminists. Discourses in this field are only now becoming inclusive of those outside of the heterosexual, cisgender nuclear family and becoming inclusive of people across the gender spectrum who lactate. As the researcher who conducted this study, my personal location in social constructions influenced my questions, my approach to data collection and analysis, and who felt comfortable participating in the study. My locations— as someone who is white, cis-gender, a U.S. citizen who has lived abroad, a single mom, pansexual, a female homeowner in a working-class urban neighborhood, someone raised in a conservative Christian nuclear family—impact the way I show up as a woman and as a researcher. I have worked to be critical of my positionality and as Lather suggests, to be reflexive about its impact. In my dissertation, I applied frameworks that are attentive to how power is at play across intersections of identity. All the same, my identities as a qualitative researcher impact the study’s design and outcomes.
Personal Motivation for Focusing on Patriarchy

Patriarchy and its attendant violence are part of who I am and part of how I understand myself. Using theoretical lenses in this dissertation that challenge a patriarchal orientation and invite me to see the world more expansively has been healing. I learned from a young age that to be loved was also to agree to certain conditions, including protecting and normalizing patriarchal community organization, heteronormativity, and whiteness. Patriarchy in white communities and its attendant violence are infused in my family stories.

My great-grandpa worked with Al Capone; we have pictures of my grandma on Al Capone’s lap, and my great-grandpa’s brass knuckles are a family relic. My grandpa’s family had a farm in the same first ring suburb of Chicago that my grandma lived in. When his dad was hit by a car when he was a boy, he quit school and helped on the family farm. As an adult, he worked the night shift as a train engineer. My grandpa on the other side of my family was in the FBI in Chicago. As young men, both my grandpas fought in WW2. My grandpa told me how he was conflicted about the violence of war. He said, “The islands we bombed were full of everyday people just like me, trying to live a happy life.” My grandmas were powerful and maternal, and both involved in their Catholic churches and invested in their family’s well-being.

I grew up in the 1990s and early 2000s in a fundamentalist, conservative Christian community. It provided a clear structure for how to live your life. The rules for community belonging were explicit. I also attended Christian schools from fourth grade on. In these communities, women could not hold leadership positions. There were no
female pastors or elders. They were homophobic places, mostly White spaces, and politically conservative. God was always referred to as “he.” I was taught that women were created to be complementary to men.

I learned that only those who believed what we did lived the right sort of way. I also learned that everyone else would burn in hell forever when they died. As a middle schooler I was sent out to evangelize. I still remember the dread I felt as I knocked on doors and tried to run through a memorized script of Bible verses. I didn’t like it. I regularly dreamt I was falling into hell to burn forever, and fear helped me to follow the rules closely. I was incredibly obedient and self-monitored; I was the student chosen for the “Christian Character award” throughout elementary school and junior high, if that tells you anything. I was a mix of genuinely sensitive and kind, and terrified not to be loved, to screw up, or to be seen as unworthy of our community or of God.

Though I left that community almost twenty years ago, community norms around patriarchy still crop up in my thinking and behaviors. The particular brand of white femaleness I was raised in is in many ways different from popular culture images of white young people in the early 2000s who were more sexually liberated, self-determined, and rebellious. My actions and interactions were controlled and contained in a fundamentalist religious community. I see it as part of my legacy to face the internalized ways whiteness, patriarchy, and compulsive heterosexuality have influenced me. I work to dismantle violent ways of thinking and moving to contribute to building a world where everyone can thrive.
Poetic Inquiry as Method

To guide how I represented and interpreted data, I looked to scholars in the field of poetic inquiry. Poetic inquiry is a growing field within Arts-Based Research (ABR). As a method of research inquiry, poetic inquiry developed out of poststructural theorizing (Prendergast, 2009). I am guided by Laurel Richardson’s (1988) poststructuralist use of poetry in order to challenge the Enlightenment idea that there is only one correct way for doing and presenting research. Richardson (1993) used poetry to present research data as both whole and partial. She described poetic inquiry as a method which “displayed the deep, unchallenged constructedness of sociological truth claims, and a method for opening the discipline to other speakers and ways of speaking” (p. 705).

Glesne (1993) also sees the use of poetry as part of a larger movement in social science research to make the inherent non-neutrality of all data evident, and to humanize data. He writes, “in the process of blurring boundaries, experimental writing helps to heal wounds of scientific categorization and technological dehumanization. With its aesthetic sensibilities, experimental writing can introduce spirit, imagination, and hope” (p. 214-215).

Faulkner (2016) clarifies how poetry can be used “as a tool and method for presentation of research data, as a source of data, and as a source for data analysis” (p. 20). Poetry has been used in a variety of ways within qualitative research; Lahman, et al. (2010) identifies six: Poetic allusion, cultural poetry research, participant poetry as data, data poems, research experience poems, and autoethnographic poems (p. 40). In my study, I use poems as a method for the presentation of research data, and as a source for
data analysis. I have chosen the term “transcription poems” to describe the poems used throughout my study because each poem is exclusively written from interview transcripts. Traditionally, qualitative researchers use block quotes to present the voice of researchers. I chose to primarily use transcription poems. I shaped the poems by emphasizing participants’ use of repetition, drawing out metaphors, through the title I chose for poems, line breaks, and the images drawn out. Therefore, the poems reflect my interpretation of what interviewees are saying during their interviews and reflect the emphases I am choosing to make as the researcher.

I also used poems as a main source for analysis. In each main body chapter, the bulk of analysis is based on transcription poems. Each time I include a poem throughout my dissertation, I introduce the participant narrator of the poem, describe how the poem is constructed, include the poem, and then analyze the poem using theory and in relation to the theme being discussed in the chapter.

In her book Poetry as Method, Faulkner (2016) reviewed the goals and processes of a sample of poet-researchers. Reasons for using poetic inquiry to represent their research include to “root work in the sensual,” for “emotional poignancy,” to “show a range of meaning,” and to “recreate moments of experience” (p. 20-21). Faulkner found that many poet-researchers “consider poetry an ideal way to capture and present [the human experience] in a more easily ‘consumable,’ powerful, emotionally poignant, and accurate form” (2016, p. 22). Similarly, I used poetry to emphasize sensory and emotional experiences participants had and to “recreate moments of experience” participants shared. For instance, in the poem “It’s a Girl Problem,” I focus the story on
the sensory and emotional experience of leaking breastmilk while at work. I organize the poem to emphasize how the participant narrator feels. I also shaped the poem to develop the theme that is also the last line of the poem: “It’s a girl problem and it’s your problem and you should be embarrassed.” I do this by showing how the participant contrasts herself to the male colleague she was with when she leaked.

Poetic inquiry research does many things; it “incorporates poetry in some way as a component of an investigation... is practiced on the margins of qualitative research by a small number of poet/scholars, a number of whom are also literary poets” and “is a way of knowing though poetic language and devices; metaphor, lyric, rhythm, imagery, emotion, attention, wide-awakeness, opening to the world, self-revelation” (Prendergast, 2009, p. 560, 562). Reading or listening to research poetry is an embodied experience; the choice of sound, form, and line length elicit a bodily response in readers or listeners. Richardson (1997) explains that “an experiencing person is a person in a body. Poetry can recreate embodied speech in a way that standard sociological prose does not because poetry consciously employs such devices as line length, meter, cadence, speed, alliteration, assonance, connotation, rhyme and off-rhyme, variation, and repetition to elicit bodily response in reader/listeners” (p. 143). In the poems I created from transcripts, I used line length, cadence, repetition, imagery and metaphor to engage the reader in the scene or narrative.

The condensed length and emotional poignancy of the transcription poems I composed is meant to make them more accessible for readers and easier to share with a broad audience. As I read a poem aloud to an audience, there are collective sounds of
resonance, disgust, and/or affirmation. After I presented to one group, an audience member said, “I didn’t think your topic had anything to do with me. But as you shared the transcription poems, I started to tear up. I didn’t even realize how hard it was for me to pump at work. I didn’t think it mattered.” Another day, after I presented the poem “White Knuckling It,” an audience member quoted a line from the poem back to me in the elevator: “We just keep pushing.” He shared his own experiences of pushing past his body’s limits while at work and connected it to a white supremacist, capitalist orientation to professionalism, as the participant narrator did in the poem. These examples speak to how poems have a resonance and a staying power due to their brevity, concrete images, and the emotions they evoke.

**Poetic Inquiry Situated in Arts-Based Research**

Leavy (2015) writes that “Arts-based practices are particularly useful for research projects that aim to *describe, explore, or discover*” (p. 21). Researchers may employ a variety of art forms, including visual art, dance, poetry, or fiction writing. In what follows, I briefly overview how art-based research (ABR) does three things: It enhances our embodied understanding of daily life within education, explicitly challenges hegemonic ways of being, and is attentive to embodied, emotive experiences. I reference both arts-based research and poetic inquiry, as the latter is entangled within the former, and their goals intersect and overlap.

In their introduction to their second edition of *Arts-Based Research in Education*, Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2018) write that specific to use in the field of education, ABR “promotes a direct, embodied engagement with the sensory qualities of
the world… we feel our researcher-teacher-student bodies moving through space… it is precisely our struggle to regain balance— to make sense—that propel us into inquiry” (p. 5). Using poetic inquiry is an opportunity to explore how “Curriculum lives inside each teacher and student in more profound ways than it does in government documents or district policies” (Prendergast, 2014, p. 4). Arts-based methods are well-situated for research that critically examines hegemonic ways of being as they manifest in institutional stories and spaces. Art-based researchers hope that through their renderings, they can situate events for the audience, allowing us to see and think differently as we “challenge stereotypes and the ideologies they promote” (Leavy, 2015, p.24). Echoing this, Cahnmann-Taylor (2018) writes that arts-based work can challenge hegemonic norms by asking the audience to engage in questions like “Who or what is in the room, not in the room, defines the room, is the subject/object of art/research? What role does the human and organic or nonhuman play? And always, why? And to what end?” (p. 248).

Arts-based methods are attentive to the emotive. Leavy (2015) discusses how researchers are often drawn to poetry because “poems push feelings to the forefront, capturing heightened moments of social reality as if under a magnifying glass” (p. 77). Poems use sensory description to draw images for the reader and to evoke an emotional experience. I hope that through my use of language, the reader is able to emotionally connect with the essence of the events rendered (Leavy, 2015, p. 91).
My Relationship to Poetry

In this section I overview my relationship to poetry, including relevant experience being trained, formerly and informally, and in sharing and publishing my poetry. I do this to situate myself as a researcher and also because there is an ongoing debate in poetic inquiry about how much training and skill is needed to justify taking up the methodology.

It is fitting that poetic inquiry made its way into my methods section. I have used poetic inquiry as a key component of my writing for my undergraduate, masters, and doctoral projects. As much as I try to escape poetry (it is both too rigorous and too personal) I cannot escape it. I have had a deep love for and affinity to reading and writing poetry throughout my life. In high school and in college, I edited the poetry section of each school’s literary journal. My undergraduate English capstone project was a book of poems, based on transcriptions from interviews with my grandparents about their lives. At that time I knew nothing about poetic inquiry, or that I was doing some version of sociological work. I just knew I wanted to write poems about my grandparents' life stories in their own words. I wanted a form that allowed me to capture their sense of rhythm, with their intonations. I also wanted to write about everyday moments as they moved through mundane life activities. My senior year of college, I was given a scholarship to a women’s studies program, where I was able to experiment with using different poetic forms to show tensions between constraint and freedom in my experiences as a woman. After college, I was accepted into a few prestigious MFA programs for poetry, but I couldn’t get myself to go, because they weren’t funded. Instead, I took a year’s worth of MFA courses at a local university at night after teaching.
When I went back to the University of Minnesota full time, my master’s thesis papers incorporated poems. Throughout this time, I got poems published in literary journals. I have been engaged with reading, writing, workshopping, and teaching poetry over the last 15 years, which shaped my approach to using poetry in this dissertation.

Data Collection

Background for my Methodological Choices

I troubled a lot over how to “best” collect data in a way that aligned with my commitment to a feminist approach to data collection, and my commitment to respecting teachers as research participants. I knew teachers were exhausted as I started my data collection and that factored into my choices. In my approach to data collection, I asked myself: 1) How can I honor and listen to teachers’ experiences about expressing milk at work in a context that is feasible and as stress-free as possible for them? 2) Knowing that teachers who expressed milk at work may already have felt their bodies were disrespected during that experience and during the pandemic (as they were asked to work in person despite significant risk to themselves and their families), how do I approach data collection in a way that is safe for teacher’s bodies? 3) What time commitment is feasible for research participants? These questions, and conversations with teacher friends in the field, led me to focus my data collection on in-depth qualitative interviews conducted on Zoom, and to drop the component of in-person collective memory meetings I had originally planned in my dissertation proposal. I also asked teachers to take an informal survey to collect demographic information and I invited participants to share pictures of their lactation spaces and any other pictures relevant to their experience. Many
sent pictures of the milk they produced while at school and of their lactation spaces. One participant shared a photo of an art piece she made using her breastmilk rather than paint.

Finally, I wanted to share data in a way that was accessible to those concerned with the current conditions of lactating teachers. I wanted to have compelling illustrations of key themes that I could use in advocacy settings, such as at a school board meeting, a presentation to administrators, or at coalition meetings. And I wanted to write up data in a way that showed the nuance, the personal complexities, and the social context embedded in participants’ experiences. This felt more important to me than reporting trends. Thus, I chose poetic inquiry as an accessible form for sharing out specific participant experiences while connecting to larger social conditions. Finally, I use a range of theoretical frameworks to analyze data, while remaining rooted in social reproduction theory as a lens for understanding why and how care work like lactation is considered “not work” in capitalist schooling contexts.

My approach to data analysis was informed by my commitment to veer away from the dominant narratives that defined Enlightenment-era research, and a move towards post-positivist research. Post-positive research is viewed as always partial, is committed to deconstructing knowledge, and is committed to centering the particularities of experiences within socially constructed categories, like gender, while retaining a view of the self as socially produced and producing, and relational (Lather, 1991). My approach to data collection and analysis was also influenced by my original design of this study as collective memory work, a Marxist, feminist, and collective approach to research. I veered away from this methodology because it requires meeting together in
groups for data collection, which wasn’t safe during the pandemic. While I didn’t use the methods of collective memory work, the feminist and Marxist underpinnings of the methodology and the view of participants as agentic co-creators of knowledge influenced the way I wrote my recruitment emails, my interview questions, and the structure of qualitative interviews, as well as the use of poetic inquiry as a method for interpreting and presenting data.

Two elements of collective memory shaped my approach to my study design. First, I deliberately looked for patterns in participants’ experiences as embedded in patriarchal contexts while thinking about socialization as a construction: Women are both constructed amidst the social relations as mapped out by white heteropatriarchy in capitalism, and agentically challenging social relations by noticing the construction and choosing to move differently. Second, Frigga Haug (1987), the creator of collective memory work, was committed to the agency of participants and structured her methodology to highlight how change happens when women become conscious of the patriarchal patterns they are moving within and choose to move differently, even to collectivize. This idea infused my approach to data collection and analysis and trained my attention on moments of agency and questioning of the systems teachers moved within.

Context for data collection

In what follows, I detail my context for data collection and describe the methods for data collection and analysis that informed my work.
Location

All participants and community experts in the study lived and/or worked in the Twin Cities metro area, though a few experts and teachers were in rural areas two to three hours outside of the Twin Cities metro. I chose to focus my study on teachers and experts in the state where I live rather than a regional or national population for a few reasons. First, my preliminary study suggested that the experiences of local teachers would reflect a national phenomenon: The majority of teachers do not have the time and space needed to pump at work (Toedt, 2020b). Second, as a former teacher in St. Paul and in Minneapolis, I had connections to teachers, have been to trainings or subbed in many of the local schools, and have experienced viscerally what the school day schedule is like, at least in middle and high school settings. I have lived and worked in this area for fifteen years. As a parent, I have used the lactation rooms at the Minneapolis/St. Paul International airport, in local schools, across buildings at the University of Minnesota, at local shopping malls and gyms, and had a bodily sense of the spaces available to lactating people. Third, each state has its own laws related to protections for lactating workers which can create nuance in how teachers have been supported. For instance, Minnesota passed a law before the 2010 federal law was put into place, and in late 2021, the state law was amended. I did a critical discourse of the law (as it was written in 2019) to better understand how it is applied in local workplaces (Toedt 2020a). This gave me familiarity with policies and programs in place to support local teachers. I have also been a member of the Lactation Advocacy Committee at the University of Minnesota since 2019, where a community of people stay in tune to the issues facing lactating people and advocate for
the needs of lactating workers. With their help, I got funding for and created a lactation space in my building at the University of Minnesota. Finally, I wanted to build connections with local and state groups who were advocating for (or could advocate for) concrete change in the material conditions for the lactating teachers that participated in my study.

**Timing: 2010-Present**

In 2010, under the Obama administration, the “Federal Break Time for Nursing Mothers” law went into effect. Prior to this, protection for lactating workers varied by state laws, with about half of states providing no legal protection or policies for lactating employees. The federal law currently requires employers with more than 50 employees to provide a clean, private space with an electrical outlet and to provide unpaid break time for employees to express milk. Currently, the law only applies for the first year of the child’s life.

The 2010 federal law is important to lactating teachers for a few reasons. First, significantly, state public health grants, programs, and specific roles to address the needs of lactating workers went into effect in 2010 and after. For instance, the Minnesota Department of Health started the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace program in 2014 to give public recognition to workplaces that comply with the state and federal law. State-funded grants also became available, and many counties use the grant money to award small grants (usually under $1,000) to workplaces that wanted to create a lactation space, including schools. Therefore, many local schools have only recently started to make lactation spaces for employees. Second, teachers often refer to the law in order to
advocate for time and space to pump at work. Since school districts or sites rarely have a transparent written policy about the rights and accommodations provided to lactating employees (two-thirds of the teachers in the study reported that their school did not have a specific policy and/or practice in place to ensure they had sufficient time and space to express and store milk during the school day), teachers approached their administration to find out, based on the law, what accommodations were available.

**K-12 Teachers**

I chose to focus on teachers rather than all people who work in schools because their school days tend to be the most bound by the school daytime table. That said, several of the teachers I interviewed also expressed milk at work while in roles as paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, or administrators, and shared their experiences in these roles as well. Every teacher I interviewed pumped for at least one child at work in the time spanning from 2010 to present. All participants identified as white women. All but one participant expressed milk for their child (occasionally participants also donated extra milk to donor banks). One mom expressed milk as a surrogate. Most participants were in heterosexual partnerships, and most were married, though some had blended families and had pumped as single moms at some point.

The population interviewed is consistent with social trends. Heterosexual, married, middle- or upper-class white women have the highest national rates of initiating and continuing breastfeeding (Johnson, 2019). Participants were recruited through my network as a former K-12 teacher in Minneapolis. I also asked three years’ worth of former teacher candidates (around 60 people) to forward my recruitment email to their
networks (see Appendix B for a copy of my recruitment letter). My consent form (see Appendix C) was explicit about my inquiry and my statement of the problem. Besides listing my research questions, I included this brief overview of the purpose of my study.

**Demographics Information for Participants and Community Experts**

I sent each participant a brief, informal survey to collect their demographic information after interviews. The full survey is included in Appendix F. All the teachers identified as cisgender women. Nineteen identified as heterosexual and one identified as queer. All participants had over seven years of teaching experience at the time of our interview and were still working in schools. All participants had more than one child. In what follows, I run through where teachers worked, how long they pumped, whether there was a policy in place where they worked, and whether they had a lactation space. A graphic representation is included in this section. Most participants (80%) worked in public schools, while 15% worked at charter schools, and one participant worked at a combination. Seventy percent of participants expressed milk in urban schools, while 25% worked in suburban schools and 5% worked in a rural school. Most participants pumped at work for over 12 months, with 25% pumping for 12-18 months, and 35% pumping for more than 18 months. The majority did not have a dedicated lactation space in their building. Seventy percent said there was not a specific policy or practice in place to ensure they had sufficient time and space to express and store milk throughout the day. 15% said they did, and another 15% said they did in one school building or at one point when they expressed milk, but not during their whole experience of pumping at work.
Primarily what type of school were you teaching in when you pumped at work?
20 responses

- Public: 80%
- Private: 15%
- Charter: 5%
- Charter for the 1st, public for the 2nd: 0%

How would you describe the geographic setting where you worked when you expressed milk as a teacher?
20 responses

- Urban: 75%
- Rural: 20%
- Suburban: 5%
All together (including any time you pumped) how long did you pump while working in a school?
20 responses

Was there a dedicated lactation space in your building?
20 responses
Community Experts

I defined community experts as those with specialized knowledge and/or experience supporting lactating workers in the Twin Cities metro area. The purpose of community expert interviews was to get a better grasp of how those in education, public health, and unions advocate for (or could potentially advocate for) policies and practices that support lactating teachers. I interviewed 15 community experts in the Twin Cities area. This included leaders of local and state breastfeeding coalitions, state union leaders, those who coordinate grants for making lactation spaces at work at the state and local levels, public health officials who focus on supporting lactating parents who work, and school administrators. Community interviews also helped me to better situate the plight of lactating teachers within the landscape of those who are working and pumping. I did not analyze the interviews as I did with the in-depth interviews of lactating teachers. I did not use the interviews to construct transcription poems. I do not refer to community experts as participants. Rather, I returned to community expert interviews to better understand the topics lactating teachers brought up. The recruitment letter I used to send
community expert emails can be found in Appendix A. Prior to interviews, I sent community experts a consent form to read over and sign, which can be found in Appendix C.

**Data Sources**

*In-Depth Qualitative Interviews with Lactating Teachers*

Qualitative interviews are usually associated with ethnographic fieldwork (Madison, 2020 and Warren, 2002). They are based in conversation and listening and teach the interviewer about the participants’ experiences and life-world (Warren, 2002). According to Johnson (2002), in-depth interviews have four key features. First, in-depth interviews are used to gain a deep understanding of a particular topic. Deep understandings are “held by the real-life members of or participants in some everyday activity, event or place” (Johnson, 2002, p. 106). Second, they move beyond common sense explanations of a cultural experience. Third, in-depth interviews can reveal the researcher’s assumptions influencing interviews. And fourth, in-depth interviews can reveal “multiple views of, perspectives on, and meanings of some activity, even, place, or cultural object” (p. 107). Within in-depth interviewing, “An important issue is the researcher’s relationship to member knowledge and lived experience” (Johnson, 2002, p. 106). In my case, because I expressed milk at work, taught for many years in a local high school, and balanced work and parenting, my lived experience provided useful background knowledge for setting up my study. Johnson (2002) writes that those conducting in-depth interviews “may use in-depth interviews to explore or check their understandings, to see if they are shared by other members or participants” (p. 106). By
sharing about my own experiences, I was able to have a conversation with participants that moved beyond common sense explanations of lactating in schools. During interviews, I also shared my experiences to create openings for honesty. For instance, I might share how I would describe the sensation of pumping because it could feel awkward to talk about at first.

Each interview with teachers was an hour-long on Zoom. I used the questions outlined in Appendix D to shape conversations. Interviews were recorded on Zoom and transcribed in Otter. In my construction of questions, I was informed by approaches to qualitative interviewing as presented by D. Soyini Madison (2020) in their text *Critical Ethnography*, which I detail in this section. Before each interview, I wrote brief notes about the school the person taught at, the time of the interview, and how I was connected to the participant. I read through past email exchanges and ensured I had a signed copy of the consent form. At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself or, if I knew the participant, took time to more informally catch up and thank them for participating. Then, I gave an overview of the study and told participants how my own experience trying to pump at work motivated my inquiry. I told them what to expect—that we would talk through a series of questions related to their experiences pumping at work—and that they could choose not to answer any of the questions.

I started interviews with what Madison (2020) calls behavior or experience questions. The questions addressed “concrete human action, conduct, or ways of ‘doing’” (p. 36). These included:

- What dates and in what buildings did you pump at work?
Can you describe the space where you expressed milk while at work? Who created the space? How close/far were you from a bathroom?

Briefly describe where you stored breast/chest milk (i.e. personal cooler, refrigerator in staff lounge)

Did your school site have a specific policy and/or practice in place to ensure you had sufficient time and space to express and store breast/chest milk during the school day? Can you explain?

Did you have co-workers who supported you in specific ways so that you could express milk at work? How about administrators? Who else provided support?

If a teacher pumped for more than one child, as many had, they repeated this process for each experience. The purpose of these questions was to focus on the interviewee’s action or behavior and to help jog their memory related to how they navigated the time and space to pump and to what extent networks of support were available. I also found that the descriptive starting point was conducive to easing into more personal questions, as they allowed us to get to know one another and focused on recall. Then I moved to ask questions that elicited stories, including: Can you tell me a story related to your biggest challenge while pumping at work? And can you tell me a story related to an experience of agency or triumph while pumping at work?

The next series of questions I asked came in the order that made sense for the interview. They had to do with feelings, sensations, and opinions or values. Questions about feelings addressed “emotions, sentiments, and passions” (Madison, p. 36). Questions about senses addressed “the senses and human sensation. How does the body
hear, taste, touch, smell, and see a phenomenon at the purely visceral level?” (Madison, 2020, p.37). Opinion or value questions asked participants to consider their personal preferences and views related to lactation. Questions included:

- Do you prefer pumping or breast/chestfeeding? Why?
- What are three emotions you associate with your experience pumping at work? Can you explain why you chose these emotions?
- What are a few words you would use to describe the bodily sensation of pumping at work? Can you explain why you chose these words?
- What are a few words you would use to describe the bodily sensation of breast/chestfeeding your infant? Can you explain why you chose these words?
- What are your biggest motivators for expressing milk at work?
- Who do you think values the work you do when you express milk at work and why?

After I did a few interviews, I found it helpful to add what Madison (2020) calls quotation questions. Madison says this is when you repeat “direct quotations from others” and ask for a response (p. 39). These included:

- For some people I have interviewed, it is difficult for them to produce as much milk if they don’t feel comfortable and safe when they express milk. Some teachers also need to look at pictures of their child while they pump. Does any of this resonate for you?
- A few teachers I have interviewed mentioned that bodyfeeding also causes changes in other daily work routines, like when they arrive at school, how much
water they drink, or how much they use the restroom. Do you find your daily habits or routines change at all when pumping? How?

By referencing what others said, participants were given the opportunity to resonate or contradict the accounts of others based on their experiences.

I ended interviews by asking advice and change-oriented questions. I asked every participant these two questions: What is something you wish your administration understood or did differently related to teachers who express milk at work? What advice would you give a new teacher about to begin expressing milk at work? At the end of interviews, I asked participants if they knew of anyone else who might be interested to talk with me and whether I could mention their name when I reached out. I also asked if they had any pictures or any other stories they wanted to share, or any questions they had for me. After everyone had been interviewed, I sent the demographics informal survey via email and got a 100% response.

Community Expert Interviews

Interviews with community experts were about an hour long, conducted on Zoom and transcribed using Otter. I generally started interviews by overviewing my research. I had a list of questions that I generated for each expert; many of my questions were aimed at gaining a better understanding of what resources are available to lactating teachers, how this has changed over the course of the last 20 years, and what changes have made the most difference for lactating workers. I also wanted to understand the plight of lactating teachers in relation to other professions.
Typically, interviewees were excited to talk about their work. Interviews with community experts varied greatly from one to the next. For instance, in an interview with a union leader, they discussed, as they wrote in an email, their “attempts to address working conditions for parents, especially those post-partum, in contract negotiations.” In another interview with a country health promotion specialist, she shared how she hosts a “creating a mother-friendly workplace” training every other year. At the training, she shares a template for support policies employees can adapt for their workplace, she talks about the MN Department of Health recognition program, and she explains how to garner the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace designation. Interviews with community experts were generative and helped me understand the context for the barriers faced by lactating teachers.

Informal Surveys

After their interviews, every teacher participant filled out an informal google survey that allowed me to collect demographic information about how teachers identified, where they taught and for how long, and where they pumped and for how long. Participants could choose to share pictures of lactation spaces. The full list of questions can be found in Appendix F.

Researcher Fieldnotes

My field notes were a place to enact how I write because “I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn’t know before I wrote it” (Richardson, 1997, p. 87). I drew heavily from Laurel Richardson’s framing of her approach to writing fieldnotes in her essay: “Writing: A Method of Inquiry” (2000). For
my field notes, I adapted Richardson’s (2000) suggestion to create field notes in four categories: Observational, methodological, theoretical, and personal. I kept observational notes for each participant interview. Observational notes were approached as “fairly accurate renditions of what I see, hear, feel, taste, and so on” (p. 941). I used observational notes as a place to record what I noticed about the participants, the space, and the context for the interview. For instance, after my interview with Melissa, I wrote:

Melissa was in her classroom at Carolina Elementary school. She set up the interview 24 hours in advance when her husband was able to drive her kids to daycare that day—“When else would I have an hour to do an interview?” she said. Melissa is white with long brown hair. She has a lower voice and a friendly demeanor. She is passionate about this topic. She also read the consent form carefully and brings up topics covered in the consent form a few times during the interview. During the interview, Melissa is sitting at her desk. Behind her, a bulletin board with clouds and a rainbow. About five minutes into the interview, the janitor walked in. He struck up a conversation with Melissa. She asked how he was, and he said thanks to her for asking. While the janitor cleaned for about five minutes, we talked about how old her kids are, what their names are, etc. Melissa deliberately did not use any words associated with pumping or breastmilk—it was clear she didn’t want to talk about this topic with the janitor present.

Observational notes were also a place I recorded quotations and stories that stood out to me during interviews, and observations of my own reactions and interactions during
interviews. I drew most heavily from observational notes when it came time to analyze my data.

I used methodological notes to trouble through my enactment of my methods: “Messages to myself regarding how to collect ‘data’” (p. 941). For instance, when I was working on the poem “Gross,” I wrote:

I had fun writing my first poem based on Christine’s transcript about the mouse. I was in the zone; time didn’t matter. I did four or five drafts and tried to show each time or keep notes on what I was changing. Line breaks still feel hard. Do I do them based on content or pauses? I decided to revisit Kumashiro’s (2002) *Troubling Education* to read his methods, and *Poetic Inquiry* by Faulkner (2016).

Theoretical notes were a place for me to trouble through how I was thinking through the theory at work, and my struggles with it. Finally, personal notes were “uncensored feeling statements about the research” and about my process (p. 941). Often, the act of writing out where I was stuck and why helped me to get unstuck. It helped me to normalize the struggle of writing. In personal notes, and in alignment with post-positivist, feminist approaches to research, I also spent time reflecting on my role as a researcher and asking questions of my positionality and process.

Data Analysis: Representing and Analyzing Data

Logging Data and Identifying Themes

I created a data log organized by participant name. First, I copied over observational notes from each interview per participant. As detailed above, observational notes included descriptions of the time, space, and interactions during the interview and
my impressions and what stood out to me during the interview. Next, I re-listened to each interview. For each interview, I logged salient moments, common topics, and themes evoked, along with their timestamps. Each common topic was highlighted in my notes, and some gained momentum. I also took note of stories I thought would make good poems by starring and copying the full text from interview transcripts over to my notes. I made note of metaphors or scenes that I thought would make poignant poems. The themes that undergird this dissertation gained momentum: There is a mismatch between lactating teachers’ embodied needs and the school day timetable; systemic problems get framed as personal problems in institutions; ignoring bodily needs is ingrained into teaching; and the range of emotional experiences of pumping at work.

In addition to my data log, I created a spreadsheet organized by participant name where I logged their demographics information, details about how I got connected with them and when the interview took place, how many times they pumped and when, and their answers to the key questions that I asked all participants, so that I could quickly look across responses from all 20 participants.

**Writing up the data: Construction of Narrative Poems**

In this section, I explicitly walk through how I created transcription poems. Once I identified the main themes that emerged throughout the interview data, I looked for moments when participants were telling a compelling story related to each theme, and when they were animated in terms of their tone and embodiment as they discussed their experiences. I looked for stories that had concrete images, like in “Gross,” where the participant tells the story of a mouse that shows up when she pumps. I looked for stories
that used metaphor, like in “White Knuckling It,” where the metaphor “white knuckling it” is used to represent fulfilling white supremacist capitalist expectations for professionalism. Finally, I looked for poems that deliberately set up a story related to embodiment with a beginning, middle and end, like in the poem “Your Problem,” when the participant tells of leaking milk at work, and how she felt as she interacted with the male colleague who pointed out she was leaking. Often these were stories that struck me as I heard them in the interview, and that provoked big feelings for the participant. Sometimes this resonance was affirmed in my interaction with the participant, like when the narrator in “Gross” sent a video of the mouse to me afterwards, and the narrator in “White Knuckling It” emailed to say she cried after reading the poem created from her account.

For each transcription poem, I kept a track of revisions in a single document that included each draft of the poem and notes about my reasons for the edits I made after each draft. My first step was to copy over the entire block of text from the interview transcript that I intended to construct as a poem. Next, I listened to and watched the Zoom recording of the transcription segment 5-10 times. I corrected the transcript. In the first drafts of the poem, I cut down words while remaining true to the linguistic particularities of the participants (such as retaining some instances of phrases like “you know”). I worked to break lines and stanzas in places that matched the flow of the participant’s story telling. In the following drafts of the poem, I worked to highlight poetic devices already present in the telling, such as metaphor, dialogue, sensory detail, or concrete images. I read the poem aloud and continued to refine word choice. Then, I
sent the poem to the participant for input and asked for approval to use the poem. All participants approved and many wrote messages of resonance with the poem as it was written. Finally, poems were workshopped with peers. I participated in an International Poetic Inquiry workshop once a month where I received feedback on many of the poems from other poet researchers, mostly working in universities in Western Europe. Often the feedback was to cut down the poems even further.

**In-Depth Example of Transcription Poem Construction**

In what follows I give an in-depth example of how I constructed the poem “Gross” to illustrate the steps I used to construct transcription poems. Each poem brought its own challenges, but “Gross” illustrates a core challenge I faced: cutting the transcription poem down while remaining true to the participant’s voice and original story. The poems tend to be narratives with a speaker and theme. My first step was to copy over the entire block of text from the transcript that I intended to construct as a poem. The original transcript that I turned into the poem “Gross” was 13 minutes into my interview with Christine. Here is the original transcript:

> Um, a mouse started showing up back there while I was pumping. Oh yeah. And like I had this video of this mouse like playing with a plastic bag and I'd be like shoo, shoo, and it just was sitting there you know, like six feet away from me playing with a plastic big and it wouldn't go away, and I that was like the final straw for me with pumping with the second. I was like I'm not gonna sit in pump in this room where these mice clearly aren't even afraid of me and I think this is disgusting. Like, I am not comfortable with this anymore. Like this is gross. I'm
like hooked up to this machine. I can't even like hop up and get away if this mouse comes towards me. So at that point, I kind of decided okay, she'll be six months at the end of January. So I came back from winter break and I said, I'm just going to get through like the next two weeks of pumping. And then when I hit six months, I just need to be done. I can't, I couldn't do it anymore in that space and like not with the mice. I think a bug ran across the counter once too. I'm like, it's just gross. It's gross. There's nowhere clean in this building. Nowhere comfortable. I just couldn't do it anymore. So I felt bad because I didn't make it as long with her. And then I only nursed for like, another month or two. And then it was just, I just started kind of drying up. And I was like, I'm just done now. So she had to go on formula for a while. And I did kind of feel bad about that. Um, just because I didn't make it as long as I did with her sister. But I just like, mental health. I just couldn't do it. I could not sit in that space. It was so disgusting. Yeah. And that was like the new part of the building. It should have been cleaner. But those mice, the mice are just too confident.

After I listened to and watched the Zoom recording of this transcription segment 5-10 times, I began shaping the transcription into a poem. I corrected the transcript. For gross, my process notes for my first draft were: “Broke lines where she paused, and to emphasize what she emphasized.” I took out many of the extra phrases such as “like,” “kind of,” “just,” and “you know.” If phrases represented a persistent speech pattern, I sometimes left a few, such as “just,” because the repeated word showed how emotionally
done the participant was with her situation. I took out extraneous details. I continued to edit the poem.

In my notes, after the first few drafts, I wrote about the tension and difficulty I was having with the poem: “There is a tension between how much to cut and how much to leave Christine’s turns of phrase. Cutting keeps it moving which is important. It emphasizes parallels in her word choice and emotions too. Lines show her breathlessness, but it feels like a transcript or narrative more than a poem still.” After five drafts, I sent the draft copied below to the participant, who said “Everything looks great!” In this draft, I structured lines and stanzas to make the poem read like a narrative and to show the breathlessness and momentum of the storyteller. I used italics to show the narrator’s internal monologue.

Just gross

A mouse started showing up while I was pumping. It was just sitting there, six feet away from me, playing with a plastic bag. I’d be like “Shoo! Shoo!” but it wouldn't go away! That was the final straw for me. I was like, I'm not gonna sit here and pump in this room where the mice aren't even afraid of me, and I think this is disgusting! I am not comfortable with this anymore. This is gross. I'm hooked up to this machine. I can't hop up and get away if this mouse comes towards me. At that point, I decided, I'm just going to get through the next two weeks of pumping. Then I just need to be done. I just couldn't do it anymore. Not in that space. Not with those mice. It's just gross. It's gross. There's nowhere clean in this building.
Nowhere comfortable. I just couldn’t do it anymore. So I felt bad. Because my milk started drying up. And I was like, I'm just done now. And I did feel kind of bad about that. But I just couldn't do it. I could not sit in that space. It was disgusting. It should have been cleaner. But those mice! The mice are just too confident.

I workshopped this draft of the poem with the international poetic inquiry group and received constructive feedback. While they felt emotional resonance and liked the concrete image of the mouse, overall others in the group felt the poem was too wordy and needed to focus more on the central images of the mouse and the pump. They felt the word “just” was used too much and needed to be taken from the title. Thus, I continued to cut down the poem until I reached the current version:

**Gross**

A mouse started showing up while I was pumping.

It just sat there, six feet away from me, playing with a plastic bag.

I was hooked up to my pump

So I couldn’t hop up and get away.

“Shoo! Shoo!” I yelled but it wouldn't go away.

That was the final straw.

I was like “I’m not gonna pump in this room anymore
and this is disgusting!"

So I stopped pumping.
My milk dried up.

I felt bad,
but I just couldn't do it.

I could not sit
in that space.

It’s just gross.

And those mice!
The mice are just
too confident.

As you can see from the poem “Gross,” I took a significant amount of time with
the editing process for each poem included in this dissertation. I worked to use the
participant’s words and to draw out themes, while adapting to the genre of poetry by
drawing out alliteration, repetition, descriptive images, and when possible, metaphor and
allusion. I let punctuation and sometimes line breaks and stanzas do the work to show the
flow and pauses in the participants’ stories. I spent many hours carefully crafting each
transcription poem.

Construction of Poems across Data

The intent of the poems in Chapter Six (“How Would You Describe Pumping?,”
”How Did Pumping Make You Feel?,” and “Pumping at Work”) was to demonstrate
participants’ answers to essential research questions across their varied experiences. For
these poems, I wanted to show the variety of responses, but also to demonstrate the clear
trends that emerged across participant responses. I ordered the responses from each
participant to emphasize the most important information. I grouped like responses
together. I spent less time organizing or cutting these data poems, but still worked through five or more drafts of each. In Chapter Six, where the poems appear, I provide a detailed explanation for how I crafted each poem.

**Analyzing the data**

In my approach to data analysis, I was informed by Jackson and Mazzei’s framework as articulated in *Thinking with Theory*. In their approach to inquiry, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) offer thinking with theory to “begin creating language and a way of thinking methodologically and philosophically together” (p. vii). In their framing, theory shapes a study’s design and the researcher's approach to the study from the very beginning. They provide a method for using theory to think *with* data. Jackson and Mazzei drew from a poststructural view of research. Their goal was to get out of “the representational trap of trying to figure out what the participants in our study ‘mean,’ “and avoid being seduced by the desire to create a coherent and interesting narrative that is bound by themes and patterns” (p. viii). What I take them to mean here is that, by applying numerous theories for analysis, and by being explicit about how a particular theoretical orientation shapes our lens as researchers, we reveal the constructed and contingent nature of our research.

Jackson and Mazzei use a traditional interpretive qualitative interview approach. They argue that “Qualitative data interpretation and analysis does not happen via mechanistic coding, reducing data to themes, and writing up transparent narratives that do little to critique the complexities of social life” (p. vii). This outlook gave me permission to keep theoretical frameworks in question while I re-listened to interviews and to
identity themes and patterns, while not feeling a pressure to use a particular coding system. I view the creation and analysis of poems as an explicit move to make the constructed and positioned nature of data transcription and analysis explicit, while showing the complexity of how themes play out for individual participants in specific contexts.

Jackson and Mazzei chose one specific concept from a specific theorist and put it in conversation with a small set of data, then re-read it with more than one theoretical concept. They took time to consider what each theorist could offer to analysis, and generated a set of questions. For instance, Foucault’s theory of power generated the question, “How do power/knowledge relations and practices produce [the participants] multiple subjectivities as they venture into the academy as first-generation professors?” I chose this framework because it allows data to talk to theory, and for theory to talk back to data in a recursive process. By requiring researchers to plug the same set of data into more than one theory, it shows how knowledge is co-constructed as researchers move between data and theoretical analysis, and how multiple meanings are inherent to any pursuit of knowledge. For my dissertation, this meant using different theoretical frameworks in each main body chapter to analyze transcription poems, and to see what each framework offered for understanding the experiences of participants. Another reason I chose this framework is because as post-structural feminists, Jackson and Mazzei don’t view data as sacred, objective truth, but as one representation, formulated by the research participant, to represent the experience in discussion. A post-structural orientation allows me to view participant interview data as one story of their experience,
but not as the only truth, and asks that I remain curious about the many ways the same
interview transcript can be interpreted based on the frameworks used and the positionality
of the person analyzing it.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I worked to make my process of data collection, presentation, and
analysis transparent. In the next section, I include all of the poems together. See if you
can notice how your body feels as you read the poems – are sensations or emotions
evoked? See if themes or patterns emerge for you. What resonates or conflicts with your
own experiences?
The Poems

Everyone Else’s Kids

When you think about how you feel supported in a school, being told that you can only pump
in a bathroom or in a room that doesn't have a lock makes you feel not valued. It makes you feel
as though pumping is an obstruction to your job. Versus, you know, my priority should be
my children, my priority should be my family life and not giving everything to the school itself.
It adds to a lot of conflicting feelings, because as teachers, you know, we're expected to care
for everyone else's kids. But when it comes to our own, it's almost frowned upon—we have to go through
such a process to have a baby or do something like pumping. There is
a sense of shame that comes with expressing milk in schools. When instead, we should be embracing the individuals
that are there, giving them the support they need to feel like they can survive and be their best.
A mouse started showing up while I was pumping.

It just sat there,
six feet away from me,
playing with a plastic bag.

I was hooked up
to my pump

So I couldn’t hop up and get away.

“Shoo! Shoo!” I yelled but it wouldn't go away.

That was the final straw.

I was like “I’m not gonna pump in this room anymore and this is disgusting!”

So I stopped pumping.
My milk dried up.

I felt bad, but I just couldn't do it.

I could not sit in that space.

It’s just gross.

And those mice! The mice are just too confident.
Tip of the Iceberg

Space and time to pump
is just the tip of the iceberg.

Let me give you an example.

We don’t get any paid parental leave.
We use our sick days.

So, a few months after I gave birth
I went back to work
but I didn’t get paid for a long time.

We were out of money.
I kept calling HR to ask,

“When am I going to get money
again in my paychecks?”

“You'll get money again
in a couple checks,”
they kept telling me.

And I was like,
“No, I need a date—
I have no money.

You have to tell me.
I'm not saying you need
to pay me before
I'm supposed to be paid.

I'm just wondering,
what is the date
I will get paid?
So I can budget until then.”

Finally, I was weeping on the phone
with this poor HR woman
and she was very nice and helpful.

She said, “I am so sorry
nobody told you this…”
She told me I had to backpay all my family health insurance—almost $900 a month—a good chunk of my income.

I was an anxious mess. I was a disaster.

I was crying every night because I was so anxious about how I was going to do everything and teach.

It was an important step for me to just say “Okay, well I’m done pumping.”

If you have all those other layers going on, what's the thing you're going to give up?

Probably pumping. Because you can.
**A Lot of Work**

It would be nice not to call it your pumping break. It's not a break. It's not easy.

It's not something we can just make happen, you know. It's a lot of work.

When I was a paraprofessional, I got a 30-minute and a 15-minute break.

I spent both pumping. Thankfully I worked for a teacher who was understanding and allowed bathroom breaks or allowed an extra 10 minutes to eat.

Now I have a paraprofessional in my room who is pregnant but won't return after she has the baby.

If she was returning, I wouldn't want her to feel like *I can only pump. I can't take a break. I can't sit down for five minutes.*

It's just, we live in a society where we have to be working, we have to be moving at all times.

Otherwise, it's wasted time. But producing milk isn't wasted time.

It's, you know, I'm feeding my child. And although he can't be with me right now,

I'll be able to use this milk to feed him later today.
White Knuckling It

As a teacher I avoid drinking water, right? Because if I drink too much water, I need a bathroom break and that's just not gonna happen. Like it’s not usually possible.

But when you are pregnant you can't do that.

You *have* to take a moment.

Then you are breastfeeding, and you're like, Oh my gosh, *I just want to take care of my body.*

But not taking care of yourself is ingrained in the culture of teaching.

I white knuckle it through stuff *all the time.*

That's just American culture right?

It's, like, we don't take care of ourselves we just keep pushing.

After the murder of George Floyd and the uprisings we talked in staff meetings about white supremacist structures in regards to professionalism and the way we structure teaching. We don't stop and pause.
And you know
what kinds of mistakes
do we make
when we do that?

Or when we expect that
of people?
How It Still Is

My grandma was a teacher in the 1950s.

She got special permission to keep teaching after she got married.

When she got pregnant, she didn’t have to resign. It was like, obviously, you're done teaching.

That's how it still is.

When I became pregnant, I asked about taking leave. They said, “that's not a thing. Just take your sick time.”

I had seven days. That was the first shock.

After leave, I asked, “I know that I'm…. given time for pumping?”

And the principal said, “Yeah, you can pump whenever you need.

Whenever in your day. But we don't provide coverage.”

My prep was at a different time every single day. It was really challenging.

So yeah. Maternity isn't supported. Breastfeeding essentially isn't supported.

It's like they just assume we’ll go part time or not work.
Your Problem

I do have this one memory from soon after I returned to work.

Actually it probably wasn’t. Because early on, you're leaking and you remember you're leaking and you're putting in pads but then your body figures it out and doesn't do that anymore.

You only have a letdown when your baby latches or you're pumping. Your body's got it figured out.

I wasn't wearing pads that day I must have thought I was beyond that phase.

And I must have been busy running around not being able to sit down and stop.

I was talking to my colleague across the hall a man who does not have children, and was a good friend of mine, a nice guy, but just never really was able to empathize with what it was to be a new mom at work, pumping, bringing your kid to daycare.

We were very good friends. Right. But his whole thing was work. He was always like, Oh, you’re late for the meeting. And I was trying to balance work and a baby.

Any way one day we were talking I was across the room from him thank God, he would have freaked.

And I started to leak.

He was so uncomfortable and was like “There's a thing—happening!”

Someone loaned me a sweatshirt.

That is burned in my memory, trying to do all those things.
and having someone loan me a sweatshirt.

It's reminiscent of being 12 years old
not knowing you're going to get your period
and then you're mortified and you're at school
and you tie a shirt around your waist
and just make do.

And this is one of those things
where as a society we make girls feel like
it's a girl problem.

And that just is dumb.
Pumping at Work

In three words, describe your experience pumping at work.

Tight, hectic, awkward stressful, necessary, hidden

lonely, gross, sad stressful, lonely, messy

quick, prep, lunch stressful, frantic, time-consuming

sometimes; relaxing / stressful hard

work, priority, progress stressful, upsetting, frustrating

It sucked—figuratively and literally. Stressful, too busy

simple, effective, supportive stressful, overwhelming, difficult

dehumanizing, humiliating, frustrating stressful, isolating, hassle

difficult, dirty, and time consuming stressful, lonely, time-consuming

time-consuming, commitment, love stressful, eye opening, necessary
How Would You Describe Pumping?

Pumping is not pleasant.  
I hated it.

It’s time consuming  
a hassle.

Pumping is uncomfortable  
stressful  
mechanical, unemotional  
gross, stressful and time consuming.

It’s extra work with carrying and washing stuff.

There is not enough time.

It was okay if I had the time.

You don't feel like a person.  
You feel more like an animal,  
it’s very dehumanizing.

It's nice to have the quiet  
alone time if you can have it  
but at school it is a lot of stress  
and fear that someone will walk in on you.

I know it’s important—  
it's something I wanted to be able to do.
How Did Pumping Make You Feel?

Lonely
stressful
pressure

providing.

Not pleasant
hurts a little
not comfy.

Anxiety
guilt
sadness.

Something I had to do.

No positive emotions really.
It was not a positive
experience for me.

I feel really rushed.

Tiresome
stressful

indifferent,
proud,
grateful.

No strong love
or hate for it.

Something I didn't want
to manage, I guess.
Chapter Four

Ignoring Bodily Needs is Ingrained in Schooling

When I interview Carol, a special education teacher in an urban district, she is sitting in her basement, the sound of her children playing upstairs in the background. It’s a midweek evening. She mentions that after our interview, she needs to finish filling out Individual Education Plans (IEPs) before she can eat dinner. As she details her schedule for pumping in 2017 and 2020, she is amazed she was able to make time to pump once a day, because in her current school day, she often doesn’t even have time to use the bathroom. She says in a tone of bewilderment, “Today, at the end of the day, I realized, ‘I haven't used the restroom today.’” Carol is one of many teachers to discuss how difficult it is to meet bodily needs generally in schools.

Many teachers mentioned holding their urine throughout the school day, or intentionally dehydrating themselves because they knew they didn’t have time to get to the bathroom. Melissa, a high school art teacher in an urban setting, emphasized how getting pregnant and then breastfeeding was a big shift for her, because she had to start drinking water and urinating once she was breastfeeding. She said,

You know, when you're not breastfeeding, you just dehydrate yourself so you don't have to go to the bathroom because it's such a horrible situation. But when you're breastfeeding you are like, I need to be drinking so much water in order to produce breastmilk. So, again, luckily, I'm right by the adult bathrooms, and we have five minutes between each class. So I was essentially able to go to the bathroom, you know, when I needed to between classes.
Melissa was one of a number of participants to detail her proximity to the bathroom, the amount of time it took to get to the bathroom, and whether this could be accomplished during the five-minute passing time between class periods (in middle and high school settings). Because teachers needed to drink more water and eat more food in order to pump enough milk at work, their proximity to the bathroom gained importance, as did their navigation of both eating and pumping during their lunch break. Laurie was in the midst of pumping for her baby when I interviewed her in Fall 2021. She detailed: “I pump during my lunch. It’s a little crazy: Class ends, I pop my food in the microwave, run to the bathroom while the food is heating up, run back. Then I eat quickly while I am pumping in the closet. You know, it's just a lot of bodily functions in and out.”

Besides not having enough time during the school day to express milk and meet other bodily needs, teachers recounted lacking time to heal properly or to take care of their body after giving birth. Melissa had her first baby when she only had a year’s worth of sick days, or 10 days, of paid sick leave saved up. In her district, as with most the teachers I interviewed, there was not paid parental leave; teachers saved their sick days in order to take time off. Therefore, Melissa only took a few weeks for parental leave and returned to work with an unhealed second-degree vaginal tear. She told me,

With my first baby I had a second-degree tear, and it didn't properly heal, and I wasn't totally sure what was happening. So, I came back to work before that was rectified. And I worked for two months before I ended up needing another surgery. So do we have proper healing time? Absolutely not. And it was painful. Yeah, it was really challenging.
Melissa could have chosen to take unpaid break time in order to extend her leave, but she and her husband are both teachers, had a lot of student debt, and their budget was tight. She told me, “My husband and I are classic millennials with student debt. Like L-O-L we're teachers and we took on a ton of student debt. What were we thinking? Becoming a teacher costs a lot of money.” Melissa points out a conundrum of many lactating teachers: They want to meet their bodily needs, but they also want to meet their financial needs, and therefore ignore their bodily needs or push through pain or illness. The lack of structural support, like paid parental leave, requires the difficult decision to return to work after birth, sometimes before fully healing.

Betsy, a suburban high school teacher, reflects on how once teachers are back at work, it is also a very intense job, and it can be difficult to attend to basic bodily needs. She reflects,

It's a pretty big thing that your body went through (giving birth), and you're expected to be back and working with 160 kids or something like that, like, all the time. Time doesn't mean as much when you're not in school, but when you're in school, every minute is accounted for. So that's really difficult because you can't address the physical needs that you have. And that obviously affects your mental capacity to be there too, and your mental health and wellbeing, because you're not allowed to attend to what your body needs at that time.

Betsy points out that because schools, like factories, work on bell schedules with predetermined break times, teachers have to wait until the appropriate time to take care of a bodily need. Unlike other professions where a person may be able to leave for a few
minutes and return, teachers are typically the only adult in a room full of children or teens and cannot leave them unsupervised if they need to run to the bathroom, for instance. Both during the workday and due to the lack of paid parental leave, teachers do not have the time they need to meet their bodily needs in the short and long term. Time is further stretched for lactating teachers, who use the break time they do have to express milk.

In this chapter, I focus on how the organization of time and space in schools are incompatible with the bodily needs of lactating teachers. I introduce cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) as a Marxist lens for analysis that allows me to illustrate how reproductive labor is not factored in as work within the workforce (a key understanding of social reproduction theory). While CHAT has numerous components, which I overview in what follows, I focus my analysis on how the rules of the workplace for teachers and the division of labor for teachers is incompatible with the reproductive labor of pumping at work. I introduce two teachers: June and Fera. I share a poem written from their interview transcripts. I analyze each transcription poem using cultural historical activity theory, with support from social reproduction theory. I argue that the need to express milk functions as a crucial moment because teachers cannot fulfill their role as professionals mapped out by current expectations. Therefore, teachers have an opportunity to critically question their role. By prioritizing their bodily needs, they directly challenge the system, which may lead to subverting the system and their role and creating change in the current regime. At the same time, issues teachers face could be alleviated by addressing the lack of structural support in systematic ways.
Theoretical Framework: Activity Theory

I have heard researchers talk about a magical moment when they have an epiphany that changed the direction of their work. The closest to such a moment I had with my dissertation was the first time I encountered cultural historical activity theory (CHAT). I was sitting with my peers in Dr. Grinage’s sociocultural theory class on a weekday evening, puzzling over a set of activity system diagrams from the first generation of activity theory, where Vygotsky mapped the subject, object, and tools into a triangular diagram, set in an a sociohistorical context; and Engestrom’s third generation of activity theory, which was more complex (I explain these in detail in the following section). I couldn’t get the diagrams to make sense. It was a three-hour night class at the end of a twelve-hour day on campus, so I got permission from Dr. Grinage for an extra-long break to pump at the midpoint of class.

When I came back to class after pumping, I mapped my subject position as a mom expressing milk at work into one activity system and my work as a PhD student and professor into another. And suddenly, a wave of relief washed over me. Nothing about my situation had changed, but here was a visual that showed, in dimension, why I was struggling to fulfill both my role as a mother and as a PhD student and professor. By mapping my identities as a PhD student and as a lactating parent into more than one activity system and comparing how I was moving within each activity system, I could finally see why I was struggling so much when I expressed milk at work: The design of the PhD student role was not for single moms pumping milk and caring for an infant. I experienced daily contradictions because in the activity system that maps out the role for
PhD students, the division of labor does not include structural supports that would reduce the level of individual labor and make it more feasible to hold both roles. I wondered if CHAT could be a useful way to visually map out the experiences of participants in my study as well. In what follows, I briefly contextualize CHAT within activity theory generally, and then overview the specific components of CHAT that I adapt for analysis.

**Activity Theory and Vygotsky**

Activity theory was developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978) to address the cartesian split between the subject and the object of research. Rather than a stimulus / response model, his triangular model included the subject, object, and a mediating artifact. Engeström (2001) reflects on the significance of Vygotsky’s model for activity theory:

> The insertion of cultural artifacts into human actions was revolutionary in that the basic unit of analysis now overcame the split between the Cartesian individual and the untouchable societal structure. The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produce artifacts. (p. 134)

Vygotsky’s development of activity theory was a breakthrough in the way that psychologists were viewing the individual. His model insisted on a sociocultural context for identity development.

Activity theory was born from Marxist roots. Leonardo and Manning (2017) contextualize Vygotsky’s work by pointing out that he was writing “during a somewhat utopian moment in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union” (p. 15). They go on to explain
that “Vygotsky’s social psychology sought to articulate a learning theory that would build upon the ideals of the Bolshevik revolution and reframe individual development as a social phenomenon” (p. 15). Vygotsky’s model views the subject within a cultural context, in order to highlight the agency of individuals who make themselves within structures, but also use agency to contradict the goals of structures. Vygotsky argued that “All human thought, speech, and action is mediated by social, historical, and cultural tools” (Vygotsky 1978, 1986). So, this first generation of activity theory highlighted that learning is context-specific and mediated by objects. Thus, the focus of research has to include individuals who exercise agency in order to produce and use artifacts (Engeström, 2001, p. 134). Scholars have continued to build on Vygotsky’s work. Leont’ev developed the second generation of activity theory. He wanted to make the unit of analysis collectively focused. He emphasized the role of objects, insisting that the activities must be viewed within larger social systems. This gave a greater accounting for the agency of individuals. Then, Engeström (2001) developed the third generation of activity theory, which considers the ways multiple activity systems interact with one another.

**An Overview of Cultural Historical Activity Theory**

I focus on the third generation of activity theory because it puts more than one activity system into conversation with one another, and I am able to create a visual representation for the systems that lactating teachers navigate. Engeström (2001) proposes that by mapping our experiences into activity systems, we may better understand where contradictions lie between our object or goal. In Figure 1 below
Engeström (2001, p. 136), you can see that CHAT highlights the agency of individuals who interact with objects, others, tools, rules or societal norms, while dividing labor. All of this occurs within a specific social context.

**Figure 1**

*Two Interacting Activity Systems*

![Diagram of Two Interacting Activity Systems](image)


Engeström (2001) outlines five key principles of CHAT. In what follows, I outline all five, because they are important to establishing how I use CHAT for my analysis. As I do so, I relate the principles back to my research topic.

The first principle is that the prime unit of analysis is the activity system, seen in relation to other activity systems, as pictured in Figures 2 and 3. The activity system is “collective, artifact-mediated and object-oriented” (p. 136). For my study, this means that the first activity system (see Figure 2) maps the experience of the participant in her role
as a lactating parent, and the second activity system (see Figure 3) maps the participant’s role as a teacher. Individual actions are framed in a sociocultural context.

**Figure 2**

*Lactating Parent Identity CHAT Diagram*

**Subject:** Lactating Parent

**Tools, means:** Pump & pump parts, 20-30 minutes twice a day, a private space w/ a locking door, extra food and water, somewhere to keep milk cold, time for bathroom breaks

**Object:** Maintain milk supply by pumping

**Rules:** Pump often enough and long enough to keep up milk supply, don’t be seen pumping, drink water, eat food and minimize stress levels to protect milk supply, and keep the milk cold and properly stored after pumping

**Community:** Other adults in the building, others who are supportive (like family or friends)

**Division of labor:** Find a private space to pump, pump during the time given to prepare lessons and during lunch, make up other teaching duties missed

**Outcome:** Produce milk to feed baby later
The second principle is that activity systems are multi-voiced. Multi-voicedness creates tension in activity systems. Multi-voicedness is especially created when the division of labor in an activity system results in different positions for participants because “The participants carry their own diverse histories, and the activity system itself carries multiple layers and strands of history engraved in its artifacts, rules and
conventions” (p. 136). For lactating teachers in schools, the division of labor they experience creates tension because they are doing two jobs (expressing milk and the job duties of teaching) at the same time, without institutional accommodations that would alter the amount of labor they have or the time they have to complete the labor.

The third principle is that activity systems must be historicized. Activities take place and are transformed in a sociohistorical context, over stretches of time. Activity systems can only be understood in the context of their history. For my topic, I situate the experience of lactating teachers in the history of the feminization of teaching, discourses about breastfeeding and the maternal, and the role of education within capitalism. Historically, female teachers had to be single and could not stay in the profession once they had children. Though female teachers now often return to work full time after giving birth and while lactating, the structural landscape for the role of teaching has not changed to accommodate them. Schools are set up to be efficient and time is highly regimented.

The fourth principal of CHAT is that contradictions within and between activity systems are the source of change, pushing social structures to alter their form. Engeström defines contradictions as “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (p. 137). Contradictions between activities are what can cause change:

When an activity system adopts a new element from the outside (for example, a new technology or a new object), it often leads to an aggravated secondary contradiction where some old element (for example, the rules or the division of
labor) collides with the new one. Such contradictions generate disturbances and conflicts, but also innovative attempts to change the activity. (p. 137)

The contradictions between the rules and division of labor in the activity system of the lactating parent are a primary focus in my analysis. When teachers need to express milk at work, the typical division of labor and rules for teaching contradicts with the division of labor and rules of lactation. This can result in changing either or both activity system(s) (the activity of expressing milk and/or the activity of teaching).

Fifth, there is a possibility for expansive transformation that is collective in nature. Engeström says expansive transformation occurs via a collective journey through Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development represents the moment in learning development when an activity takes place that moves an individual from their current capacity to a higher order skill learned from a more developed peer or teacher. In Engeström’s model, the zone of proximal development for a group is when “Some individual participants begin to question and deviate from its established norms… This escalates into collaborative envisioning and a deliberate collective change effort” (p. 137). He continues to explain that “An expansive transformation is accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity” (p. 137). In the conclusion of this chapter, I focus on how lactating teachers in the study offer up the potential for expansive transformation.

In my analysis in the following section, I focus on how participants experienced contradictions between the activity systems that dictated their role as a lactating worker
and as a teacher. The primary contradictions were between the rules and the division of labor (see Figures Two and Three). I chose to focus on the rules and division of labor because they are the two strongest contradictions between the activity systems. The rules for lactating workers include the following: Pump often enough and long enough to keep up milk supply, don’t be seen pumping, drink water, eat food and minimize stress levels to protect milk supply, and keep the milk cold and properly stored after pumping. The rules for teachers include the following: Maximize the use of time to prepare lessons and attend meetings, teach classes, and put students first.

The division of labor for lactating teachers is such that teachers are usually the ones to find a private space to pump. Lactating teachers pump during the time they are given to prepare their lessons and during their lunch time. They make up other teaching duties missed at a later time. The stress of this role is compounded by the fact that the division of labor for parents is tenuous: There is not paid parental leave to give birth and heal, so teachers use their sick days. Teachers often find their own substitutes to cover the time they take off to give birth, they pay high premiums for family health insurance, and usually come back to work without paid sick days left. The division of labor for their role as teachers requires them to prepare and teach lessons; grade student work and provide feedback; answer students questions between class periods; take part in staff development, committees, and meetings before and after school; collaborate with colleagues; clean their classrooms; email and call parents, and more.

The two roles of lactating worker and teacher are not compatible because the rules for the jobs they must perform are too difficult to meet, given that the division of labor
does not accommodate their second role as lactating workers. Just looking at the list of
tasks fulfilled in each role above, you can imagine the level of multi-tasking and labor
outside worktime lactating teachers do to fulfill both roles. At the same time, lactating
teachers can collectively make small and large changes, especially regarding the division
of labor, so that the roles of lactating worker and teacher can be more compatible. The
next section of this chapter illustrates the incompatibility of the two roles through the
transcription poems of two teachers.

“White Knuckling It” Introduction

When I asked June, the speaker of the poem “White Knuckling It,” what
seudonym she would like to be called, she said, “How about June? It means ‘protector
of women.’” June is a middle school teacher who expressed milk as a teacher at two
different sites. For her second child, she worked at an urban charter school with explicitly
feminist underpinnings. The school was one of the better sites in terms of
accommodations for lactating teachers. A few teachers at the school, who I also
interviewed, got a grant, and created a wellness room that functioned as a lactation space.
Lactating teachers could even ask one another for help covering classes. Though June
says that when other teachers helped by covering classes for her: “I still felt a degree of
guilt, like someone else is taking time out in their day to come and support me and like,
you know how schools are: Everyone is busy all the time. The work never ends. And so
that’s really stressful.”

Throughout her interview, June told many stories about how she sidestepped her
bodily needs over the course of her career to perform her role as a teacher. She pointed
out how the system is set up so that teachers can’t take care of their bodies, and that the particular needs of women who get pregnant or breastfeed during teaching are not accounted for in the job structure for teachers. For instance, she tells the following story:

I remember it was my first week at a new teaching job. My daughter had given me hand, foot and mouth disease. Even though it's highly contagious, I went to work (and it's extremely painful). I had sores in my mouth. It was, it was awful. I remember laughing to myself and being like, haha! Here I am! I'm so hard that I can do this. Right? Cuz I just was like, I can't take a day off because I'm saving for maternity leave, and if my kids get sick this year, I need to have enough sick days to take care of them…I'm making all those stupid calculations.

In the poem from her transcripts, June points out that a teacher’s identity and role are determined by a system that assumes teachers will “white knuckle it”—that is, prioritize capitalist reproduction over bodily and personal needs. In this way when teachers expressing milk choose to listen to their bodies, they resist capitalist norms for work. “White knuckling it” is a process performed by teachers to fulfill their role as a teacher efficiently. In the poem that follows, “white knuckling it” is a metaphor for how teachers embody white supremacist capitalism when they perform professional norms, including maximizing the use of time by not taking breaks, even when breaks are needed due to hunger, sickness, or to express milk. June gives examples throughout the poem about the ways that she has “white knuckled it” as a teacher, including not eating, holding her urine, and neglecting anything that would draw her away from maximizing her use of time.
White Knuckling It

As a teacher I avoid drinking water, right? Because if I drink too much water, I need a bathroom break and that's just not gonna happen. Like it’s not usually possible.

But when you are pregnant you can't do that.

You *have* to take a moment.

Then you are breastfeeding, and you're like, Oh my gosh, *I just want to take care of my body.*

But not taking care of yourself is ingrained in the culture of teaching.

I white knuckle it through stuff *all the time.*

That's just American culture right?

It's, like, we don't take care of ourselves we just keep pushing.

After the murder of George Floyd and the uprisings we talked in staff meetings about white supremacist structures in regards to professionalism and the way we structure teaching.

We don't stop and pause.
And you know what kinds of mistakes do we make when we do that?

Or when we *expect* that of people?

**Using CHAT to analyze “White Knuckling It”**

Engeström (2001) suggests that by mapping two activity systems next to each other, we can notice where conflicts lie between the systems. Looking at the roles mapped into the diagram we can see that for lactating teachers (see Figures 2 and 3), there are two key contradictions between the activity system of a teacher’s role and the activity system of lactating parents: Rules and division of labor. In her poem, June emphasizes the contradictions between the rules and the division of labor within each role (see Figures 4 and 5).
Figure 4

*June, Role as Teacher*

**Subject:** June as teacher

**Rules:**
"Don’t stop & pause": Maximize efficiency in achieving the outcome of student learning via hyper productivity, “Just keep pushing,” follow rules of professionalism

**Community:**
American culture, the culture of teaching, White supremacist social & school structures

**Tools, means:** Avoid drinking water, minimize bathroom breaks, avoid eating, ignore bodily sickness & injuries post birth

**Object:** To guide all students in their learning

**Outcome:** Students achieve learning outcomes / mistakes are made due to following the rules of White Supremacist institutions

**Division of labor:** Teacher maximizes use of time to complete job duties. Ignoring bodily needs is necessary to complete duties in the given time
Figure 5

*June, Role as Lactating Parent*

![Diagram of June's role as lactating parent]

**Subject:** June as lactating parent

**Rules:**
Take care of your body, eat enough food & drink enough water to maintain milk supply

**Tools, means:** Pump & pump parts, 20-30 minutes twice a day, a private space w/ a locking door, extra food and water, somewhere to keep milk cold, time for bathroom breaks

**Object:** Maintain milk supply by pumping

**Outcome:** Produce milk to feed baby later

**Community:**
American culture, the culture of teaching, White supremacist social & school structures

**Division of labor:** June finds the space to use, uses her prep time to pump

**Rules**

The main rule June discusses in her role as a teacher is that teachers “don’t stop and pause.” To maximize their efficiency in achieving the outcome of student learning, teachers do not take a break or take a moment for themselves. The participant narrator points out (see stanza one) that as a teacher she avoids drinking too much water because
if she drinks too much she needs a bathroom break “and that’s just not gonna happen.”

On the other hand, a key rule of lactation is “You need to eat and drink enough and pump often enough to produce enough milk,” as June says in her interview. The rules of teaching contradict with the rules of pregnancy and lactation, because when pregnant, June says she couldn’t push past her bodily needs. She says in stanza three, “You have to take a moment.” June points out her resistance to the rules of the profession of teaching was spurred by her embodied need to breastfeed, when she says in an exuberant, determined tone that when breastfeeding she felt, “Oh my gosh, I just want to take care of my body.” In this way care work, like expressing milk, can function as an opportunity to prioritize bodily needs, directly challenging the rules that uphold the capitalist organization of schools. In fact, June says this choice was in direct opposition to the culture of teaching. She says, “Not taking care of yourself is ingrained into the culture of teaching.” June shows how she simply cannot fulfill her professional duties as a teacher while she is expressing milk at work, because the rules are incompatible with one another. Given the present system, June chooses to fulfill her role as a lactating parent, thus rebelling against the structure of her role as a teacher.

In stanza seven, June moves from discussing how as a teacher she doesn’t stop to take a break, to stating that a general rule of U.S. culture is “We don’t take time to take care of ourselves, we just keep pushing.” She then moves to think about how this general rule—we don’t stop, we keep pushing, we don’t take a break—is part of the white supremacist social order in the U.S., that also undergirds how schools function. She states that after the murder of George Floyd, in staff meetings they started talking about “white
supremacist structures in regard to professionalism and the way we structure teaching.”

She realizes the rules of her role— and the role itself— are designed to uphold white racial capitalism, and not to nurture her humanity or the humanity of students. In stanza 12, June asks and answers, “What happens when we [follow the rules and] don’t stop and pause?” June makes a critical point that the speed and lack of time to pause embedded in the role of teaching and in U.S. capitalist culture keep us from questioning the systems we are living out by following the rules. Thus, we conform to the literally deadly ideology of white patriarchal capitalism. We treat others and ourselves the way white patriarchal capitalism has—exploiting and dehumanizing bodies for the sake of capitalist production.

**Division of Labor**

Maximum efficiency is required for June to achieve the expected outcome of teaching: Students achieve learning objectives. Yet her labor as a lactating parent isn’t conducive to maximum efficiency in her teaching duties. Ignoring her bodily needs is necessary for June to complete the amount of work required by her role as a teacher. But in her activity system as a lactating parent, June also needs to find time to pump throughout her day, needs to clean her breast pump parts and store her milk, and needs to have relative mental calm in order to produce milk. June questions the division of labor and the rules that undergird teaching. She is aware of the system she is working within and that her struggle to balance lactation is just one facet of the larger activity system of the profession of teaching, which is embedded in white supremacy.
What is interesting is that June has one of the best situations of the teachers I talked with in terms of division of labor: There is a lactation room in her building, and she can ask other teachers to help cover her classes if she needs more time to pump. Her school is educator-led, meaning her administration is a group of teachers. The administration is empathetic to her needs as a parent and many of them also expressed milk at work. June could even bring her infant to work with her during professional development week and was able to breastfeed during meetings. Yet June points out that even though the charter school she works at is supportive, they still have to contend with the way schooling is mapped out generally in the United States. There still isn’t paid parental leave, health insurance is still expensive, there are still only minor accommodations for lactating parents once they return to work, and teaching is still a job that requires maximum efficiency from teachers. For instance, though someone can cover June’s class while she pumps, she has to make a plan for them to follow in her absence.

June suggests some ways to alter the division of labor. When I ask what she would change about the accommodations for lactating teachers, June says,

[There should be] really clear guidelines that employers have to abide by, that are agreed upon, so that parents don't feel like they have to advocate for themselves. It's just like, these are the rules. No one should have to advocate for themselves—it's good if they do. But it shouldn't be that someone gets something because they asked for it and someone else doesn't—It should be really clear.

June also talks a lot about the division of labor in terms of healthcare for new parents. She reflects on the financial burden for teachers, and how expensive meeting the
deductible to give is anytime a teacher gives birth, as well as the monthly health
insurance. Her deductible was $3,600 dollars, and this was hard for her family to afford
each time she gave birth. This caused her to make other decisions that were potentially
dangerous for her body and her pregnancy. She recalls:

I had gestational diabetes with my second pregnancy. And I reused the pen
prickers even though you're not supposed to, because they were so expensive. It
was $75 a month. We were just so short on money, and we just didn't know how
things were gonna look, so I would reuse them. It is so messed up; I could have
given myself some kind of infection while I was pregnant.

June also based her decision to get the pelvic floor therapy she needed after her second
child on when her baby was born: Since she gave birth and paid her deductible anyhow,
she was able to do pelvic floor therapy and fully heal. June’s account is important
because she shows that even with building reforms that alter the division of labor (her
building has a lactation space and she can ask others for class coverage), more sweeping
changes to systems that support lactating teachers are needed.

“A Lot of Work” Introduction

Fera, the speaker in the poem “A Lot of Work,” teaches in an urban school as a
middle school SPED teacher and has pumped for three babies in 2015, 2017, and 2019.
She starts out her interview explaining, “I have kind of a unique breastfeeding journey. I
have given birth to three babies, two of which are my own and a third of which was
through surrogacy.” She began her journey expressing milk while she was a
paraprofessional. She says that when she returned to work in the Fall of 2015 and was
pumping as a paraprofessional, “It was one of the most challenging things I've ever done. I was engorged, I had mastitis, the whole nine yards.” Mastitis is a painful breast infection that occurs when a lactating person's breasts become engorged from not releasing enough milk. Fera recounted that mastitis was an ongoing problem for her when she moved to a role as a teacher, because her lesson preparation period and her lunch break were scheduled close to each other. She says, “I would go home engorged because it was like, morning prep, lunchtime, and then I wouldn't have any more time.” Fera pumped in a locker room. She says it was “very cold, very impersonal. It was not an ideal situation. It was a changing room technically, an adult locker room outside of the gym. It was a cement bench with cement walls. And there I was pumping.”

When I asked Fera if she was told where she could pump or what her rights were as a lactating parent, she says,

I had to advocate for time and space to pump. Right away, I went to admin saying, I plan on pumping, I know that it is my right as a breastfeeding mother to do so. And so then they sort of had to come up with a place for me. They didn't naturally have a pumping room (which most schools don't). You know that, I know that. Then it so happened to be that somebody else had given birth, and they also needed a space during that same period of time, so I was not the only one. It was very much, you know, we had to advocate for ourselves as opposed to, yeah, having a plan coming back.

Fera talks about how it felt taboo to tell colleagues she wasn’t available because she was pumping. She says, “You know, it feels so taboo [to tell people why you aren’t available
during prep times]. You're pulling your boobs out to express milk, and it just feels like it's not something that is talked about. It's not that it's frowned upon. It's just, it's private, it's something you keep to yourself.”

Fera shares that she had to quit pumping earlier than she expected for her child in 2019. Teachers in her district went on strike, and then the pandemic started. She said the compounding bodily stressors made it more difficult to continue pumping:

What happened was, the stress of school, the stress of being on strike, the stress of entering a pandemic—my milk was gone at that point. I had some milk that I was able to produce at night. But that's when we really had to start supplementing with formula. As the pandemic hit, I really, really, really wanted to continue, because if I would have gotten COVID, I would have passed antibodies. But it just was physically impossible at that point. So my milk dried up. And so my daughter ended up with formula, which was okay, that's, that's not, that was fine for her. It was perfectly acceptable.

Fera’s account shows how besides time to pump (which she doesn’t have enough of), mental and physical stress also factor into the work of pumping. In the poem that follows, Fera focuses on the dual role of pumping and teaching. She critically reflects on what it means to do two kinds of work at the same time. Like June, she points out how highly monitored time is in schools and in the role of teachers and paraprofessionals, and how this makes it difficult to navigate both roles. She addresses the social conception that pumping “isn’t work.”
A Lot of Work

It would be nice not to call it your pumping break. It's not a break. It's not easy.

It's not something we can just make happen, you know. It's a lot of work.

When I was a paraprofessional, I got a 30-minute and a 15-minute break.

I spent both pumping. Thankfully I worked for a teacher who was understanding and allowed bathroom breaks or allowed an extra 10 minutes to eat.

Now I have a paraprofessional in my room who is pregnant but won't return after she has the baby.

If she was returning, I wouldn't want her to feel like I can only pump. I can't take a break. I can't sit down for five minutes.

It's just, we live in a society where we have to be working, we have to be moving at all times.

Otherwise, it's wasted time. But producing milk isn't wasted time.

It's, you know, I'm feeding my child. And although he can't be with me right now,

I'll be able to use this milk to feed him later today.
Analyzing “A Lot of Work” using CHAT

A primary question that Fera raises in her poem is: What counts as work? She points out how, without any extra time to pump, her day is a frenzy of activity. In what follows I analyze how the rules and division of labor show up in Fera’s poem.

Figure 6

Fera, Role as Lactating Employee in School Setting

**Tools, means:** Complete job duties in school classroom

**Object:** To guide all students in their learning

**Subject:** Fera as teacher

**Rules:**
“Have to be working, have to be moving at all times – otherwise, it’s wasted time.”
Maximize efficiency. Only take breaks during pre-assigned break times

**Community:**
American culture, the culture of teaching, other adults in the building

**Division of labor:** Teacher maximizes use of time to complete job duties. Ignoring bodily needs is necessary to complete duties in the given time

**Outcome:** Students achieve learning outcomes
Figure 7

Fera, Role as Lactating Parent in School Setting

Rules

Fera points out that a key rule in her role as a lactating parent is that when she needs to pump, she does it during her pre-assigned break time. Fera says this is a problem because when you are pumping, “It’s not a break. It’s not easy.” She goes on to detail how she used both of her work breaks as a paraprofessional to express milk, which didn’t
leave her any time to eat lunch or go to the bathroom. When she was a paraprofessional, the teacher she worked with “allowed bathroom breaks or allowed an extra 10 minutes to each.” The teacher she worked with “broke the rules” and gave her an extra break. In stanza seven, Fera says that now that she is a teacher, she would also break the rules and make sure the paraprofessional that works with her had extra time to pump if she wanted it.

Fera pans out and theorizes that the reason for a lack of break time is an obsession with being busy in the United States. She said, “We live in a society where we have to be working—we have to be moving at all times. Otherwise, it’s wasted time.” Like June, Fera points out that an obsession with hyper productivity and constant work is embedded in the ethos of schooling and in U.S. culture. She alludes to an understanding of expressing milk as “not work”—and that maybe this is the reason there is not additional paid break time to express milk. If it was viewed as work to produce milk, then workers wouldn’t be required to multi-task. She makes a case that it is work; it’s just work that has been made invisible.

**Division of Labor**

A core issue in the division of labor for lactating teachers is the misconception that pumping is “not work.” But Fera reminds the reader, “It’s not something that we can just make happen, you know. It’s a lot of work.” In a social reproduction theory frame, the labor required to express milk is considered “not work” because reproductive work takes place outside capitalist work production. Yet Fera points out that lactation has a use value. She says, “I’m feeding my child. And although he can’t be with me right now, I
will be able to use this milk to feed him later today.” In the recent Spring 2022 formula shortage, when families have not been able to get the food they need for their infants, the tangible product that lactating parents make when they pump milk has become part of social discourse. Yet because human milk is not typically “on the market” as an object with an exchange value, the value of breast/chestmilk, and the time and effort it takes to produce it, is made to seem value-neutral. Fera is asking a question Bhattiachara (2017) says is core to social reproduction theory: “What kinds of processes enable the worker to arrive at the doors of their place of work every day so that she can produce the wealth of society?” (p. 1). Fera is making milk to feed her baby, who is a future worker within capitalism. Yet the work she does is rendered value-neutral because in capitalism, only what she produces through her labor as a teacher is considered work.

**Conclusion**

As I highlighted early in this chapter, to transform an activity system, Engeström claims that individual participants must “begin to question and deviate from its established norms” and “This escalates into collaborative envisioning and a deliberate collective change effort” (p. 137). He continues to explain that “An expansive transformation is accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity” (p. 137). June and Fera are critical of the established norms, which require them to navigate two incompatible activity systems. The need to express milk functions as a crucial moment for expansive transformation because lactating teachers cannot fulfill their role as professionals as mapped out by white supremacist capitalism.
This was true for the teachers who created the wellness space that June used. June says that she was able to use a wellness room because several teachers before her didn’t have a space when they expressed milk at work and kept getting walked in on when they pumped in their classrooms. Thus, they got funding to create the wellness room. It became a project that students were involved in as well. June recounts:

The lactation room was a project led by students in a self-care class. Students learned all about self-care and different components of it. And one of the things was community care. Students were involved in choosing the color palette and decorating the space… I don't know how much they're involved or aware but the room was created as a lactation room, a prayer room, and basically a chill out space for staff.

The same group of teachers registered the space so that the school was designated a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace by the Minnesota Department of Health. For her part, June says that when she was pregnant, she encouraged the leadership to be explicit about their policy for parental leave. She says, “I remember noticing they didn't have they didn't have FMLA in their employee handbook. They were like, oh, we're too small. I was like, no, you have to.” In addition, she says that knowing they would work with her if she self-advocated for time and space to express milk wasn’t enough; she wanted a blanket policy that anyone could read. She recalled, “[Administration] was like, we’ll work with you. And I was like, no, you need to put this in the policy because you look, you look silly, not being aware of it, you know?”
June stood out to me as someone who was especially interested in addressing the systemic issues, and not just in changing her personal circumstance. She envisioned a collective, cohesive change in policies and practices for lactation and for new parents in her building. In our conversation, I said to June, “It sounds like you've felt fairly comfortable with self-advocacy. I'm curious: Where do you think that came from?” June replied,

One reason I was excited to talk with you is I'm very much an advocate for this. I think it's important. And I think what's problematic is, breastfeeding in general can be divisive among women and mothers. And, you know, as I was talking about before, when I had to take time off, I felt like I was burdening the system. As a teacher, you don't want to burden anybody, because you know what everyone's carrying. So I think that makes it hard. But it's also like, it is such an important thing to me, especially having my kid in daycare and wanting to give them protection from all the diseases that they're being exposed to. I feel like when I'm asking for it, I'm asking for it for others as well.

June understood that a core issue was that even when lactating teachers were willing to self-advocate and even when they did experience a measure of accommodation, they still felt they were “burdening the system.” Rather than a systemic change, individuals receive personal accommodations. This frames lactation as a personal problem or issue to solve, rather than a common occurrence among workers that requires a remaking of the rules and division of labor in the role of teaching. June was interested in moves that would
change the system, rather than placing the onus on the lactating parent to navigate the systems in place.
Chapter Five

“It’s Your Problem and It’s a Girl Problem”:

Misfits in the Institutional Design

In her article “Misfits: A feminist materialist disability concept,” Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011) sets forth the concept of misfit to position lived identity as always embodied, and disability as situated in place and time, as related to environments and structures that do not fit the diverse range of human embodiment. Garland-Thomson positions her concept of misfits in critical disability theory, yet asks us to consider how its critical application extends beyond disability as a cultural category and social identity toward a universalizing of misfitting as a contingent and fundamental fact of human embodiment. In this way, the concept of misfitting can enter the critical conversation on embodiment that involves the issue of contingency and instability. (p. 598)

She points out that embodiment is unstable and changes over the span of one's life and across environments.

Garland-Thomson uses the concept of misfit as a way to think about disability, racism, sexism, and nationalism. Misfitting includes a wide variety of ways that one can not fit the design of an institution. Her definition of misfits asks us to consider for whom we create spaces and to what effect. A misfit occurs “when world fails flesh in the environment one encounters—whether it is a flight of stairs, a boardroom full of misogynists, an illness or injury, a whites-only country club, subzero temperatures, or a natural disaster” (p. 600). Sarah Ahmed (2017) picks up from this thread to add that for
misfits, “When you try to fit a norm that is not shaped to fit your body, you create an incongruity. You become an incongruity” (p. 125).

In contrast to a misfit, Garland-Thomson defines a fit as being “ensconced in an environment that sustains the form, function, and needs of one’s body” (p. 600). This framework is useful in thinking about how lactating teachers may have bodies that typically fit the institution of schooling. For instance, the teachers in my study were all white, cisgender middle-class women and in this way, the “garment of schooling” was a fit, given the history of teaching in the U.S. as a predominantly white, female profession. Yet while expressing milk, they had an embodied experience of not fitting the patriarchal, cisgender male-oriented structure of schooling. Many of the lactating teachers in the study were experiencing being a misfit in the environment of schools as a novel, temporally bound experience.

Not fitting the built environment of schooling while expressing milk offers an opportunity to be jolted from the experience of fitting and provides an embodied incentive for recognizing the systems at play. Garland-Thomson writes that when people fit, “Like the dominant subject positions such as male, white, or heterosexual, fitting is a comfortable and unremarkable majority experience of material anonymity, an unmarked subject position that most of us occupy at some points in life and that often goes unnoticed” (p. 597). She goes on to say that “When we experience misfitting and recognize that disjuncture for its political potential, we expose the relational component and the fragility of fitting. Any of us can fit here today and misfit there tomorrow” (p. 597).
The poems included in this chapter focus on the physicality of a non-fit, and how the feeling of not fitting is also emotionally and mentally draining. For instance, in “Gross,” Christine remarks, “I just couldn’t [pump] anymore; the conditions were too difficult.” In “Tip of the Iceberg,” Lilly says, “I was crying every night because I was so anxious,” and for her, too, the solution was to stop pumping to better fit the institutional norms. Ahmed (2017) remarks that “An institution is like an old garment. It acquires the shape of those who tend to wear it; it becomes easier to wear if you have that shape. Privilege could be rethought in these terms: Easier to wear. Privilege is an energy-saving device. Less energy is required to be or to do” (p. 125-126). By quitting expressing milk, the participants included in this chapter were able to return to being a “fit” to school norms. Yet in other ways, as biologically female, there were processes like getting periods or giving birth that participants named as continual non-fits for the role of teaching. In “It’s a Girl Problem,” Robyn, the participant narrator of the poem, says that when she leaked breastmilk while teaching, she was reminded of leaking blood during her period when she was a student. She remarks, “And this is one of those things where as a society we make girls feel like it's a girl problem. It's a girl problem and it's your problem. And you should be embarrassed.”

In this chapter, I utilize Garland-Thomson’s (2011) concept of misfits and Sarah Ahmed’s (2017) subsequent application of this concept to show how the onus is put on teachers to navigate incompatibilities between their bodily needs and the school day regime. I do this by analyzing three transcription poems, written from the interview transcripts of Christine, Rachel and Lilly. I chose to create poems from the accounts of
these three participants because each illustrated the theme of systematic problems being offloaded to individuals with a specific story grounded in place, space, and relationships with others. In their interviews and in the subsequent poems I created from their interview transcripts, the three participants also situated their “problem” within the institutional structure of schooling: They had the sense that a structural problem was being made to seem like their personal problem.

In what follows, I introduce the concept of “misfits” as a theoretical frame for analyzing the poems. Then, I share the context and background for each participant before sharing their poem. The first poem, “Gross,” illustrates how an inadequate space to pump results in Christine’s choice to stop pumping, because the school does not have a space that is clean, private, and accessible. The analysis focuses on how women come to a feminist understanding of the world through bodily experiences of not fitting the patriarchal design of social structures. Christine experiences sexism ingrained in the schools’ design, and also in the lack of an avenue to ask for better or changed conditions. The second poem, “Your Problem,” tells a story from Rachel, whose breasts leak while she is at work. Her poem illustrates how the incongruences between her body’s timetable and the school day timetable are framed as her personal problem, rather than as a problem with how different needs are not accommodated within the school day schedule. I also read this poem through a social reproduction theory lens to discuss how reproductive work is obscured in capitalism. The final poem, “Tip of the Iceberg,” is more of a prose poem than any others shared in the dissertation. In it, the participant situates time and space to lactate as “just the tip of the iceberg” when it comes to creating a structure that
honors the bodily needs of a lactating teacher. I conclude by discussing how misfitting can function as a catalyst for challenging the norms of an institution.

**Misfitting and Embodiment**

Garland-Thomson (2011) focuses her definition of a misfit in embodied terms. Rather than viewing identity as primarily discursively formed, the concept of a misfit turns to the material “by centering its analytical focus on the co-constituting relationship between flesh and environment. The materiality that matters in this perspective involves the encounter between bodies with the space and structures of our everyday world” (p. 602). Garland-Thomson argues that “The utility of the concept of misfit is that it definitively lodges injustice and discrimination in the materiality of the world rather than predominantly in social attitudes” (p. 602). She goes on to clarify that a person may be accepted in the workplace, while the conditions of the workplace still do not provide the same material access and benefits. Thus, “Inequity occurs not purely from prejudicial attitudes but is an artifact of material configurations misfitting with bodies” (p. 602). This helps to put the focus on the material conditions and set up of institutions. I find this framework useful in thinking through the space and time non-fit of the school day timetable for teachers, and also in terms of the set-up of the profession. The material configuration of employment, with no paid parental leave, with a requirement for many participants that they find their own substitutes when they are gone for parental leave, and with expensive family health insurance with high deductibles also contributes to a non-fit for lactating teachers who birth their child.
Garland-Thomson says most people experience moments of not fitting in at least one aspect of their life, at some point, because of “the premise of universal vulnerability… An embodied engagement with worlds is in fact life itself” (p. 600). She goes on to say that “our experience of living eventually contradicts our collective fantasy that the body is stable, predictable, or controllable, creating misfits for all of us” (p. 603). She argues that by thinking about disability in the broadest sense, and by realizing that misfitting is actually a “significant universal human experience that occurs in every society, every family and most every life, we will change how we respond to and think about disability” (p. 603). We can see that we must attend to the material processes of fitting and misfitting and respond by “changing the environment to accommodate the widest possible range of human form and function” (p. 603).

In Living a Feminist Life, Sarah Ahmed (2017) theorizes that when a person’s body does not inhabit a norm, the formal rules or arrangements of an organization and everyday situations frame them as a “misfit.” Ahmed argues that noticing patterns and regularities in how gender functions can result in a feminist orientation and to a redescription of the world within a feminist frame. Feminist pattern identification reveals how “institutions create a residence for some bodies more than others” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 125). I noticed that teachers in the study recognized a pattern: Many lactating teachers faced challenges, which led them to name how school times and spaces did not fit their bodily needs, and to look for ways to get their needs met. Cora, a community expert, affirmed that teachers did work to figure out how to “fit” in their professional role as teachers while they were pumping. Cora worked at the state level with coordinating the
Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) grant and with overseeing statewide designations of Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces. She said, “Schedules are one of the things we hear a lot about [from teachers]. If they can't leave the classroom to go to the bathroom, being able to pump is also not conducive [to their schedules].” Tracy, another community expert, affirmed that teachers struggle to fit in school day routines once they are expressing milk at work. Tracy runs a community breastfeeding cafe in a rural county, where she talks to many breast/chestfeeding parents. She became motivated to focus her work in supporting lactating teachers, because over and again she heard stories from lactating teachers about the significant barriers they faced to finding time and space to pump. She recounted:

We were finding a lot of educators were very anxious about returning to work for multiple reasons. A lot of the barriers seem to be they have no space to pump and time to do it. Schools seem to be already maxing out the capacity of their school buildings. There are teachers on carts that are going room to room each class period who don't even have their own classroom, so that was a big issue. In terms of time to do it, the teachers didn't really know how to space their pumping break times throughout the day. In elementary school, unless the kids were going to a specialist of some sort, teachers had a classroom of kids depending on them. They were trying to figure out, do they need to get a sub so they can pump? That kind of piece. So finding the time to pump and finding a location seemed to be the two biggest barriers.

The accounts of these two community experts illustrate a pattern: When participants are
pumping, their bodies fail to fit the institutional norms and their bodies can no longer “fit” their job duties.

Poems and Analysis

“Gross” Introduction

The poem “Gross” focuses on having an inadequate space to pump. Christine, the participant narrator in the poem “Gross,” was one of four teachers I interviewed at a newly renovated urban public high school in an affluent area of the city. The four teachers shared a concern about finding a clean and private space to pump. Lactation spaces offered by administration at different points over the course of the last seven years were inadequate. They included an old bathroom where the toilet was taped over, an office with floor to ceiling windows facing student hallways, a storage closet, and a lounge where many adults had a master key, so that pumping teachers were routinely walked in on.

When Christine began pumping for her first child in 2015, she chose a bathroom space that was attached to the women's coach's office. She describes the space this way:

It had a bathroom and a shower. I actually pumped in the shower space. And I said I'll use this space, but it cannot be used as a bathroom. So I actually taped the toilet up so it couldn't be used. I was like, well, at least I have a sink. I have an outlet. And I pushed in a soft chair. I had a table in there, in the shower space. I used that space for a year and it was fine. It was close to my room, and I could lock it from the inside.
Two of the four teachers I interviewed from the site chose to pump in their classrooms, though as Barb noted, “My classroom doesn’t really have a private space. Really not at all. There’s windows everywhere. There’s one corner that is kind of hidden, so I had to make that my corner.” She chose this space because “Administration has offered us space in the building before, but it’s weird, gross restrooms that have mouse poop in the corner and stuff.”

Concerns about the cleanliness of spaces was an issue that came up across the four interviews. In a separate interview, Christine’s colleague Ava said that at first, she pumped in a locker room but “It felt uncomfortable because the room never gets cleaned and our school has a major mouse issue. You could see mouse poop all around the corners and it just stayed that way.” Another teacher at the site, Charlotte, said she pumped in a storage closet. She didn’t like it though because “This storage closet was full of mouse poop— and a male teacher would bust in there, despite the locked door and the sign I put up.”

Of particular frustration to the teachers was that though many teachers who needed to pump worked at the school, and it had a reputation for being a well-funded city school that was supportive of teachers, a pumping space was not considered in the renovation plan for the school. Christine did suggest a pumping room but was told it was too late in the renovation project. Christine told me how, during the school’s renovation, she asked the principal,

“Have you thought about – Is there a dedicated space being added to accommodate lactating women?” Because I knew there were a lot of us coming
up that were gonna have babies. And I said, “Is there a dedicated space being made in the new addition?” And he said, “No, and it's too late to add one in.” And I was like, “Well, I wish, you know, somebody would have brought that up earlier, like, we were making all of these new spaces, let's make some dedicated closet, even size space that's just for this.” And it just didn't happen.

Barb, a mostly pragmatic mother of two who is devoted to teaching, notes, “In a profession that's dominated by women, you would think that they would make [having a space for pumping] a priority. And it kind of makes me mad that we did a whole big renovation and didn't think to do anything like that.”

Though there were a number of teachers pumping in the building, even after the building renovation, this particular site was doing less than the bare minimum required by state law, as outlined in Section B of MN Statute 181.939:

The employer must make reasonable efforts to provide a room or other location, in close proximity to the work area, other than a bathroom or a toilet stall, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public and that includes access to an electrical outlet, where the employee can express her milk in privacy. (Minnesota Legislature, n.d.)

The closest to meeting the requirements of the law were those pumping in their classrooms, though because classrooms do not lock from the inside and many people have “master keys,” teachers reported regular fear of (and actual) intrusion, even if they put signs on their door or over their door handles to remind others they were pumping.
After the building renovation was complete in 2018, Christine had a second child. To pump, she chose the theater green room across the hall from her classroom. She explained that

There was a sink back there because there were bathrooms and there was a sink outside of the bathrooms. And they had dressing rooms back there. So I said, “Can you give me a key to that room back there and I can go back there and pump? It's across the hall from me, it’s super convenient” …. I would go back into the dressing room and pump back there.”

She says she wore a cover over herself just in case, because there wasn’t a way to lock the space from the inside. She says, “I was always worried.” A mouse started showing up in the space, and then it just felt like too much for Christine. The poem below, “Gross,” is written from Christine’s interview transcript. The poem illustrates how an inadequate space to pump results in a teacher choosing to stop pumping, because the school does not have a space that is clean, private, and accessible.

**Gross**

A mouse started showing up while I was pumping.

It just sat there, six feet away from me, playing with a plastic bag.

I was hooked up to my pump

So I couldn’t hop up and get away.

“Shoo! Shoo!” I yelled
but it wouldn't go away.

That was the final straw.
I was like “I’m not gonna
pump in this room anymore
and this is disgusting!”

So I stopped pumping.
My milk dried up.

I felt bad,
but I just couldn't do it.

I could not sit
in that space.

It’s just gross.

And those mice!
The mice are just
too confident.

“Gross” Analysis

Garland-Thomson (2011) draws on the definition from the Oxford English Dictionary to describe the action of fitting as “‘proper’ or ‘suitable’ relationship with an environment so as to be ‘well adapted,’ ‘in harmony with’” (p. 593). Christine recounts one memory of a stark moment where she is not well adapted to the school environment; from her perspective, the mouse seems more suited to the room where she is pumping milk than she is. Christine sent me a video of the mouse she is talking about in her poem; the mouse is frolicking with a plastic bag as her breast pump sucks in and out, a soundtrack in the background of the video. Christine’s story sets up a juxtaposition between herself as someone who can’t move, since she needs to be connected to her breast pump, and the mouse who roams freely. Part of Christine’s exasperation is that the
mouse, who doesn’t belong in a school, is freer and “belongs better” in the space than she does. Besides being literally unable to move away from the mouse while she is hooked up to her pump, she is stuck in sexist conditions which require her to put her body in spaces that do not make her feel seen or comfortable in her work environment.

In the poem, Christine repeats that “I just couldn’t do it… I just couldn’t sit in that space.” In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sarah Ahmed (2017) explores how women come to a feminist understanding of the world due to their bodily experiences of not fitting in patriarchal configurations. She writes that “feminism begins with a sensation: with a sense of things… Feminism is sensible because of the world we are in; feminism is a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world, which we might register at first through our own experiences” (p. 22). Christine registers that the situation is not right. Her body had a visceral, sensory reaction to her disgust about pumping with the mouse. Yet because the system itself was not changing, the agency she had was to quit pumping. In this sense Christine makes the move to accommodate the conditions of the institution by quitting pumping before she wanted to. She also takes on the emotional burden of quitting pumping, which is that she “felt bad,” because her milk dried up when she stopped. She was able to return to her “standard” body, which did not require accommodation. The cost was her internal feelings of guilt. Ahmed says that “Becoming a girl is here about how you experience your body in relation to space. Gendering operates in how bodies take up space… The more accommodating we are, the less space we have to take up. Gender: a loop, tightening” (p. 25). The way systems are currently set up, individual teachers bear the physical burden of doing the simultaneous roles of
provider of milk and worker, and take that responsibility when they can’t, both physically by discontinuing breastfeeding and/or pumping early, and by experiencing the guilt or shame that accompany what is interpreted as a personal failing. Yet one interesting move Christine makes in the poem is that though she acknowledges she feels bad when her milk dries up, she continually refers to her experience in the context of the space. In this way, she moves the emotional burden away from herself and puts it into the context of the situation—the space for pumping was untenable and therefore she stopped pumping.

Christine is dismayed that though she brought the dismal pumping conditions to the attention of administration, as did her colleagues, nothing changed. Ahmed (2017) points out that institutional sexism is when institutions “enable and reward sexist behavior… You are judged as taking something the wrong way when you object to something” (p. 34). There was an assumption that the teachers would figure out the time and space to pump on their own. I interpret the mouse video and her sharing of this story to other colleagues in her district and school as one way that Christine is protesting the inadequacy of the current conditions, despite dismissals by her building administration. Even still, she was frustrated by the lack of institutional support. The state law Christine used to self-advocate also dismisses sexist conditions because rather than creating a clear necessity for accommodations for lactating workers, “The employer would be held harmless if reasonable effort has been made” to provide either time or space to employees. What counts as “reasonable effort” is left ambiguous. In addition, being in a dirty space does not violate the state or federal law concerning lactating workers. There is
no cleanliness requirement. Lactating employees bear the burden of making their bodies fit in working conditions that are not set up for them.

“Your Problem” Introduction

Rachel is a high school teacher in an urban district. Overall, Rachel, the participant narrator in “Your Problem,” is upbeat in her interview. She said her mindset when pumping was “not thinking of it as a chore.” Her advice to pumping teachers is to Think of [pumping] as time for yourself to relax for a minute and do something for you and your baby. Think of it as a relaxing moment in your day. Find a good space where you feel relaxed and comfortable. Advocate for yourself to find the right place. Tell your team that you need support so you don’t have to feel bad.

She tells me how she had a traumatic birthing experience, and she pumped because she loved nursing. When she nursed, she felt connected to her infant and it felt relaxing.

Rachel told me it took a little while for her body to adjust to her pumping schedule at school, and sometimes her breasts leaked. The following poem, “Your Problem,” is a story she told about the time when her body was transitioning to the school schedule. It reminds me of how Ahmed (2017) unpacks that once we name a problem, we register it more fully, and it can even get mapped onto us: “To give a problem a name can be experienced as magnifying the problem” (p. 34).

I chose to organize the poem onto two sides of the page in order to represent the way that Rachel, the participant narrator, told the story, which was to have a main body story (the left column of the poem) and then many contextual remarks and details (the right side of the poem) where Rachel uses additional details to fill in the sketch of the
story. The poem can be read two ways: You can read straight down the left-side for the
story. Or you can read the full poem to understand how Rachel uses asides to describe her
embodied experience and to create a fuller picture of all that is going on in the
background of the story. I think in this way, Rachel shows how something seemingly
straightforward like pumping a few times a day has more nuance and complexity than at
first glance.

Your Problem

I do have this one memory
from fairly soon after I returned to work.

Actually it probably wasn’t. Because early on, you're leaking and you remember
you're leaking and you're putting in pads but then
your body figures it out and doesn't do that
anymore.

You only have a letdown when your baby latches
or you're pumping. Your body's got it figured out.

I wasn't wearing pads that day I must have thought I was beyond that phase.

And I must have been busy running around not being able to sit down and stop.

I was talking to my colleague across the hall a man who does not have children,
and was a really good friend of mine, a nice guy,
but just never really was able to like, empathize
with what it was to be a new mom
at work, pumping, bringing your kid to daycare.

We were very good friends. Right. But his whole thing was work.
He was always like,
Oh, you’re late for the meeting.
And I was trying to balance work and a baby.
Any way one day we were talking
I was across the room from him thank God,
he would have freaked.

And I started to leak.

He was so uncomfortable and was like
“There’s a thing—happening!”

Someone loaned me a sweatshirt.

That is burned in my memory, trying to do all those things
and having someone loan me a sweatshirt.

It's reminiscent of being 12 years old
not knowing you're going to get your period
and then you're mortified and you're at school
and you tie a shirt around your waist
and just make do.

And this is one of those things
where as a society we make girls feel like
it's a girl problem.

It's a girl problem and it's your problem.

And that just is dumb.

“Your Problem” Analysis: You Become the Problem You Name

Ahmed (2017) writes: “We become a problem when we describe a problem” (p. 39). In Rachel’s poem, “the problem” Rachel names is her leaky body; the blood from a monthly cycle or breastmilk that leaks and makes her body incompatible with the able-bodied cisgender male that the space and timetable are designed for. Ahmed (2017) says that once we name a problem, it “might then be assumed that the problem would go away if you would just stop talking about it or if you went away” (p. 37). Instead of systems changing to make it more feasible to meet bodily needs, however, the “problems” are
framed as individual or personal embarrassments. Rachel feels “this is just dumb”—it is wrong.

In the chapter “Feminism is Sensational” in *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed (2017) unpacks what it means to sense something is wrong. Ahmed recounts her experiences of bodily violation or mistreatment as an accumulation of sensations that made her feel something was not quite right with the way she was being treated as a woman. She says these experiences teach you “to be careful… being careful, not having things like that happen to you, is a way of avoiding becoming damaged…. And you sense a consequence: If something happens, you have failed to prevent it” (p. 24). Yet part of becoming a feminist, Ahmed says, is culling these memories is looking at the patterns, and realizing that your personal experience is constructed in a social context. “We begin to identify how what happens to me, happens to others. We begin to recognize patterns and regularities” (p. 27). As patterns are recognized, we learn to name the problems. A key pattern that Rachel points out and returns to is the busyness of a teacher’s day and what it felt like in her body to also be trying to meet the needs of a new baby, both in terms of her body and her schedule. She explains she wasn’t wearing pads in her bra the day she leaked. To give context for why she didn’t notice she was leaking she says, “I must have been busy, running around not being able to sit down and stop.” Then she builds a contrast between her male coworker, who doesn’t have kids, prioritizes work, and wasn’t able to “empathize with what it was to be a new mom at work, pumping, bringing your kids to daycare.” She further explains that he prioritized being on time for work events like meetings and didn’t understand when she had competing priorities, like
pumping. It is this ethos—that work schedules and duties are the top and main priority of your life—that Rachel points out as incompatible with her body’s needs as a lactating parent.

By the end of the poem Rachel frames her experience of leaking, again, in the context of “trying to do all those things that day.” She continually makes references throughout the poem to the amount she is balancing, usually without it being visual to others. Then she pans out and talks about how it reminds her of “being 12 years old not knowing you’re going to get your period and then you’re mortified and you’re at school and you have to tie a shirt around your waste and just make do.” Rachel realizes that in some ways, the biological needs of her body have not fit the design of schooling for a long time. Needs that can’t be predicted or controlled like getting your period, can’t fit the regimented structure of breaks during a school day. She makes a broader connection to how society “makes girls feel like it’s a girl problem. It’s a girl problem and it’s your problem. And you should be embarrassed.” Ahmed (2017) says that when you name the problem “as sexist or as racist you are making that thing more tangible so that it can be more easily communicated to others. But for those who do not have a sense of the racism or sexism you are talking about, to bring them up is to bring them into existence” (p. 37). This is what she is describing at the end of her poem—the risk of naming the school structure or the social structure generally as sexist is that you will be seen as the problem.

**Becoming the Problem: Thinking through Social Reproduction Theory**

The incompatibility of Rachel’s bodily needs and the school day timetable can also be understood through a social reproduction theory frame. Rachel’s leaking of
breastmilk is a physical example of how social reproduction is not separate from economic production. Fraser (2017) writes, “Capitalist societies separate social reproduction from economic production, associating the first with women and obscuring its importance and value. Paradoxically, however, they make their official economies dependent on the very same processes of social reproduction whose value they disavow” (p. 24). Rachel produces breastmilk—an act of social reproduction—and is expected to do so without interruption to the economic production of her work as a teacher. Fraser explains how in financialized capital the dominant imaginary is liberal-individualist and gender-egalitarian—women are considered the equals of men in every sphere, deserving of equal opportunities to realize their talents, including—perhaps especially—in the sphere of production. Reproduction, by contrast, appears as a backward residue, an obstacle to advancement that must be sloughed off one way or another en route to liberation. (p. 33)

Fraser argues that this devaluing of social reproduction (pregnancy, childbirth, breast/chestfeeding, carework) makes it so that while women in the U.S. are making gains in the workforce, the energy they put towards social reproduction is not valued in the economic system. Fraser argues that the U.S. reliance on mechanical pumps for expressing milk is a symptom of the devaluing of social reproduction or equality in this realm:

This is the “fix” of choice in a country with a high rate of female labor-force participation, no mandated paid maternity or parental leave, and a love affair with
technology… One “breastfeeds” by expressing one’s milk mechanically and storing it for feeding later by bottle. In a context of severe time poverty, double-cup, hands-free pumps are considered the most desirable. (p. 35)

Fraser remarks, “Given pressures like these, is it any wonder that struggles over social reproduction have exploded over recent years?” (p. 35).

When I asked Rachel what she would change about the school structure to support lactating teachers, she said she wouldn’t change the structure of the school day; instead, she advocates for six months to a year of federal paid parental leave as a gender equity move that would change the working conditions for lactating teachers. She says in her ideal world, lactating workers would “just be able to stay home with your baby, as long as you're producing milk. And then when you're not, and they're more independent, and you're able to, then you can go back…. Yeah. It's never gonna happen in this country. We can't even get, you know, nine weeks for most people.”

In the poem, Rachel spends a lot of time painting a picture of the male coworker who responds with discomfort and “would have freaked” if she was closer to him when her breasts started to leak. Her body represents the labor that Rachel does every day but that typically remains hidden when she pumps for her baby on break time and balances childcare duties with her work. Federici (2020) writes that “Precisely through the wage has the exploitation of the non-wage labor been organized. This exploitation has been even more effective because the lack of a wage hid it… where women are concerned, their labor appears to be a personal service outside of capital” (p. 24). From the perspective of her male colleague, Rachel had no reason to be late for a meeting or to
need accommodations due to parenting. That work–reproductive labor–is framed as a personal service, rather than as integral to the maintaining capitalist production.

“Tip of the Iceberg” Introduction

Lilly, the speaker in “Tip of the Iceberg,” is a middle school teacher in an urban district. She expressed milk for two children at work, in 2017 and 2020. She is sitting in her middle school classroom during our Fall 2021 Zoom interview. When I asked her what advice she had for teachers who will pump at work, she said,

Ask for everything that you feel like would be helpful. The answer might be no but at least you have advocated for yourself. I don’t think I did a very good job of advocating for myself, especially with my first born when I was trying to be a new mom and that was enough.

During Lilly’s first time pumping in 2017, she pumped for three weeks, and decided to stop, because she didn’t have enough time to pump and do her job duties. Her prep period was at the start of the day, during first hour at 8am. Then by the end of the school day she needed to pump again. She recounted,

You know, having a 55-minute prep, by the time I got everything set up and then took the time to pump and then took everything off and got it all washed and put away, I had maybe 10 minutes of prep left. Which just wasn't a very sustainable practice for me to be able to be ready to teach so I just [decided] this is not worth it for my mental health. As much as I hate that I'm sacrificing something for my child because of my job, I just have to because I can't, I can't sustain this.
Lilly succinctly shares why the work of pumping, including setting up the pump, sitting in place to pump, and cleaning up afterwards—was incompatible with her teaching duties if she was going to “be ready to teach well.” She also points out how the tension between her two roles as a lactating parent and teacher creates mental stress. She says that part of the labor the lactating worker performs is taking on the emotional burden and potential guilt, stress, and/or anxiety of trying to balance two incompatible roles, or of giving one up or not doing it as well (I get into this more in Chapter Six). Lilly said she did feel people in the building wanted to be supportive, but the school-day structure itself created limitations for their support. She said,

At work I definitely had colleagues who were supportive. My principal was always supportive of anything we needed as much as it was in her control but there's just not, you know, we didn't have extra people. So it's not like I could have said: “Hey, I need to pump. Can someone cover my class for 20 minutes while I go do it?” because there just weren't people. Yeah. Which is why I was trying to use my prep and lunch and after school to pump.

While Lilly says her principal and others in her building are supportive, lack of staff and the fact that people are already over-capacity in her building means that there aren’t others who can cover classes for her so that she can have extra time to express milk.

Lilly’s second baby was born in March 2020. That journey was totally different: Lilly did not take parental leave, as her daughter was born the first day school went online at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. She took two weeks of sick days, and then taught asynchronously online. When her school went back to synchronous
online in Fall 2020, she pumped but she was able to do it in her own home. She said the biggest difference at home was, “I didn’t feel rushed.” At school she says,

I felt rushed…. If I would have had one of those [pumps] you can just stick in your bra and walk around and do stuff I could have pumped for so much longer. But that wasn't a thing at that time, or at least they weren't common... It was mostly that feeling of being tethered and not being able to get to what I needed to do for work at the same time that made me stop early. I tried to save computer work that I could do while I was pumping. I answered a lot of emails while I was pumping. You can't really walk to the copier when you're plugged into the wall and your boobs are hanging out.

Lilly emphasizes that she cannot fulfill her duties as a teacher—making copies, preparing her classroom—while she is tethered to her pump, yet she couldn’t afford to just cease working while she pumped, so she did the tasks she could, like sending emails. Lilly mentions the expensive, newly developed hands-free pump as a potential solution, because it would allow her to multi-task. The hands-free pump has been a popular choice for lactating parents “doing it all”: You can put the hands-free pump in your shirt and continue with your tasks. However, right now it is too expensive for most people to buy. While it is one way to increase multi-tasking, it sells the narrative that efficiency is most important, and that pumping is something that “just happens” without requiring energy or emotion.

While Lilly acknowledges the barriers to balancing the roles of lactating work and teacher, she emphasizes structural constraints she faces as a teacher and more broadly as
a lactating worker in the U.S. as the primary incompatibility between her roles as worker and breastfeeding parent. Lilly talked a lot about how, while she felt supported by particular individuals, the lack of support she experienced was primarily a structural issue that needed to be addressed through district level and national level policies. She said, “I do feel like there is not a supportive culture for moms in [my district]. There's individuals who are supportive, of course. But I have never felt supported at a district level.” She goes on to talk about the lack of policies in the U.S to support young parents. She says,

I don't feel that society is supportive of parents in general. I mean, in any way. Whether it's family leave, whether it's breastfeeding, whether it's childcare, whether it's universal preschool, you know, we just don't have anything in the U.S. that shows that we support families. We just don't. And I think there's also some talking out of both sides of mouth, depending on who you're listening to, about, you know, people say these things are so important, and we know how important they are and then no one's willing to remove any of the barriers that make it virtually impossible.

Lilly makes a crucial point that while individuals make a difference and often individuals are willing to be supportive, structural barriers need to be removed to support lactating teachers and parents generally. She says it is difficult for her in a nuclear family household where both parents work full time. She assumes others without this structure find it even more difficult. She says,

especially for two working parents, the systems aren't supportive. And, I mean, we have a lot of privilege, like, we're great compared to what a lot of people are
going through, but it still isn't a supportive system, even for people with the most privilege. So it's heartbreaking to think about people who are navigating even more barriers than I did, because there were plenty for me.

Lilly acknowledges that the struggle was too great for her as a white, cisgender, middle class, heterosexual, married woman with small children. If it is difficult for her, she assumes that the challenge to navigate barriers is even greater for those less privileged by their identities and access to resources. In the transcription poem “Tip of the Iceberg,” Lilly intertwines the lack of structural support for birthing and lactation with the anxiety and stress she experienced as a lactating teacher.

**Tip of the Iceberg**

Space and time to pump is just the tip of the iceberg.

Let me give you an example.

We don’t get any paid parental leave. We use our sick days.

So, a few months after I gave birth I went back to work but I didn’t get paid for a long time.

We were out of money. I kept calling HR to ask,

“When am I going to get money again in my paychecks?”

“You'll get money again in a couple checks,” they kept telling me.

And I was like, “No, I need a date—
I have no money.

You *have* to tell me.
I'm not saying you need
to pay me before
I'm supposed to be paid.

I'm just wondering,
what is the date
I will get paid?
So I can budget until then.”

Finally, I was weeping on the phone
with this poor HR woman
and she was very nice and helpful.

She said, “I am so sorry
nobody told you this…”

She told me I had to backpay
all my family health insurance—
almost $900 a month—
a good chunk of my income.

I was an anxious mess.
I was a disaster.

I was crying every night
because I was so anxious
about how I was going to do everything
and teach.

It was an important step
for me to just say

“Okay, well I’m done pumping.”

If you have all
those other layers going on,

what's the thing you're going to give up?

Probably pumping.
Because you can.
“Tip of the Iceberg” Analysis

“Tip of the Iceberg” started as a conversation about finding time and space to pump. But this provoked a more urgent experience Lilly had of not fitting the role of teacher, especially related to parental leave and family health insurance. This provoked a sense for Lilly that things are not right all around. In her interview, Lilly makes a distinction between individual people being supportive versus systemic support. She says, “There is not a supportive culture for moms in [my district]. There are individuals who are supportive, of course. But I have never felt supported at a district level…. it’s just sad to consider that given that, you know, it is mostly women of childbearing age [who are teachers].”

Lilly points out that the division of labor for lactating teachers reaches far beyond navigating pumping within the school day schedule and space. In her story about how time and space to pump is just the tip of the iceberg, she recounts how it is up to teachers to pay for their parental leave by using sick days they save up year to year and explains that the family plan for health insurance is very expensive— almost $900 a month. Navigating the HR aspects of taking a leave, including figuring out how much she would get paid and when, were left to her as a teacher. This lack of structural support was mentally and emotionally stressful. She was “weeping on the phone” with HR, she was “crying every night” and an “anxious mess.” “I was a disaster,” she says. The work it takes to navigate the financial and physical needs of childbirth, recovery, caring for a newborn, and breast/chestfeeding are invisibilized in capitalist systems where production
at work is considered the important labor. The most straightforward solution for Lilly was to quit expressing milk.

Lactating teachers can return to a state of “institutional passing” by choosing to stop expressing milk, so as to “minimize differences from institutional norms” (p. 131). Ahmed says, “Institutional passing… requires working on one’s own body in an effort to be accommodating” (p. 131). Yet while lactating teachers who participated in my study can return in some senses to an institutional fit, their roles as parents and as the birthing parent had concrete and material impacts on their ability to fit in school structures. This is clear in “Tip of the Iceberg” when Lilly is unable to pay her bills due to the lack of parental leave provided to teachers. Lilly’s experience running out of money got her thinking about how, really, time and space to pump was her smallest concern. Her embodied experiences of not fitting in school policies and practices made her question why there is not universal paid leave, preschool, or affordable childcare.

In a society where reproductive labor was valued, Lilly’s district would provide paid parental leave, health care would be affordable or universal, and daycare would be affordable. In this world, Lilly wouldn’t have to be crying every night because she was so anxious “about how I was going to do everything and teach.” Instead, Lilly does the work to institutionally pass.

**Conclusion**

All three teachers in this chapter recognized a pattern: School times and spaces do not fit the bodily needs of lactating teachers. Teachers expressing milk are framed as “misfits" because their bodily needs do not fit the current structure, giving them the
opportunity to challenge the current regime. Garland-Thomson notes that misfitting can “foster intense awareness of social injustice and the formation of a community of misfits that can collaborate to achieve a more liberatory politics and praxis” (p. 597). So whereas the benefit of fitting is material and visual anonymity, the cost of fitting is perhaps complacency about social justice and a desensitizing to material experience. Misfitting, I would argue, ignites a vivid recognition of our fleshiness and the contingencies of human embodiment. (p. 597-598)

Ahmed (2017) writes that “in formalizing an arrangement, institutions create residence for some bodies more than others… diversity work then is the work you do because you do not fit with a series or arrangement” (p. 125). Ahmed offers that when you experience periods of not fitting in institutional arrangements, you become uncomfortable. The discomfort felt is an opportunity to ask questions. She offers that “if we have a body that is expected to turn up, we might be less likely to be caught by what comes up” (p. 132). She suggests that when we are caught up by ways that our bodies do not fit institutional norms, we take the opportunity to transform questions into a catalogue. The purpose of catalogues of questions is to hear “continuities and resonances. It is a way of thinking of how questions accumulate; how they have a cumulative effect on those who receive them. You can be worn down by the requirement to give answers, to explain yourself” (p. 133). By sharing their experiences during interviews and with colleagues, teachers are creating a catalogue. This catalogue is important because even with the 2010 federal law protecting break time for breast/chestfeeding parents, the
accommodations are inadequate. Lactating teachers are indeed worn down by the need to figure out the system and then explain themselves.

There are those who use the experience of not fitting to directly address the issues of misfitting, and who work to “achieve a more liberatory politics and praxis” (Garland-Thomson, 2011, p. 597). Nancy, an administrator in a rural school district, is an example of someone whose embodied experience of being a misfit prompted change in how she worked as a leader. Nancy expressed milk as a teacher prior to becoming an administrator. Nancy is committed to making teachers feel like their identities as parents “fit” and are valued.

She recalls that when she was pregnant for the first time, she went to the superintendent to ask what to expect. She and her husband went together, because they both taught in the district. But the superintendent was dismissive. Nancy recalls: “He said, ‘do you think you’re the first person to have a baby?’” Nancy wondered, “So how do I know my legal rights? Is there a school policy? What supports does the school have in place?” Now she wants to be a bridge, and to advocate for pumping teachers. In her district, Nancy worked with administration to make a clear one page policy about lactation accommodations. She says in an ideal world, all districts would have a policy to refer to. That way administrators who don’t know how to address the needs of lactating teachers can refer to the policy. She says, “There should be someone to support new parents and help them know their options and make it a celebration.”

Nancy covers classes for pumping teachers in her building when they need it. She says as an administrator, her schedule is more flexible, so she just puts the time into her
calendar like she would a meeting. On the day I interviewed her, she was subbing for a teacher every day at 1:45pm so that the teacher could pump. She sees this as an opportunity to get to know students better by being in the classroom, and a way to demonstrate the kind of care they encourage students to show one another. She said, “I tell teachers to take as much time as they need because I know it is good to feel relaxed and not pressured about time.” Nancy also made her own office into a lactation space that teachers can check out. Nancy described the space ( pictured below) in this way in a follow-up email after her interview:

Attached is a picture of my office that is used by our nursing mothers. Some pieces to note are the refrigerator for storing milk, the basket of snacks on top, a table to set their things, comfy chairs to pump in, aroma therapy to create a calm space, a TV to watch or to listen to music if desired, access to a garbage, and most importantly, privacy. I have also attached a copy of our Nursing Mother's Policy. It is very basic and the bare minimum, but important to have as a foundation for support.
Nancy’s material, personal experience of not fitting in her school as a lactating teacher motivated her to create material changes in terms of district policy and through her personal commitment to daily support lactating teachers by sharing her office space and her time. After reading the three poems in this chapter, my friend said: “By the end I felt like the mouse, the man, and the money won out—they are comfortable and in control.” I added this concluding story about Nancy to show that while current structures make lactating teachers “misfits,” I also heard many stories of teachers like Nancy who are making small changes, and those add up to challenge the institutional insistence that work productivity matters more than humanization in schools.
Chapter Six

Taking Emotions into Account

When you speak as a feminist, you are often identified as being too reactive, as overreacting, as if all you are doing is sensationalizing the facts of the matter; as if in giving your account of something you are exaggerating, on purpose or even with malice. (Ahmed, 2017, p. 22)

Introduction

I noticed as I started my research that usually when discourses arise about milk expression at work, they focus on aspects of functionality: Having a place to pump and store the milk, getting the milk to the baby, getting the baby to receive the benefits of the milk. I was startled by the lack of consideration for the bodyfeeding person’s feelings. I wondered: Does it matter how I feel, or what others feel, when they express milk at work? Should lactating people’s emotions be considered when we create policies about pumping at work and when we create standards for the spaces where lactating people express milk? In previous chapters, I have illustrated how ignoring bodily needs was a common practice for lactating teachers. In this chapter, I focus on the emotional states provoked for lactating teachers.

In a pragmatic sense, I focus on emotions because positive, calm feelings are integral to successful pumping. The hormone oxytocin triggers the let-down, or release, of milk. La Leche League (2022) reminds bodyfeeding parents: “Oxytocin is released when you feel happy and relaxed…It can be difficult to relax…if you feel rushed or under pressure.” Likewise, Shukri, Wells, and Fewtrell (2018) confirm that “maternal
psychological state is recognised to influence lactation success, largely by affecting milk ejection. Thus, increased psychological distress can disrupt milk flow and in the long-term, affect milk synthesis” (p. 1). Lactating teachers in my study were often aware they needed a state of calm to induce milk let-down, but it was difficult to achieve. La Leche gives advice to create a sensory and emotional ritual to facilitate milk release:

Make a conscious effort to put your mind at ease and use your senses to help trigger milk release. Hold or sit near your baby, or look at a picture or video of him, listen to a sound recording or hold and smell an item of his clothing. Relax your shoulders and take a deep breath to calm yourself before you begin. Try not to think about how much milk you are producing—instead, try distracting yourself by reading, listening to music or a relaxation CD, watching TV or even chatting on the phone. (La Leche League GB, 2022)

In current discourses, expressing milk is discussed in mechanical terms, as though it can happen anywhere, at any time. The emotional component of producing milk gets overlooked. The “Breaktime for Nursing Mothers” federal law, for instance, shows a lack of awareness for how a relaxed emotional state affects the process of milk ejection. The law does not have a requirement for a lactation setting that facilitates calm. It does not require extra breaks beyond existing break times to facilitate a relaxed state.

This chapter addresses the research question: How do teachers describe milk production in school spaces in terms of their emotions? I start by introducing the theoretical frameworks that situate why I prioritize the emotions of participants. First, I trace how emotions have been construed in Western thought as articulated by Alison
Jagger (1989) in her essay “Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology.” I overview how Jagger defines emotion in relation to sensation and feeling; how Jagger positions the role of emotion within research; and how she understands the role of outlaw emotions in feminist living. Second, I overview the field of pleasure activism as articulated by adrienne maree brown (2019) and the role of erotic energy within anti-capitalist social justice work as articulated primarily by Audre Lorde in her essay “Uses of the Erotic” (1984). Erotic energy reveals what makes us feel alive and connected to others and reveals when we are being disrespected and used by institutions that “reduce work to a travesty of necessities, a duty by which we earn bread or oblivion for ourselves and those we love” (Lorde, 1984, p. 55). I draw from the concepts of outlaw emotions, pleasure activism, and the uses of the erotic to analyze three poems. Each poem was written by compiling participants’ responses to questions about what emotions were provoked when they pumped at work. In my analysis of the poems, I focus on outlaw emotions, including stress, loneliness, and self-negation, which can lead to anger. I show how the desire for pleasurable emotional experiences can motivate resistance. I conclude by giving an example of an administrator whose emotional experiences pumping at work and whose struggles as a parent led her to adapt what she calls a “big-hearted” approach to leadership.

**Theoretical Frames**

**Emotion, Sensation, and Feeling**

In Western academia and culture, we have a long history of downgrading emotions as less important than other aspects of our being, like our thoughts or even, to
an extent, the sensory input that impacts our observation of the world around us. This can be traced to a positivist view of the world that prioritizes reason and downgrades emotions as unreliable. There is a lineage of scholars who delineate between emotion, sensation, and feeling—how they are intertwined, what might come first in our experience, and to what extent they are socially constructed. In her essay “Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology” (1989), Allison Jagger points out that one problem we have when we talk about emotions is that there are range of phenomena covered by the term “emotion,” including “apparently instantaneous ‘knee jerk’ response of fright to lifelong dedication to an individual or a cause; from high civilized aesthetic responses to undifferentiated feelings of hunger and thirst; from background moods such as contentment or depression to intense and focused involvement in an immediate situation” (p. 153). In her definition of emotion, Jagger excludes “automatic physical responses and non-intentional sensations” (p. 154). So, for example, in Jagger’s definition of emotion, anger and loneliness are emotions, and hunger and tiredness are physical responses or sensations that may contribute to an emotional state. Jagger writes that “emotions differ from feelings, sensations or physiological responses in that they are dispositional rather than episodic” (p. 155).

Jagger traces how emotion has been conceived in Western philosophical tradition, from a positivist approach to cognitive behavioral and finally, to viewing emotions as social constructions. Positivist accounts worked to separate emotion from sensation and reason, and to devalue emotions as something outside of scientific inquiry. Jagger writes that in a positivist conception, “Emotion has been associated with the irrational, the
physical, the natural, the particular, the private, and of course, the female” (p. 151). She says that “Emotions were not seen as being about anything: Instead, they were contrasted with and seen as potential disruptions of other phenomena that are about some thing, phenomena such as rational judgments, thoughts, and observations” (p. 155). In this conception, emotions were understood to be separate from scientific inquiry. “Pure” studies were supposedly emotion free and driven by dispassionate observation and reason.

The positivist view was mostly superseded by a cognitive view of emotions. In a cognitivist understanding, emotions are thought about in terms of the associated judgment: The thought we map onto a physical sensation determines how we interpret it. So, for instance, if I feel a sinking sensation in my stomach and have a big presentation this afternoon, I might interpret the sinking sensation as being nervous about the presentation. Or, if I am presenting with a colleague who doesn’t always show up on time, I might interpret the sinking sensation as dread that my colleague will be late for our presentation.

Jagger posits that there is no such thing as an “emotion free” observation. Even if people deny, suppress, or are otherwise unaware of their emotional state, as is encouraged in a Western positivist view of emotions, that “does not mean that emotions are not present subconsciously or unconsciously, or that subterranean emotions do not exert a continuing influence on people’s articulated values and observations, thoughts, and actions” (p. 161). In scientific investigations that work to eradicate the influence of emotions, Jagger points out that scientists nevertheless work in a social context with
values that affect the problems they think are worthy of solving, the hypotheses they
make, and the ways they try to solve the problem (p. 162). Jagger argues that emotion
and values are invariably at play, and that they can be viewed as part of our conception of
knowledge formation. The myth of the dispassionate investigator functions to “bolster the
epistemic authority of the currently dominant groups, composed largely of white men,
and to discredit the observations and claims of the currently subordinate groups
including, of course, the observations and claims of many people of color and women” (p.
165). Jagger proposes that emotion and knowledge be viewed as co-constituting rather
than oppositional. This is especially important because the development of our emotional
constitution takes place in the realm of the dominant culture. As such, our understanding
of even basic emotions is influenced by the norms and values of the dominant culture.

From Jaggar’s view of emotions, in a white supremacist, patriarchal capitalist
context, we are “all likely to develop an emotional constitution that is quite inappropriate
for feminism” (p. 165). We are swimming within the social constructions of our time, and
all must reckon with a compulsion toward homophobia, racism, sexism, classism, and
ableism (among the many other constructions we move within). Our emotional
constitution protects the status quo, and we are primed to limit our imagination for
alternate ways of living. Our emotional responses are conditioned to protect white
supremacist, patriarchal capitalist values, yet we can tap into outlaw emotions that lead us
to challenge these systems. Jaggar’s concept of outlaw emotions posits that the emotions
felt by those in a group marginalized from the dominant group can reveal how structures
are not working in an equitable way. Drawing from Jagger, I proceed with the following
understanding of emotions: Emotions are dispositional, rather than episodic; emotions are formed within social context and influenced by dominant values; and emotions experienced by those in marginalized groups can reveal how the dominant culture is oppressive.

**Outlaw Emotions**

Jagger posits that what she calls “outlaw emotions” can play a role in critical social theory and in a feminist orientation to the world, revealing new questions and modes for inquiry. Jagger reminds us that “The hegemony that our society exercises over people’s emotional constitution is not total” (p. 166). Those in non-dominant groups experience “conventionally unacceptable” or what Jagger terms “outlaw emotions” (p. 166). For those who experience outlaw emotions, “The social situation… makes them unable to experience the conventionally prescribed emotions: For instance, people of color are more likely to experience anger than amusement when a racist joke is recounted, and women subjected to male sexual banter are less likely to be flattered than uncomfortable or even afraid” (p. 166). Outlaw emotions gather momentum when they are experienced across a group of folx. In this case, shared outlaw emotions became a basis for a potentially politically subversive subculture that opposes “prevailing perceptions, norms, and values” (Jagger, 1989, p. 166).

Outlaw emotions are important indicators of how the status quo is not working for many or most in society.

They may provide the first indications that something is wrong with the way alleged facts have been constructed, with accepted understandings of how things
are… Only when we reflect on our initially puzzling irritability, revulsion, anger or fear may we bring to consciousness our “gut-level” awareness that we are in a situation of coercion, cruelty, injustice or danger. (p. 167)

A question may be, “Why should we trust the emotional responses of women and other subordinated groups?” (p. 168). Jagger suggests that “Emotions are appropriate if they are characteristic of a society in which all humans (and perhaps some non-human life too) thrive, or if they are conducive to establishing such a society” (p. 168). Jagger argues that those in subordinate positions have a unique epistemological clarity because they can see and feel more fully the changes that need to be made for all to thrive, based on their lived experiences of struggle and misfit in these systems. For instance, a person in a wheelchair is more likely to see the need for an elevator to get to the third floor of a building. A woman who experiences sexual harassment at work is more likely to see the need for workplace policies that prevent discrimination based on gender. It follows that a person who lives at the intersection of compounding minority groups will have a deepened understanding of what systems are not working for them and how they might be changed.

**The Use of the Erotic and Pleasure Activism**

In her book *Pleasure Activism* (2019), adrienne maree brown defines and explores how pleasure can function as anti-oppressive, with a focus on those most marginalized in current neoliberal capitalist regimes. She defines pleasure as “a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment” (p. 13), and defines activism as “efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform or states with the desire to make improvements in society” (p. 13). Therefore, 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). brown ties pleasure activism to an anti-capitalist lifestyle. She sees pleasure as potentially anti-oppressive and liberatory. She asks, “What would happen if we aligned with a pleasure politic, especially as people who are surviving long-term oppressive conditions?” (2019, p. 6). In relationship to lactation and work, this could allow us to dream up and enact systems and policies that take the pleasure and pain of lactating workers into account. Rather than individualizing the responsibility of expressing milk without providing adequate frames for support, we would be concerned with how those pumping at work feel and what communal webs are in place to affirm their life and the life of the baby(ies) being fed by the milk.

brown (2019) sees the erotic and the pleasurable as positive power. She says: “I have seen, over and over, the connection between turning into what brings aliveness into our systems and being able to access personal, relational, and communal power” (p. 6). On the other hand, what happens when we regularly deny our sensual and complete selves? It “increases the chances that we will be at odds with ourselves, our loved ones, our coworkers, and our neighbors on this planet” (2019, p. 6). Pleasure is dangerous to capitalism and to patriarchy, because as we learn what truly brings us joy and makes us feel good, we become less willing to comply. We must take more breaks. We need more time to pay attention to whether we are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired—whether we need to refill before giving more. brown also clarifies that

Pleasure activism is not about generating or indulging in excess… Part of the reason so few of us have a healthy relationship with pleasure is because a small
minority of our species hoards the excess of resources, creating a false scarcity and then trying to sell us joy, sell us back to ourselves. (p. 15)

She asks us to explore our relationship with what is enough.

In a similar vein, in her essay “Uses of the Erotic,” Audre Lorde (1984) casts a vision for how erotic energy can transform patriarchal relations internalized by women. The word erotic comes from the Greek word eros, which is the “personification of love in all its aspects—born of Chaos and personifying creative power and harmony” (p. 55). Lorde clarifies that often, eros gets confused with the pornographic. The pornographic is the “suppression of true feeling” and is about sensation without feeling. Lorde posits that patriarchy values eros’s depth of feeling “enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men… So women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same ways ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters” (p. 54). Those who are in touch with erotic energy are dangerous to patriarchy because they are unwilling to channel their life force in vast quantities into systems that destroy. adrienne maree brown (2019) points out that once you get in touch with erotic energy, “You’ve been spread all through with actual aliveness. You can’t go back to suffering” (p. 38). Fear gets transformed into energy to change, and this energy can change systems.

Cara Page, who was executive director of the Audre Lorde Project, talks about how erotic energy is important to deconstructing oppressive systems, and to building new ways of interacting with others across marginalized identities. She asks,
What is pleasurable in finding a place of grace and well-being and transcending oppression? If we’re not imagining where we’re going, then it will constantly just be pushing back outside from inside of cages, as opposed to imagining what’s happening outside of cages. (2019, p. 39)

Erotic energy is brave, because it asks us to imagine a world where our desire for wholeness, for healing, and for interconnectedness are worth investing in. This stands in contrast to capitalist systems that prioritize production and downgrade the importance of interconnectedness.

Poems and Analysis

The following poems are direct quotations from teachers’ descriptions of pumping. The first poem “Pumping at Work” was composed from each of the 20 participants’ responses to an informal survey. Each line of the poem is one participant’s direct response to the question: “In three words, describe your experience pumping at work.” I organized the responses deliberately to build a sense of momentum. One way I did this was by beginning all but one of the second lines of each stanza with quotations from participants who used the word “stress” to describe their experience.

The second poem draws together participants’ responses to the interview question: “How would you describe pumping?” The third poem recounts participants’ answer to the two interview questions: “How did pumping make you feel?” “What emotions did pumping evoke for you?” To create the second and third poems, I took notes about each participant’s answer to each question in their interview. I compiled their direct quotations. Then, I ordered the responses to build on one another, and sometimes
to contradict each other. In both poems, each stanza is in the voice of one participant. I did not define the word “emotion” for participants. Therefore, participant responses in the poems sometimes refer to emotions as defined by Jagger, and sometimes describe general experiences or sensations. As you read, please notice what emotions and situations gain momentum across participants and across poems.

**Pumping at Work**

In three words, describe your experience pumping at work.

Tight, hectic, awkward
stressful, necessary, hidden

lonely, gross, sad
stressful, lonely, messy

quick, prep, lunch
stressful, frantic, time-consuming

sometimes; relaxing / stressful
hard

work, priority, progress
stressful, upsetting, frustrating

It sucked—figuratively and literally.
Stressful, too busy

simple, effective, supportive
stressful, overwhelming, difficult

dehumanizing, humiliating, frustrating
stressful, isolating, hassle

difficult, dirty, and time consuming
stressful, lonely, time-consuming

time-consuming, commitment, love
stressful, eye opening, necessary

“Pumping at Work” Poem Analysis

In the poem “Pumping at Work,” participants used a range of words to describe the emotions of pumping at work, including: stressful, difficult, dehumanizing, humiliating, sad, frustrating, overwhelming, awkward, and for four participants, lonely or isolating. In what follows, I focus on stress, loneliness, and do a deep dive into Grace’s experience, who was the only participant to choose all positive descriptive words.

Stress

It is noteworthy that of the 20 participants, half of the participants chose “stressful” as one of three words to describe their experience pumping at work. Merriam Webster defines stress as “A physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation.” Describing pumping as stressful can be seen as naming an outlaw emotion. Outlaw emotions show the status quo is not working. They bring to our consciousness that something “is wrong with the way alleged facts have been constructed, with accepted understandings of how things are” (Jagger, 1989, p. 167). From the standpoint of social reproduction theory, the aspect that is wrong is that carework like pumping has been framed as “not work,” and it is expected that this work is done as a personal service, usually by women, and that it takes place outside of the use-value of workplace production. But the stress that lactating teachers feel is an outlaw emotion that indicates they are “in a situation of coercion, cruelty, injustice or danger” (Jagger, 1989, p. 167). If pumping is framed as a personal choice, then it is participants’ own fault they are stressed and if they are stressed, they can just stop
pumping. Yet framing pumping as an individual choice is precisely the problem, because the status quo still assumes a cisgender male body. By sharing that pumping is stressful, the teachers are acknowledging how difficult it is to do their jobs as a lactating parent and as a teacher in the same time frame and space.

**Loneliness**

A common outlaw emotion participants shared was loneliness. The federal “Break Time for Nursing Mothers” law requires that employees are given a space that is shielded from view and free from intrusion to pump. According to the law, pumping breaks are to run concurrently to existing work breaks. Teachers typically have one break, for around thirty minutes, for lunch. Typically, schools do not offer extra breaktime for pumping. While privacy was important to participants, having a private space to pump during their pre-assigned break times came at the expense of using their lunch to connect with their colleagues. At the same time, they were also isolated from their infants, pumping milk rather than bodyfeeding in person. Therefore, feelings of loneliness and/or isolation came up time and again as descriptive words for the experience of pumping at work. Velotti, et al (2021) define loneliness as “the pain of feeling alone… A psychological condition characterized by a deep sense of emptiness and uselessness, lack of control, and personal threat” (p. 2). They differentiate between social isolation, which they deem “the objective condition of isolation” and loneliness as the “subjective condition of isolation” (p. 2). In interviews, teachers were experiencing the subjective condition of loneliness that directly resulted from the objective condition of social isolation caused by pumping alone during their lunch time and other breaks at work.
Faith, an urban high school teacher, said her biggest advice for teachers pumping at work is to figure out how to deal with the isolation. She recommends that teachers who are expressing milk explicitly tell their colleagues that they want to connect but can’t. She says,

It is especially hard emotionally for a new parent to [pump]. Because it's so isolating. If you're used to socializing during lunch, you don't have that anymore. So reach out to your friends to be like, “Hey, come say hi after school.” That kind of emotional support is hugely under looked.

Faith points out that because lunch is the main time during the day where teachers see each other, and because it is at the middle of the day, when lactating teachers need to express milk, many participants lose the opportunity to connect with other adults in the building.

Barb agreed that her loneliness while pumping stemmed from missing lunch, the main time she could connect with her colleagues. She said that loneliness was a major reason why she decided to stop pumping:

Loneliness a major reason [I stopped pumping]. What would end up happening was I would have to pump up at lunch. It was right at the beginning of the school year when I was coming back. And I was so excited to be out and not be a mom 100% of the time. But I couldn't see people at lunch. And I was feeling just really, really, really lonely. That was a big contributing factor to me stopping [pumping].

Torry echoed the experience of loneliness caused by pumping during lunch. Torry, a suburban high school teacher, explains her first year of pumping for her child this way:
In a job where we're becoming less social, where people are retreating more and more, [my year pumping] was a big retreating year. I pumped, and then I only had a few minutes of lunch left. So I'm not gonna walk across to the teachers’ lounge. I'm just gonna eat my sad peanut butter and jelly sandwich at my computer while I catch up over emails. That extra isolation was hard.

Torry’s image of taking only a few minutes to eat her “sad peanut butter and jelly sandwich” while answering emails stands in contrast to eating lunch with peers. She is sad about eating alone while pumping in part because she knows her work experience is more positive when she has time to connect with her peers for lunch. Torry uses her positive experience at work of socializing with peers as a lens to think about her experience eating a rushed lunch alone while pumping. It makes her less willing to settle for what is convenient to the patriarchal structure of schools. She wants to do what is good for her: She needs connection and support from her peers.

Similar to Torry, Ava says that connecting with peers is essential to her well-being as a teacher. She said,

[Pumping] becomes really isolating. When you have to pump at school, at least for me, it was during my lunch hours. And that's usually the time where you find other teachers, and you can converse with them and create those necessary connections not to go through burnout. But for me, that time was dedicated to pumping. For so long, I sat in my classroom by myself in the corner, trying to pump and not connecting with my peers when I needed to connect with my peers. You lose out on some of those bonds that are being created. You just feel so
alone, because then if you don't have matching prep times, if you don't get to see each other before after school, you feel like you don't know who your coworkers are anymore.

Faith, Barb, Torry and Ava all trace having to pump during lunch as a source of their loneliness, an outlaw emotion. The federal 2010 law that provides time for workers to express milk at work is fairly new. The dominant view of policy makers and administration may be that lactating teachers should be grateful to be given time to pump. Yet “The social situation… makes them unable to experience the conventionally prescribed emotions” (Jagger, 1989, p. 166). The outlaw emotion of loneliness reveals that the way the law is functioning is not working for lactating teachers. Jagger offers that those marginalized by the systems in place have an “epistemological privilege” because they experience emotions based on their experiences moving through structures not made for their bodies, and so their emotions teach us about what can be changed to create systems that fit for every body. The participants trace the problem of loneliness to the problem of how the “Breaktime for Nursing Mothers” law plays out in their lived experience. Pumping during pre-existing breaktimes creates isolation, which causes loneliness. Participants’ experiences of isolation show that a different approach to break time is needed—one that provides time that does not run concurrently with pre-existing break times, as the law currently stipulates. This would allow teachers to have a break to eat lunch, which as Ava says, gives time to build “those necessary connections to not go through burnout.” In addition, paid parental leave would allow lactating employees the option to bodyfeed their baby in person, rather than sit alone with a pump.
Mia described how pumping was lonely because she felt that overall, her identity as a parent and as a lactating worker weren’t valued by her employer. Mia worked at a charter school with explicitly feminist underpinnings. However, when she pumped, she felt lonely because she got the message that pumping didn’t fit the workplace culture. She says,

There were three women who ran our program, and I was a teacher. And there was no space to [pump]. I had an administrator ask me, “How long are you actually going to [pump] for?” And I was like, "Okay, well, first, you can't ask that. And second you say you're a feminist. That breaks lots of barriers in my brain of like, what that means, like, that's not for all people by making that comment.” And she apologized... And she did work to right her wrong, but it was still one of those things that I kind of lost trust in her. She didn’t share the value that I had for being able to do that at work.

Mia goes on to say that she was drawn to Leaf Falls School because of its feminist underpinnings. So, when she felt like her body didn’t matter when she was pumping, it felt lonely. In her conception of feminism, there is an inherent understanding that resisting and changing patriarchal structures is integral to enacting feminist values in the workplace. Perhaps for the feminist leaders in the building, who founded the school during the second wave of the feminist movement, there was more willingness to follow patriarchal norms in order to have a “seat at the table.” The feminist leaders were conforming to an anti-family stereotype of feminism, which Patricia Hill-Collins (2014) points out was a common perception of second-wave white feminists. Mia says,
this school was founded by all these amazing women, and yet I felt like I had to
fight so hard, not even fight, but like, I had to create everything for myself. And
that felt very lonely. So then when there is other people who are, you know,
experiencing this, I was like, I could do something about that I can make it better
for them.”

As an administrator now, Mia is committed to making teachers feel like their whole
personhood is welcome. Mia and other staff and students created a wellness space for
lactating teachers (later used by June, as described in Chapter Four). Mia’s story
illustrates how part of feeling supported in a school also relates to having policies and
practices in place that normalize the range of bodily needs and experiences represented,
and that acknowledge the value of employees’ familial roles.

**Focusing on the Positives**

Only one participant used all positive words to describe her experience pumping
at work: Grace uses the words “simple, effective, supportive.” Grace pumped for three
children while teaching. I should note that she pumped for her first child while she was
substitute teaching, so she didn’t include that experience when she answered the survey
and chose the three positive words.

Grace’s interview stood out to me because it was important to her to share how
grateful she felt to have a job where she gets a regular paycheck and where she has the
choice to pump at work. During her interview, when I asked Grace how she would
describe her experiences pumping, she said she felt “indifferent but then also proud.
Because it is a lot of work. And I'm grateful. Yeah. I chose it was important and I try not
to invest a ton of feelings. Like, I try not to make a big deal out of it.” She went on to clarify that she felt good about her situation because she knew many people in the world have bigger problems than struggling to express milk at work:

I know that in a lot of parts of the world, when women go back to work, this whole idea of pumping is an odd idea. Like oh, well, I'm going back to work now. My kid can have formula or maybe they're old enough for milk. But I just really appreciate the fact that it's an option. I appreciate the fact that I've been at schools where people get it and don't make a big deal out of it. And obviously, it's the women I go to for support to help me figure these things out about where to go and how it works. But I'm just grateful that it's been an option. And that I'm in a consistent position: I go to the same job every day, and it's fairly easy for me to have a spot to pump. Yeah. I like that. It's available to me. You know, I stuck with it, even though I don't enjoy pumping.

Grace also contrasted her experiences expressing milk as a teacher and her experience as a substitute teacher. As a substitute, she pumped in a bathroom. She felt rushed and had to stop pumping earlier than she hoped. In contrast, as a teacher she pumped at her desk, had a set schedule, and felt like she had more control over the experience.

When she pumped in 2021 during the pandemic, Grace saw pumping as more straightforward than the rest of her day. At that time, she was teaching in person, schools were routinely closing due to high COVID-19 rates, everyone was wearing masks with social distancing protocols in place, and students were unaccustomed to in-person
learning. She recounted that 2021 was incredibly difficult. Compared to everything else that was going on, pumping was a straightforward part of her day:

It was a terrible, terrible mess. You've got people who feel like they're drowning. And yeah, trying to keep our heads up. And then in some ways, not only did it probably decrease my milk supply, but it was also more like when I did have the opportunity to pump at work, it was more of a break, or like a relief. It felt kind of cool to me— it was straightforward versus the rest of my day. It was not okay. And it wasn't good. So more than ever, it was a year where I would want to look at pictures of [my child]. Yeah, kind of go to that space. There was more of a need to feel connected. Because I didn't want to be where I was.

Grace explains that one reason she enjoyed pumping at work was because the rest of her job at the time was such a “terrible mess.” It was “not okay,” and she didn’t want to be where she was. In that way, pumping provided her a time to step away and think about her baby as she completed what felt like a straightforward task.

Grace’s account is important because Grace was trying hard to focus on the positives of her career and pumping at work. Yet although she chose three positive words, her experience was nuanced. Grace’s deep desire to connect with her child by looking at their picture as she pumped, in contrast with the mess and stress of her day, can be seen as a move to connect with her erotic intelligence. Audre Lorde (1984) writes that

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those
erotic guides from within ourselves… we conform to the needs of a structure that
is not based on human need, let alone individuals. (p. 58)

While Grace is willing to sacrifice a lot for the stability her job offers, she also recognizes
that she is being asked to sacrifice too much of her own and her family’s well-being for
the institution. By choosing to pump and look at a picture of her baby, Grace makes a
move to meet her human need, and away from conforming to the institution’s obsession
with efficiency. Grace says she didn’t want to be where she was, and so her way to cope
was to think about her family and to frame the sacrifices she was making as her personal
choice to take care of her family—by providing milk and by having a steady job and
income.

Grace sees pumping as an individual decision that she bears responsibility to do
or to quit doing. This lines up with a neoliberal understanding of mothering, where any
decisions related to mothering or parenting are framed as an individual choice, relieving
the collective of responsibility for families or parents. Grace views it as her personal
problem that she chose a career where there isn’t more paid leave and because of this,
doesn’t see complaining as productive. She said, “I chose to have a baby. You know, I
have to use my sick days right away. So, if I have a baby at the beginning of the year, like
I did, and I have a leave at the beginning of the year, I can never stay home sick again.”
A benefit of framing parenting and lactation as a personal choice is it can protect us from
the disappointment, frustration, and doubts evoked by working in a system that does not
account for women’s bodies and experiences as it does for men. It also protects the
neoliberal conception of family that pervades thought in the United States. Yet Gringle
(2015) points out that “the discourse of choice obscures the political project of decentering and obscuring collectivism and structural change” (p. 566). By thinking about how gender is at play in the lack of accommodations or leave for birthing and lactating parents, Grace might see herself as part of a community of people who can make the situation more sustainable.Grace’s experiences—her pains and breaking points, and also her sense of accomplishment and gratitude—crisscross with the experiences of the other participants.

adrienne maree brown (2019) frames love as a collective act that takes others’ experiences into account and functions as political resistance. She says,

We have a deeper socialization to overcome, one that tells us that most of us don’t matter—our health, our votes, our work, our safety, our families, our lives don’t matter—not as much as those of white men. We need to learn how to practice love such that care—for ourselves and others—is understood as political resistance and cultivating resilience. (p. 59)

Grace chose to practice taking care of herself and her child when she took the time to pump at work. While she framed it as personal choice, it could also be framed as a move to establish that her family, her body and specifically stress level matter a great deal, and that the ways the school was transgressing the boundaries of safety and care during the pandemic were not okay. While she was grateful to have a full-time job and time to pump, she also recognized ways that schooling could better account for the needs of teachers. This ethos of care, understood as political resistance, changes how we
understand the role of self-advocacy in the workplace, both as we advocate to meet our bodily needs and as we advocate to change current policies and practices.

In what follows, I share the poems: “How Would You Describe Pumping?” and “How Did Pumping Make You Feel?.” In my analyses, I continue to focus on how erotic energy, as defined by Lorde (1984), provides a frame for interpreting emotional experiences and as a motivator for cultivating an anti-capitalist ethos.

**How Would You Describe Pumping?**

Pumping is not pleasant.
I hated it.

It’s time consuming
a hassle.

Pumping is uncomfortable
stressful

mechanical, unemotional
gross, stressful and time consuming.

It’s extra work with carrying and washing stuff.

There is not enough time.

It was okay if I had the time.

You don't feel like a person.
You feel more like an animal,
it’s very dehumanizing.

It's nice to have the quiet
alone time if you can have it
but at school it is a lot of stress
and fear that someone will walk in on you.

I know it’s important—
it's something I wanted to be able to do.
How Did Pumping Make You Feel?

Lonely
stressful
pressure

providing.

Not pleasant
hurts a little
not comfy.

Anxiety
guilt
sadness.

Something I had to do.

No positive emotions really.
It was not a positive
experience for me.

I feel really rushed.

Tiresome
stressful

indifferent,
proud,
grateful.

No strong love
or hate for it.

Something I didn't want
to manage, I guess.
“How Would You Describe Pumping?” / “How Did Pumping Make You Feel?”

Analysis

*Rushing Causes Displeasure*

While many descriptors came up in the poems, a main descriptor had to do with feeling rushed. Teachers said things like, “there is not enough time,” it’s “time consuming,” it’s “extra work with carrying and washing stuff.” Yet some teachers point out that the displeasure of pumping would be mitigated if they had more time to do it. For instance, one teacher says, “It's nice to have quiet alone time if you can have it. But at school there is a lot of stress and fear that someone will walk in on you.” Another teacher agrees that “It was okay if I had the time.” Even within the current constraint of having to pump at work rather than having paid parental leave or other options breast/chestfeed while working (such as by having workplace childcare centers), teachers note that if their time pumping was less rushed (so perhaps it was a break addition to their lunch break, rather than simultaneous), then they could use the time to restore their energy—“to have the quiet alone time.” Right now, the priority is workplace efficiency, rather than considering how the rushed nature of pumping during a lunch break feels for the lactating employee. Audre Lorde (1984) writes that:

> The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need—the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life
appeal and fulfillment. Such a system reduces work to a travesty of necessities, a
duty by which we earn bread or oblivions for ourselves and those we love. (p. 55)
The current system prioritizes profit over the needs of lactating employees, because it
does just what Lorde points out—it provides for the bodily need to release milk but
excludes the “psychic and emotional components of that need.” Teachers are viewed as
“objects” that are to fulfill their role as outlined in their job description. Freire (1970)
says that by controlling the oppressed, the oppressor can “change them into apparently
inanimate ‘things’” (Freire, 1970, p. 59). In this process, the very human needs of
teachers get lost. When lactating teachers refuse to work within parameters that require
them to prioritize professional duties over pumping—such as pushing back against how
rushed they are to pump at work— they push against the white supremacist, capitalist
underpinnings of schools. Dehumanization is an outcome of capitalism, and the
humanizing maneuvers of workers act as resistance to capitalism.

**Self-Negation and Anger**

Many of the teachers described pumping as a matter of necessity, a duty, or as a
self-sacrifice to be performed. In the poem “How Did Pumping Make You Feel?,”
teachers described pumping as a matter of necessity when they say it is “something I had
to do,” and “something I didn’t want to manage.” Others describe it as a duty by
describing their feelings with the words and phrases: “providing,” “indifferent,” and “no
strong love or hate for it.” Others pumped as a self-sacrifice but had negative sensory
and/or emotional experiences of pumping. They say pumping “hurts a little,” and is “not
comfy.” Others say they have “no positive emotions really” and that “it was not a
positive experience for me.” Lorde says that experiencing the joy of the erotic is feared, because once we are in touch with what brings us pleasure and joy, “our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relate meaning with our lives” (p. 57). For teachers, who are stereotypically known as people who negate their own needs to prioritize the needs of children, standing up for themselves might be framed as selfish. They may frame self-sacrifice as a virtue inherent to teaching and parenting. Yet this only benefits the patriarchal structures already in place.

Teachers who are in touch with their erotic energy are dangerous to the capitalist structure of schools. When teachers do get in touch with the power of erotic energy, “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 the only alternative in our society” (Lorde, 1984, p. 58). When teachers describe their discontent and negative emotions because they are required to self-sacrifice and to give up on positive feeling states for the sake of capitalist obsession with work productivity, they are moving towards their connection to their self. They are moving towards what Lorde (1984) says is an erotic knowing that our positive feeling states matter deeply to connecting with our humanity and the humanity of others.

Underlying some of the teachers’ descriptions of duty is anger. Betsy was sitting in her classroom when we talked on Zoom. She works as a high school teacher in a suburban school. It was Fall 2021, COVID was still rampant, students weren’t used to being back in school, and like many teachers at that time, Betsy was worn out. She had
recently pumped at work in 2020, and earlier in 2014. She confided, “I was just thinking about [my experience pumping as a teacher] this morning. And I'm like, with all the crap like that, how have I not left this field yet?” When I asked her what she is proud of in her journey expressing milk at work, she explained how it is hard to feel proud because mostly, she is angry. She said,

It's hard to think about things that I'm proud of. Because you do it because you have to do it. It's necessary. But it's like, why are there all these obstacles put in place to prevent you from doing something that is really important and biological? So I don't know that I feel proud. I just, I feel like when I think about it, I'm more angry than I am proud.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2015), Sara Ahmed writes that for pain to move subjects into feminism, it reads “the relation between affect and structure, or between emotion and politics in a way that undoes the separation of the individual from others” (p. 174). Ahmed writes that from pain, subjects must also be angry if they are to move to action. Anger signals that “this pain is wrong, that it is an outrage, and that something must be done about it” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 74). By saying that she doesn’t feel proud because she is just doing what she needs to do to feed her baby, Betsy pushes back against the understanding that expressing milk is a personal decision, and that it is all up to the individual to make it happen. She questions the assumption that she should be proud, and instead says she is angry, because pumping is framed as a personal choice. Rather than supporting her in her dual roles, there are “obstacles put in place to prevent you from doing something that is really important and biological.”
Betsy goes on to explain why she is angry:

I'm angry because [expressing milk] is something you have to do— it is how you feed your child…My daughter drinks formula right now but it's almost like you're being pushed or forced into that situation. It's not a decision. You're being forced to do it and so it hits you in the budget. It hits your child's immune system. You know it takes away the benefits of nursing or expressing milk for your child. It's just really unfair that your employer is allowed to force you into that situation. And that makes me angry.

Betsy feels that the institution doesn’t take her needs or her family’s needs into account and doesn’t value her work as a parent or as someone expressing milk. Betsy is starting to feel bitter towards her profession, and she is seriously considering leaving. Lorde says that “In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial” (p. 58). Betsy’s anger signals that she is tired of self-denial. She feels like her employer forced her into a situation where she had to stop pumping and give her child formula instead of breastmilk because she did not receive support. Betsy’s anger isn’t just about pumping. It is about how she is supposed to feel proud of all the self-negation that teaching requires. She is angry generally about how she is being treated within the profession of teaching.

It can be tempting to believe that by going along with the status quo, teachers are helping or serving students. Yet bell hooks reminds us: “Nothing indicates female allegiance to patriarchy more than the willingness to behave as though the problems
created by cultural investment in sexist thinking about the nature of male and female roles can be solved by women working harder” (hooks, 2002, p. 96). Experiencing the outlaw emotions that stem from being a misfit in the institutional organization of schools can provide motivation to create change for others whose bodies do not fit in the space of schools.

**Conclusion**

Piepzna-Samarashinha (2019) says that “For most people, the words “care” and “pleasure” can’t even be in the same sentence. We’re all soaking in ableism’s hatred of bodies that have needs, and we’re given a really shitty choice: Either have no needs and get to have autonomy, dignity, and control over your life, or admit you need care and lose all of the above” (Piepzna-Samarashinha, 2019, p. 314). Lactating teachers are continually demonstrating care towards the students they teach and the children they pump for. But we live in a social context where paying attention to one’s own need for care can feel taboo for women and those from marginalized communities. Adrienne Maree Brown (2019) writes that “women are still taught too often to be submissive, diminutive, obedient, and later nagging and caregiving—not to be peers, emotional complex powerhouses, loving other women and trans bodies” (p. 61). By paying attention to their outlaw emotions—including loneliness, stress, discontent with self-negation, and anger—teachers are choosing their personhood over the system of schooling that denies them their full personhood.

Lucy, a principal in a suburban middle school, emphasized that creating a culture of care for the teachers in her building was a key to her job as a leader. She reminded me
of how bell hooks says that a love ethic is “showing care, respect, knowledge, integrity, and the will to cooperate” (p. 101). Lucy’s leadership style was informed by her experiences of struggles with infertility and cancer and other health complications in her family. She said these experiences informed her understanding that at some point, things don’t go like we hoped or expected. Life can get hard. And that is when we need help from others. However, she also said that sometimes when we are in the thick of it, we don’t know what we need. Therefore, she had a personal approach to leadership that included offering concrete support to staff and especially to new parents.

Lucy checks in with the teachers on her staff when they are on parental leave. She says, “At some point during the first month of their leave, I ask if I can bring a pack of diapers and a meal.” She said she also offers to swing by and help. She recounted,

I just recently did this with a teacher whose baby is seven weeks old, and I was like, “I don't want to put anything on you. But if you'd like me to swing by for 45 minutes or an hour while you shower or run an errand. Being a mom is really hard. Can I help?” I think sometimes you just have to assume they need it.

Another staff member had a miscarriage late in her pregnancy, after announcing she was pregnant to staff. Lucy said she didn’t exactly know how to help, but she wanted to do something, so she dropped off a meal at the teacher’s home. She told the teacher, “I don't care if you throw the food away. I’m dropping some off.” This kind of proactive approach was part of how Lucy understood care. I asked Lucy, “What do you think makes it feel like that is also part of your job? I guess, sometimes we have such strong feelings about what's private or what's public?” Lucy replied,
I’m really only in the business of being a principal. I have an important job and one is to build as positive, safe and affirming of a culture as possible in my building. And I think the way to do that, is really being in relationship with the other grown-ups in my building.

Lucy believes that by supporting teachers who are parents in the building in concrete ways, and by being explicit about her own identity as a parent, she is contributing to a more humanizing work environment for everyone, including students. She says,

I try to be very explicit with my modeling of being a person, a parent, and an educator because I want my teachers to do the same. If we show up full hearted, big hearted, open, then I think we are much more likely to catch the ways in which we are not being human to our little humans. It’s better if we're showing up with our parent selves at the surface— like if it wouldn't be okay for my own kids it better not be okay for my students in my building. And I think my teachers and the other grownups in my building are far more likely to abide by that if they're allowed to show up as parents.

Rather than thinking about the reproductive labor of parenting and of family life (pregnancy and childbirth, lactation, caretaking for loved ones) as a hindrance to her staff’s ability to do their job, Lucy sees it as integral to how they do their work. At the same time, Lucy believes that for teachers who are parents to show up for students in the best way, they need to be able to prioritize caring for themselves and their families. She said, “As parents we have to put ourselves first and then our families and then our work
and I really try to model that.” Lucy believes it is part of her job as a principal to create a culture that is affirming and to build positive relationships with the staff in the building.
Chapter Seven

Conclusion: A Commitment to Daily Difference

Introduction

Right now in the United States, we reckon with whose bodies matter. By May 2022, nearly half of all infant formula was out of stock nationwide (Cerullo, 2022), causing a massive shortage. In Uvalde, Texas, nineteen children and two adults were murdered during yet another school shooting, while police waited outside for an hour, in full protective gear. In June 2022, Roe versus Wade was overturned, and abortion quickly became illegal in states across the nation. In July 2022, Jayland Walker, an unarmed black man, was murdered by the police in Akron, Ohio. In August 2022, inflation rates reached a thirty year high. As a nation, we reckon with the questions: Who gets access to food and shelter? What do we do when our children are not safe at school? Does a woman get to control her reproductive destiny? Who gets to move safely in the world in their gender and racial identities? Or put more broadly: Who has the access, resources, and protections to take care of and protect their bodies?

The plight of lactating teachers is just one equity issue situated within our hypercapitalist social context, where bodies are valued for production more than for their humanity. The struggles facing lactating teachers are a result of structures that do not see the reproductive labor involved in creating breast/chest milk as crucial work. As social reproduction theory scholar Susan Fraser (2017) points out, struggles over social reproduction are widespread, including:
Housing, health care, food security, and an unconditional basic income; struggles for the rights of migrants, domestic workers, and public employees; campaigns to unionize those who perform social service work… struggles for public services such as daycare and eldercare, for a shorter work week, and for generous paid maternity and parental leave. Taken together, these claims are tantamount to the demand for a massive reorganization of the relation between production and reproduction: For social arrangements that could enable people of every class, gender, sexuality, and color to combine social reproductive activities with safe, interesting, and well-numerated work. (p. 35)

Since 2010 when the federal law “Break Time for Nursing Mothers” went into effect, national discourses have functioned to frame bodyfeeding as the personal, responsible choice parents should make, as I discussed in Chapter One. Personal choice rhetoric obscures the responsibility of the state, nation, or workplaces to systematically support lactating people. Using feminine language in national discourses (breastfeeding, mother) to describe expressing milk at work further reveals how national discourses make reproductive labor seem value-neutral by framing it as “natural” function of being female. In addition, health organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization have strongly pushed for increased national rates of breastfeeding and have used data to show the health benefits to mothers and babies. Yet these discourses largely fail to account for how policies and practices like universal paid parental leave, proper lactation spaces, and affordable health care positively affect the rate and duration of breast/chestfeeding.
In U.S. schools, lactating teachers are expected to be compliant and productive workers. The primarily female workforce is often valued for stereotypically female virtues, including: obedience, docility, putting the needs of others before self, and caring for others. These “feminine virtues” are relied upon to create a “home” environment in an institution that resembles a factory, tightly controlling students within time and space. As I discussed in Chapter Two, schools function as an ideological state apparatus within capitalism, instilling the ideology of capitalism for future generations of workers, including the value of work production, of following work-orders, and of prioritizing efficiency over humanizing working conditions. Teachers are key to transmitting these values. Thus, when lactating teachers become unable to prioritize workplace efficiency over their bodily needs, as I discussed in Chapters Four and Five, they become misfits within the institutional design. When lactating teachers become misfits within the patriarchal, capitalist design of schools, they are more likely to become aware of the systems that they move within, but that do not fit them.

In my study, I used social reproduction theory and a variety of supporting feminist and Marxist theoretical frames to make visible the dual labor performed by lactating teachers, who simultaneously produce milk for their babies (framed as “not work” in capitalism) and teach (framed as productive work in capitalism). I found that individual and communal acts that resist the capitalist orientation to efficiency and that prioritize the needs of lactating teachers are a salve and an act of resistance that have positive, constructive outcomes. Grassroots resistance builds momentum over time and leads to structural change. We can’t underestimate the importance of our daily choices to act in
compassionate, ethical, counter-capitalist ways. The next step is to advocate for long-term solutions for lactating teachers that are structural in nature. They include policies that prioritize humanity over workplace efficiency and that embrace and create a workspace that accommodates the needs of different bodies.

I move into my conclusion from the assumption that we will continue to live in a society that prioritizes possessions over people, that paves the way for the rich to get richer and the poor to stay poor, and that depends on exploitative and unequal social constructions, so long as we continue to adapt neoliberal capitalist values over all other orientations towards life, work, and relationships. In the same breath, we have made and will continue to make strides to push back against a capitalist orientation towards relationality even while functioning within a neoliberal capitalist system. I want to reiterate Cara Page’s (2019) point that “If we’re not imagining where we’re going, then we will constantly just be pushing back outside from inside of cages, as opposed to imagining what’s happening outside of cages” (p. 39).

In my concluding chapter, I review how my study illustrates the importance of reproductive labor and what a social reproduction theory frame for analysis offers for understanding the plight of lactating teachers. I overview my main findings. Then, I spend much of my conclusion walking through the practical implications of my findings in terms of actions we can take to change the current situation for lactating teachers. I write practical implications for the following groups of people: Lactating teachers, colleagues of lactating teachers, community members, school administrators, those with decision making power at the school district level, and for anyone interested, avenues for
advocacy at the state level. I include links to practical tools and information for addressing issues that face lactating teachers. I provide brief examples from participant and community expert narratives to illustrate how daily actions have created changes in the material conditions of lactating teachers. Next, I move to discuss the potential implications of my work for teacher education, which include framing professionalism in the context of capitalism, using critical theories of embodiment to contextualize social happenings in schools; and further developing a critical pedagogy of the body (Jones and Hughes-Decatur, 2012). I discuss the limitations of my work and areas for future study. I end with a concluding story about what I have learned from my experiences expressing milk at work and in advocating for better conditions for lactating workers.

Overview of Main Findings

In what follows I briefly answer my research questions, referring to how I answered each question in my main body chapters. Then I list my main findings.

What are common discourses concerning time and space evoked by teachers that situate the lactating body in schools, and what might they reveal about institutional values?

Overall, I found that participants in my study did not have adequate time or space to pump at work. I illustrated the incompatibility of the school day regime and lactating teachers’ bodily needs using cultural historical activity theory in Chapter Four. I continued this discussion in Chapter Five by focusing on how teachers were unable to meet bodily needs within the current school set up (even in schools that are following the Minnesota law and federal laws related to bodyfeeding workers). Using the theoretical concept of “misfits,” I show how institutional time and space are designed to “fit” those
bodies that can most efficiently conform to white supremacist, patriarchal capitalist norms. Therefore, teachers who express milk at work become misfits to the institutional design and are more likely to notice and critique the way schools are designed. Using a social reproduction theory lens, I show how we can understand the lack of appropriate time and space to lactate in schools as one side effect of a capitalist system that frames care work like lactation as “not work.”

How do teachers describe their bodies and milk production in school spaces in terms of emotions and bodily sensations?

In Chapter Six, I went into detail about how teachers describe their emotions as related to lactation. The mostly negative emotions participants used to describe expressing milk at work reveal that current accommodations are not humanizing for lactating teachers. I argued that by paying attention to the outlaw emotions of stress, loneliness, self-negation, and anger, we can see ways that current practices make lactating teachers feel they do not fully belong in schools.

The emotions and bodily sensations of participants are embedded in the poems included throughout my dissertation. In the poems, teachers demonstrated emotions like disgust (such as in the poem “Gross”), disappointment (such as in the poem “Tip of the Iceberg”), and frustration (such as in the poems “Your Problem,” “Everyone Else’s Kids,” and “A Lot of Work”). Often, the bodily sensations recounted had to do with feeling rushed, tired, or hungry. While a focus on bodily sensations was a part of interviews and of the poems, I did not directly explore the role of bodily sensations using theory and analysis. It is an area for further study.
To what extent do lactating teachers collaborate to change school policies and practices that hamper expressing milk at work?

I found that usually, teachers had too much to manage while they were expressing milk to change school policies and practices. However, many of the study participants did take concrete action of some kind after they were done pumping at work. A few created lactation spaces in their buildings, and one did advocacy work through the teacher’s union. Two participants moved into roles as administrators, where they created lactation spaces and embedded clear policies and/or practices for lactating teachers at their site. At the end of Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I included examples from study participants who worked to change school policies and practices that hamper expressing milk at work. In the practical implications section of this chapter, I include ideas for how readers can collaborate to change policies and practices as well.

I also found that teachers need more education about the state and district policies in place that affect them as employees, and what they can do to advocate for themselves and/or to advocate for changing current policies. Pre-service and in-service teachers can be taught how to advocate for more equitable policies in their schools, districts, and state, including by filing complaints when their rights are violated or by campaigning for school board members with an agenda that includes family-friendly and flexible workplace environments, better and more affordable health care, and paid parental leave.

Pre-service and in-service teachers can also be taught the importance of self-advocating for their bodily needs. If pre-service and in-service teachers are taught the history of schooling within capitalism and patriarchy as I outlined in Chapter One and
Chapter Two, they would have context for their experiences as workers in schools that informs their advocacy work. In addition, pre-service and in-service teachers can be taught to contextualize their experiences in schools using theoretical frameworks such as social reproduction theory, cultural historical activity theory, and misfits in the institutional design. Doing so would allow teachers to see self-advocacy and complaint as essential components of pushing for equity within inequitable schooling conditions (see the implications for teacher education section in this chapter for more on this).

How does situating the experiences of lactating teachers using social reproduction theory illuminate patriarchal, capitalist approaches to school design?

A key question in social reproduction theory, which I introduced in Chapter Two, is: “If workers’ labor produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the worker?” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 1). Capitalism considers the productive labor of a worker once at work but fails to consider the work that goes into caring for and reproducing workers outside the workplace. This includes pregnancy, giving birth, bodyfeeding an infant, and caring for children during non-work hours, among other reproductive forms of labor. Social reproduction theory “seeks to make visible labor and work that are analytically hidden by classical economists and politically denied by policy makers” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 2).

By evoking social reproduction theory, we can see that the system of schooling fails to account for the many facets of reproductive work that teachers do without proper institutional support, including expressing milk at work. When lactating teachers in the study talked about their experiences pumping at work, they used many negative
emotional descriptors, as discussed in Chapter Six. Their “outlaw emotions”—emotions felt by those marginalized by race, class, gender and other categories within capitalism—reveal how capitalism functions in dehumanizing ways in schools. Overall, participants’ experiences as shared in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, show that schools failed to provide time, space, or policies to support the dual labor of teaching and lactation at work.

**Summary of Findings**

I offer the following four findings based on my dissertation research:

1. Lactating teachers are trying to fulfill incompatible roles as a teacher and as an employee expressing milk.

2. The lack of structural support for lactating teachers (such as clear lactation policies and practices at work, paid parental leave, affordable family health care, and childcare assistance) contribute to an inequitable work environment in schools.

3. Individuals, buildings, and districts can create more humane conditions for lactating teachers by enacting modest reforms like creating school lactation spaces and providing additional time, outside of existing break times, to pump. Yet while stop-gap reforms in schools such as creating lactation spaces are one step in the right direction, more sweeping change is necessary.

4. When lactating teachers refuse to work within parameters that require them to prioritize professional duties over pumping, they push against the capitalist, patriarchal underpinnings of schools.
During the Q&A session after I present this research, I am always asked, “What can we do right now?” In this section, I offer some practical implications of my research to a variety of stakeholders. I include potential implications for action and advocacy for the following groups: Lactating teachers, colleagues of lactating teachers, building administration, districts, and more generally for those advocating at the local and state levels. My practical implications section is by no means comprehensive, but it is a place to start. I hope it gives you a place to plug in from your own location. I draw heavily from the resources that community experts shared with me during their interviews. I also share anecdotes from participants about what was helpful to them. I draw from the generous input of a health promotion specialist who met with me numerous times and gave me specific ideas about implications.

I am not trained in, nor do I have experience in public policy. That said, I know this section has a place in my dissertation. I would be remiss to have spent countless hours sorting through resources, gleaning resources generously shared by others, and hearing what helped or hurt lactating teachers during interviews without sharing practical ideas for readers. Before continuing, I want to note that resources I include, especially those created by the U.S. government, continually use the words “mother,” “nursing,” and “breastfeeding” to describe those who need to infant feed and/or express milk. I leave the terms if I am using a direct quotation but use gender inclusive terms for the portions written in my own words.
In addition, in this section, I include resources created by government agencies, which frame accommodations for those lactating at work in capitalist terms. Therefore, they often refer to how accommodations can save money, and frame support within a capitalist ideological framework, where workplace efficiency and worker productivity are core values. I don’t criticize the resources here. I am noting here that most are providing an avenue for reform without requiring a significant change to the neoliberal capitalist organization of institutions.

**Implications for Lactating Teachers**

This section directly addresses lactating teachers. However, the implications are relevant to anyone who seeks to better understand the challenges facing lactating teachers. For teachers currently expressing milk at work, I hope this dissertation shows you that it should not be up to you to navigate everything on your own. That said, because most of the teachers I interviewed didn’t have what they needed when they began pumping at work, in what follows I share the advice participants offered when I asked them the question: What advice would you give a teacher who is planning to express milk at work? Advice centered around naming what you need, complaining/self-advocating, finding a space to pump where you feel relaxed and comfortable, asking for extra time to pump, asking colleagues for emotional and practical support, just pump rather than multi-task, and be kind to yourself.

**Name What You Need**

Many participants advised you to ask for what you need. Lilly advises to “Ask for everything, even if [administration] says no.” She added, “Whatever happens on your
journey, it doesn't mean you're a failure.” Administration is required by law to give you
time and space to pump throughout the day, so at the bare minimum, ask for what is
required by law. Amber encourages, “Ask forcefully for what you need. Have a plan and
know it could change.” She said it is okay to be firm, because sometimes administration
needs the push to create the accommodations that they are required by law to provide.
And with a push, they may be willing to do more than is required by law, so that you feel
more supported and less over-capacity.

Some participants said it was easier for them to self-advocate when they reminded
themselves that they were not just advocating for themselves—they were also advocating
for other teachers who needed to express milk at work. Charlie said,

The thing that really pushed me is that I knew that that conversation wasn't just
about me, they could picture it, because I was in front of them. But I already had a
place to [pump]. So when I was asking for [a permanent pumping space], I knew
it wasn't really for me. So I think that kind of made it easier. Because I think as
women and as teachers, we often are willing to accommodate for somebody else.
And not advocate for ourselves.

**Complaint and Self-Advocacy**

By lodging formal or informal complaints, you are advocating for better, more
appropriate accommodations for yourself and for others. Laurie said that because another
lactating teacher filed a complaint with HR, her administration went out of their way to
help her pump. She said, “Because that woman before me escalated and got feisty about
it, administration was like: ‘Okay, let's do everything we can—we don't need any other
complaints about this.’’ You can submit complaints about lack of appropriate lactation accommodations through your district’s human resource department. You can also file a complaint with your union; to do so, contact your union representative. For example, Charlie was a member’s rights advocate for her building. Other teachers and educational assistants told her they did not have a secure, private place to pump. She “started pushing our administration that we needed a space.” You can also pursue a lawsuit where appropriate. Gender Justice is an organization that takes on cases (see https://www.genderjustice.us/strategic-impact-litigation/). They select cases “based on their potential either to affect broad populations in similar situations as our clients or to set a powerful legal precedent on a particular issue.”

For those in Minnesota, a way to positively frame your complaint, if that helps you to approach the conversation, is to encourage your employee to become a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace through the Minnesota Department of Health (see https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/breastfeeding/recognition/workplaces.html). A helpful resource for starting the conversation is the Self-Assessment Checklist which lists criteria for Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace recognition (see https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/breastfeeding/recognition/docs/workplacerecognition/docs/checklist.pdf). The checklist details requirements for “a written breastfeeding policy or guideline that is routinely shared with staff and addresses the elements of support, time, education and place.” There are requirements related to support, time, education, and place that are outlined in detail. Having a checklist created by a state institution can be a powerful way to feel sure of your own needs and advocacy work, and to frame
accommodations in a way that your employer can see the benefits they will reap. The checklist requires employees to make and regularly share with staff a clear, transparent policy to support and encourage bodyfeeding parents, to create a lactation space, to consult with lactating employees about the breaks they need and to accommodate these. Please see the section for districts below for more detail.

*Seek a Comfortable Place Free from Intrusion*

To find a comfortable space to pump that is free from intrusion, participants advised to “Advocate for yourself to find the right place.” For many, this advice stemmed from their own compromises and subsequent realization that feeling safe and relaxed was crucial to their ability to sustain pumping. Betsy recommends finding a space that is “private and clean and appropriate.” Grace says, “Find a place where you feel safe, with a locking door and no intrusion.” Finding a place that has a locked door was especially difficult, since in schools, many adults have master keys to the rooms. A clever solution was to put a “do not enter” sign directly over the door lock. One teacher added humor by having a picture of a cow and the phrase “Privacy please—expressing milk.”

To create a space that is relaxed and comfortable, participants found it helped to have items like a fridge, a comfortable chair, and a table so that they could have a feeling of calm. Often, participants hung up pictures of their baby in their pumping space, and an encouraging quotation. Charlie, a teacher in a rural school, sent the picture below with the explanation: “This is a former office space that I added a fridge, chair, table in. It has been used as storage, but I tried to make it more inviting.”
Betsy’s situation was less ideal: She was given a storage closet, pictured below. She describes: “This is a small storage closet inside a larger office area where my colleagues eat lunch each day. I would be pumping while my male colleagues ate. I turned on music to try to mask the sound of the pump.”
Betsy’s idea to turn on music or white noise while pumping so that she felt less self-conscious about the sound of the pump was one that came up often in interviews to create a sense of comfort.

Advocate for Extra Time to Pump

Participants agreed that it is essential to ask for prep times that are spaced throughout your day, and to request class coverage as needed. You may need to ask for the break times you need before going on parental leave, and before any schedules are put into place. When Torry returned after parental leave, she was given first hour prep, and a
10:20am lunch. She was scheduled this way because she was teaching Advanced Placement Biology, a course Torry created a syllabus and curriculum for the year prior. She was really excited to teach it. As soon as she saw her schedule, she knew: “Oh this isn't gonna work for pumping. I need a break in the middle of the day.” So, she met with the principal. She said that though they were friends, it was still uncomfortable to talk about her needs for expressing milk. The principal said, “If you really need a prep during the middle of the day, then you won't teach AP Bio, but you'll teach general biology.”

Torry was rightly frustrated by this. She told me,

Coming back to work, it really felt like: What are you going to choose? Are you choosing your career? Or are you choosing to be a mom who pumps milk for her baby? And it felt awful. Heading into the meeting, I felt really confident that we would figure out a way to change some students lunch schedules.

Very unfortunately, some teachers found that those in charge of scheduling didn’t provide information or the opportunity for lactating teachers to request prep times that made sense for them. So, self-advocating prior to starting parental leave is a good idea.

In addition, while extra class coverage is not covered by the law, it is a reasonable ask, given the variety of circumstances that pumping teachers find themselves in. A number of participants had unique circumstances so that additional class coverage was especially necessary. Though they didn’t necessarily get the coverage, it is important to ask, and to explain the circumstance, because other teachers will come after you who face the same dilemma. By raising the issue for yourself, you are opening the door and showing administration the obstacles in place. For instance, Melissa, an art teacher, had a
rotating prep time, so it was different every day. That made it very difficult to pump. Having someone to cover her class for the same 30-minute time every day would allow her to have a regular pumping time.

At her site, Charlie was expected to stay in the lunchroom with students if her prep period fell during a student lunch period. She was still expected to do this while pumping, but by firmly stating her needs, she was able to be “given a break” from lunch duty while she expressed milk. She said, “You have to watch the kids in the lunchroom…. I did talk administration into not making me do that during that time, because I was like, I literally don't have any time if you [make me do lunch duty].” I learned that often when teachers asked for more time, it was granted, so it is worth a try.

**Ask Colleagues for Emotional and Practical Support**

As I detailed in Chapter Six, teachers often experienced loneliness and/or isolation because they couldn’t see their colleagues during lunch. Page recommends: “Ask your friends to stop by after school so you can still see people.” Page says she also had colleagues she could ask to cover her class in case she was running 10 minutes late after pumping. A few teachers felt comfortable enough to ask someone to come sit with them while they pumped. Many teachers shared tips, advice and encouragement with others who were also facing institutional barriers due to caretaking responsibilities like caring for their child, for an elderly parent or sick family member. By being honest about your own needs for support, you open the conversation about the many ways our bodies can be misfits in the system, as discussed in Chapter Five.
If You Can, Just Pump, Rather Than Multi-task

Rachel says something that helped her was to “not think of pumping as a chore. Think of it as time for yourself to relax for a minute and do something for you and your baby—think of it as a relaxing moment in your day.” Most teachers felt like they needed to check emails or grade papers while they pumped. Some needed to eat while they pumped. Sometimes, to have less work at home when they were with their baby, it made the most sense for teachers to multitask. That said, I present this option given by Rachel, to just pump. A few teachers read a novel, read the news, or looked through social media. Some rested or tried to take deliberate time to enjoy their meal. Every person’s situation is different, but this is a note that “just pumping” is enough.

Be Kind to Yourself

Christine says to “give yourself small goals…. I told myself: ‘If I can just get a little longer, I’m gonna feel good about it.’” Christine and others in the study were kind to themselves when they didn’t make their initial goal for how many months they planned to pump. As I showed in Chapters Four and Five, one way to cut yourself slack is to acknowledge that the difficulty of pumping is not a personal “failure.” Pumping at all is amazing, given the structural and systematic barriers to your success.

Teachers were sometimes hard on themselves for not “producing enough milk.” Betsy advises that “It's okay, however much you produce.” Betsy’s sentiment was repeated over and over—many teachers struggled with guilt or shame about not producing enough milk. They wondered if it was due to the stress of their job and life responsibilities. As I highlighted in the main body chapters of this dissertation, it was
helpful for teachers to contextualize their experiences pumping at work and to see that many of the challenges are structural in nature and not your personal “failing.” Laurie wanted to remind you that “Your worth isn't measured in ounces.”

Many teachers said that one way they were kind to themselves was by giving themselves permission to supplement with formula. The federally and medically pushed idea “breast is best” does not consider the holistic needs of both parent and baby, or the ways that the structures are not in place to support exclusive bodyfeeding in the United States. Many lactating teachers reported that their babies were just as happy and healthy when they supplemented or switched to formula. Lactating teachers often made this switch to protect their emotional, mental, and physical health. Carol put it well when she said:

My feeding plan was whatever is gonna work best for everyone. I stopped exclusively breastfeeding with my first child and my husband was able to do bottles. Making that switch of not being the only person responsible was such a weight off. With my second child I decided: I don't want to be the only person responsible. That’s just so draining when you're also trying to work and keep everything afloat. So, yes, I was much more flexible the second time around. Set a goal but be flexible and do what's best for your sanity. Goals are great. But check in with your mental health and be flexible about what's best.

**Implications for Colleagues**

Over and over, participants told a story about a colleague who made a big difference for them through small acts of kindness. For those who are friends with a
colleague expressing milk at work, the following three stories show ways that you can be helpful in supporting your colleague. I want to note that in the three examples, there was clearly a sense of friendship and trust that was already established.

Fera told me about a paraprofessional that worked with her throughout the day. She was thirty years older than her, and her own kids had attended the school. Fera told me how this colleague made a huge difference for her by washing her pump parts:

Every so often, she would pull the mom thing. And she'd be there, washing my pump parts for me. I'd be like, “You didn't need to do that!” And she would say, “It's okay. I knew they needed to be washed. I just wanted to make sure that you'd be ready for this afternoon.” She's one of the best people I could have ever asked to work with. She was like, “Okay, well, you need help. And I'm here. I can help. It's okay.” She made it a very enjoyable experience for me.

Fera’s experience pumping at school was made more feasible because her colleague made her feel like she wasn’t alone. More than that, work that is often invisible was visible to her colleague and pointed out as hard work. Fera felt supported and seen, and it made a big difference.

Mia was supported by a friend who checked in with her and helped to cover her classes when needed. Mia had a difficult birthing experience, and when she came back to work, pumping and breastfeeding were important to her, because, in her words, “We didn’t have that initial bond between the two of us.” She said that she and her friend “asked for our prep times to be opposite of each other so that we could help cover each other's classroom.” Her friend covered her class, and she could pump more often.
Ava told me about a friend who offered to sit with her when she pumped, after she told her friend how lonely she was. Her friend assured her she didn’t mind and it wasn’t a big deal, and Ava felt comfortable with her. She said that she felt so much less isolated, knowing that her friend would sit with her during lunch each day. Finally, Page relied on her colleagues to check in and say hi before or after school. She said, “That kind of emotional support is hugely underlooked.”

If you aren’t friends with a colleague who is pumping, there are many other ways to be supportive by advocating. You can advocate for better policies and practices that push forward family values at work in your district and state, which are detailed in the implications sections following this one. In addition, a simple thing you can do is to also ask for what you need to meet your bodily needs. For example, if you need to have more time to go to the bathroom throughout the day, ask a colleague to cover for you and advocate for different ways of organizing the bell schedule overall. If you would benefit from paid leave to care for an ailing loved one, be vocal to your colleagues, union, and district about how state family and medical leave would benefit you (if you aren’t sure if or how it would, please see the “Implications at the State Level” section below).

**Implications for Community Members**

All of us can advocate for better systems and policies in our schools and districts. As outlined in the sections below, push your school and district to follow the practices outlined for breastfeeding friendly workplaces. You can share the resources linked below with your school and district administration. In addition, advocate for local property tax increases to support bigger school budgets that could fund expanded health care, paid
leave, paid breaks, and higher salaries for teachers and other school staff. You can organize and campaign to elect school board members who promote a family friendly school agenda. You can advocate at the state level for statewide family and medical leave, as outlined in the “Implications at the State Level” section below.

**Implications for School Administrators**

A common refrain from lactating teachers in this study is that they felt like it was up to them to navigate how they were protected by the law, and how the school was enacting policies related to expressing milk at work. Many didn’t feel like their administration was working against them, but they also didn’t feel a sense of concrete support. Even those who were friends with their administration did not feel support or repertoire to ask for what they needed. For example, Daphne said,

> The thing that was sad to me was that you were on your own to figure it out. It was just like, if you want to pump, go find a room, and make it work with your prep time. Or if you want people to cover your class, you figure it out. It was on the teacher to figure it out.

Since over time, many teachers will need to express milk, and because having accommodations is required by law, it makes sense to have a plan in place that is communicated clearly and embedded in your site’s practices. Luckily, there are resources available for doing this, which I share in this section and in the “Implications for Districts” section below. While you can’t ask a pregnant worker if they will be expressing milk, you can certainly let everyone on staff know that accommodations are required by law, and briefly walk through your school’s approach. You can outline the
state law and/or school policy related to expressing milk at work during yearly orientations.

There are some simple ways to gain more information about how to support lactating employees, and how it benefits your workplace climate. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health has a website that walks through what employers need to know about lactation at work, linked here: https://www.womenshealth.gov/supporting-nursing-moms-work/what-law-says-about-breastfeeding-and-work/what-employers-need-know. In addition, they have compiled a number of helpful resources, including an example of schools that effectively support lactating parents, linked here: https://www.womenshealth.gov/supporting-nursing-moms-work/resources.

For those in Minnesota, a straightforward way to make sure you are complying with current laws related to lactating workers, and to go above and beyond by addressing common concerns shared by lactating teachers, is by following the steps to become a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace. You can also advocate for your district to do this, as some in the state have already done. I have included full details in the district level section below, although many individual schools across Minnesota have chosen to do this on their own.

**School Districts**

School districts can make their district a more appealing place to work by providing and communicating systemic support for lactating employees. For those skeptical about the need or benefit of creating a plan for accommodating lactating
workers, I recommend looking at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Business Case for Breastfeeding:

https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-home-work-and-public/breastfeeding-and-going-back-work/business-case. The Business Case for Breastfeeding is “a comprehensive program designed to educate employers about the value of supporting breastfeeding employees in the workplace. The program highlights how such support contributes to the success of the entire business.” The program includes everything you need to start a program, and the economic justification for doing so. The website explains: “Research shows that providing a lactation support program is not only highly desired by breastfeeding employees who return to work after childbirth, it can also improve your company's ROI by saving money in health care and employee expenses.” The brief for managers, for instance, uses data to show how lactation accommodations result in business savings because breast/chestfeeding workers miss work less often; supporting breastfeeding lowers healthcare costs; and supporting lactating workers results in lower turnover rates, higher productivity and loyalty, and positive public relations. There is also a booklet for human resource managers and members of wellness teams about how to implement a cost-effective lactation program and a toolkit for building a program. Many of the community experts I talked with affirmed that the guides and information included are practical, research-based, and user friendly.

Districts can also follow the steps to become a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace. By doing this, you will do your part to address key barriers faced by lactating teachers in this study. The criteria for becoming a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace is a great place
to start
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/breastfeeding/recognition/docs/workplaceldocs/checklist.pdf). The checklist is useful for many employers, not just those in Minnesota, though those who live in Minnesota can get a special recognition by following the steps and applying to be recognized as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace. The requirements include “A written breastfeeding policy or guideline that is routinely shared with staff and addresses the elements of support, time, education and place.” In the sections below, I have provided some detail and examples for each of the four elements. Taking these steps can make a big difference for the teachers in your district. Torry, a participant, said it would mean so much to her if her district “found ways to let mom feel like being a mom is a worthy investment.” Districts can make teachers who are parents feel welcome, and address a key gender equity issue, by creating a lactation support program.

**Written Policy: District Level Policies are Clear, Transparent and Regularly Shared in Person and in Print**

School districts and/or schools need to have clear, transparent policies that concretely back up their diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments, including those that relate to lactating workers. Policies should be easily accessible to all staff and regularly communicated to staff in person and in writing. Most participants were unsure how to ascertain what the school or district would do, if anything, to support them as lactating parents. Two out of three participants didn’t know of any policy in place in their district or school that outlined their rights as lactating parents.
Tracy works at the state level with schools that want to achieve the designation of a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace. I asked her, “How did the teachers find policies about their rights for lactation?” Tracy told me that “One of the steps in this breastfeeding workplace requirement is that the policy gets communicated to everybody.” I asked Tracy how this played out. She said:

A lot of times I worked with the school over the summer and then when all the teachers came back for orientation days (the first days of school, when teachers have staff development) it was brought up during the live meeting. And then school districts have it on their internal school website where you can access all their policies. When I was working with HR individuals, they also put out posts to highlight that the policy is up there or to bring attention to it. And then also, if a mom was taking maternity leave, that conversation would get brought up with HR. So yeah, it got communicated in multiple ways.

I was surprised by Tracy’s answer, because it seemed very straightforward. I asked, “In the policy, does it specify how schools will help teachers find time to pump?” Tracy said, The language is basically, “Moms need to be provided time to pump, paid or unpaid.” It's very vague. A lot of schools follow that same vague language like “Moms will be provided time to pump.” One school in particular was more specific about it and said, “We will provide paraprofessionals or substitutes as needed for you to take a break time.” But a lot of the others, like the three or four other school districts [I worked with] left it pretty vague. A lot of the school policies say “Try to use your breaks that are already in your schedule to pump” or
something along those lines, but that they would accommodate if it fell outside
time.

It is possible that while a policy is in place, it reiterates the law, but does not include any
further accommodations such as class coverage for extra time to pump, as in the example
above. It is important that administrators and districts follow through beyond the bare
minimum. For instance, one district made a simple, one page handout that included five
sections: Milk expression breaks, place to express milk, communication, maintenance of
spaces, and scheduling. Each described, in a few sentences, what the employee can
expect. In terms of milk expression breaks, they wrote that breaks should be concurrent
with lunch and other existing breaks, but if more breaks were needed, to talk to
administrators to work this out. Another important component is to make sure that HR
can talk with teachers about the supports in place. Charlie, who teaches at a rural school,
says,

Teachers need to be able to have a conversation prior to the moment they need
[accommodations]. Which is tricky because that's going to require some
knowledge on the teacher’s part. And if you've never had a kid, there's a lot of
things you don't know. But that's where you'd hope that HR could do a better job.
HR could have somebody that is your point person to talk about some of these
issues, to help you work out the space and the time to [pump].

**Support**

Support is straightforward. You simply need to provide a way to support and
encourage lactating employees. One way to do this is to have a bulletin board in lactation
spaces, and a virtual space on your HR page, with links to locally available resources, such as the local or state breast/chestfeeding coalitions and other support in the community. Another way to concretely support lactating employees is to take care of the other three areas on this list.

**Time**

As mentioned in the policy subsection above, it is important to specify what coverage lactating workers can expect during their existing breaktimes, and for additional coverage outside of existing break times. It will also be important to consider how this works for paraprofessionals in the building.

**Education**

The Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace designation requires that supervisors are trained to support employees who are expressing milk at work and are familiar with the policy.

**Place**

Districts need to establish policies for creating lactation spaces in existing buildings and have a plan for creating spaces in new buildings and in remodels. The lactation space(s) can be stand-alone or multi-use. Because existing school buildings are often short on space, some districts and schools get creative and have a “traveling lactation station” teachers rent. This includes a pump, a white noise machine, and sanitizing products that teachers can keep in their classroom while they are pumping. Alternatively, schools have made spaces in closets or offices that are deliberate and thoughtful. For instance, some administrators open their private offices or a department
or staff lounge as a lactation space or as a multi-use space. Nancy, who I talked about at the end of Chapter Five, is a great example of this. As a reminder, Nancy is an administrator in a rural school district who pumped at work when she was a teacher, and it was a challenge for her. So, as an administrator, she is committed to supporting staff in the building where she works. She made her office into a lactation space and created a Google calendar sign out for the space.

Another example, detailed in the conclusion to Chapter Four, is Leaf Falls School. At Leaf Falls School, students helped to create a multi-use wellness space that is also used by lactating teachers. Students did a collaborative, service-learning project in class to research what kinds of bodily needs staff members have in schools, such as those who must take medication, administer shots, or lactate throughout the day. They also looked at mental and emotional health, and the ways a multi-use room could be used by staff. They interviewed staff at their school. Their teacher was able to get a small grant through the Minnesota Department of Health, and the students helped to design a multi-use room that is now used by lactating teachers and others who needed to use the room. You may be able to get funding through grants, such as in Minnesota, through the Statewide Health Initiative Partnership (SHIP) grant. Community experts I talked with in 2021 were using this grant to allocate small amounts of funds (around $1,000) to schools so that they could create lactation spaces.
Other Ideas for Districts or Schools

Provide Six Weeks+ of Fully Paid Parental Leave

In the “Implications at the State Level” section below, I include information about paid family and medical leave. City, state, and corporate level organizations are choosing to provide fully paid parental leave as a term of employment, regardless of state policy. Given the difficulty to retain quality teachers, a move like this one would make your district more appealing to future employees and demonstrate your commitment to being a family friendly environment.

Provide Daycare Facilities for Non-School Age Children

Districts or schools could also consider providing daycare facilities available for students and staff. Staff could then bodyfeed their baby during breaks. For example, some participants worked in an urban school that had a childcare facility for students. I interviewed a principal at the school who had asked the district, “Why not open the childcare for teachers too?”

Allow Teachers to Bring Infants to Work

A few teachers were able to bring their babies to work with them for the first six months of the infant’s life. A few others brought their babies during in-service days. This allowed teachers to breast/chestfeed their baby on their breaks, and to continue to do so past parental leave.

Implications for Unions

Unions can advocate for paid lactation spaces and the establishment of break time policies that meet the criteria for employers who are recognized as a Breastfeeding
Friendly Workplace. Unions can push forward issues like paid parental and medical leave, more affordable health insurance coverage, and higher staffing levels.

**Implications at the State Level**

All of us can advocate for state level policies that structurally support lactating teachers. Lactating teachers are greatly impacted by the lack of paid parental leave. Most teachers use their sick days to partially cover absence when they give birth or adopt and establish bodyfeeding, which requires feeding every two to three hours. So far, 11 states and the District of Columbia require paid family leave and 16 states and the District of Columbia have paid sick leave (National Conference of the State Legislatures, 2022). Minnesota does not require either. At the state level, those in Minnesota and other states without statewide paid family and medical leave policies can advocate for this.

Those in Minnesota can follow the Minnesotans for Paid Parental Leave Coalition and access their many resources that lay out how paid parental leave would be implemented and how to advocate for it: [http://paidleavemn.org/about-us/](http://paidleavemn.org/about-us/). In their own words, the Minnesotans for Paid Family & Medical Leave Coalition “supports a state-administered paid leave insurance program, where everyone contributes, and everyone benefits. Paid Family & Medical Leave is different than paid sick days which would allow workers to earn sick days for minor illness of themselves or family members (which is not yet required of all employers in Minnesota).” The Minnesota Breastfeeding Coalition, the Midwest Doulas, and the Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, among many others, are organizational members. I recommend reading through the 2019 Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Report, linked here:

Compiled by researchers from the Center on Women, Gender and Public Policy, University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs and the Institute on Women’s Policy Research, the report details the design and implementation of paid family leave and medical insurance.

Those across the United States may also be interested to check out Family Values @ Work (FV@W) to see if the network is active in their state. In their own words, FV@W “grew out of the recognition that valuing caregiving and enabling people to be good providers and good family members is key to achieving racial, gender and economic equity” (https://familyvaluesatwork.org/about-us/). Family Values @ Work raises funds for state coalitions to design and implement Family and Medical Leave Insurance and Earned Sick Days. FV@W functions from a framework that aligns with a social reproduction theory lens. They state that “Current policies still reflect the notion that families have someone home full time, even as women are primary or co-primary breadwinners in two-thirds of families. Time to care is a jobs issue, as well as a key to economic self-sufficiency and to well-being for children, families and seniors” (https://familyvaluesatwork.org/about-us/).

I hope the information here has given you ideas about how to advocate for better conditions for lactating teachers. I now move to discuss the implications of my study for the field of teacher education prior to addressing the limitations of my study and areas for further study.
Implications for Teacher Education

Frame Professionalism in the Context of Capitalism

Teachers may not realize that an accommodating attitude toward expectations for professionalism is not serving them. Following the rules set forth in schools can feel like doing the “right thing” to teachers, because a capitalist orientation towards life and work has been so thoroughly naturalized in our current historical context. Freire (1970) reminds us that “The oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of people, people themselves, time—everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal” (p. 58). In this vein, the job description is a priority over and above the needs of the employee. Freire (1970) says that humanization signifies subversion; therefore, constant control of time and energy is essential. By controlling the oppressed, the oppressor can “change them into apparently inanimate ‘things’” (Freire, 1970, p. 59). In this process, the very human needs of teachers get lost. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Althusser (1971) points out that many teachers don’t realize that by unquestioningly fulfilling the duties of professionalism, they reproduce state ideologies of capitalism:

How many [teachers] (the majority) do not even begin to suspect the “work” the system (which is bigger than they are and crushes them) forces them to do, or worse, put all their heart and ingenuity into performing it with the most advanced awareness (the famous new methods!). So little do they suspect it that their own devotion contributes to the maintenance and nourishment of this ideological representation of the School… the dominant Ideological State Apparatus. (p. 157)
The role of teachers—including the tight control of their use of time, space, and bodies—is designed to reproduce white supremacist patriarchal capitalism. Pre-service and in-service teachers can be taught to think about professionalism in a critical way.

**Use Critical Theory in Education to Contextualize School Happenings**

Theories that address the role of embodiment and/or emotion and intersectional identity within institutions, like misfits (Garland-Thomson, 2011); outlaw emotions (Jagger, 1989); and pleasure activism (brown, 2019), can be used to help us think through the role our bodies play in school contexts.

**Cultural Historical Activity Theory**

Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), used in Chapter Four, offers us a tool for thinking about the incompatibility of various bodily needs within current school organization. In addition, CHAT offers a method for making work that teachers do visible, specifically their reproductive labor, which has been invisibilized by the institution but nonetheless affects how it functions. Using CHAT to compare two or more activity systems also shows where transformation within current systems can occur. Engeström (2001) writes that “An expansive transformation is accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity” (p. 137). Times when collective groups of teachers or folx in schools are discontent about how an activity system is working are opportunities for transformation. For instance, schools become more humane and desirable workplaces for lactating teachers when schools change the division of labor by providing space and time to express milk, and paid parental leave.
**Misfits**

The theoretical concept of “misfits,” as introduced in Chapter Five, can be used by educators to critically examine the way teachers and students are framed as misfits to the institutional design across race, class, gender, sexuality, national, linguistic, and ability identities. By critically examining why and how people experience “misfitting” within institutional design, educators can better understand what stands in the way of realizing diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Misfitting reveals specific ways institutions can be re-designed in terms of time, space, and policy to accommodate the range of bodies that are in the space.

**Outlaw Emotions and Pleasure Activism**

The theoretical ideas of “outlaw emotions” and “pleasure activism,” as discussed in Chapter Six, provide a way to account for the many embodied, emotional experiences that take place in schools and that provide information about what schools can do to become equitable spaces. Those who are misfits in the institutional design of schools, and who experience outlaw emotions because they question and challenge school design, have important information to tell us about how to show up in humanizing ways in school spaces. Those who share their outlaw emotions and who acknowledge the ways schools are failing to be liberatory, pleasurable spaces bring attention to what needs to change.

**Critical Pedagogy of the Body**

Teachers often said that a barrier to self-advocacy was that it felt socially inappropriate to talk about breast/chestfeeding. Ava said that it was hard for her to self-advocate because “Everyone gets all weird around the idea of breastfeeding and
pumping, and they feel super uncomfortable when you talk about it.” Charlie, who was a union member advocate in her building, commented that

The fact that I was talking about breastmilk—much less my breastmilk—made everybody very uncomfortable. So I think [administration] were just kind of like, “Okay, [we’ll provide a lactation space]” because it was a bunch of men and they really wanted this conversation to end.

The body’s functions, parts, presentations, and feelings are information that we read about ourselves and communicate to others. Jones and Hughes-Decatur (2012) advocate for “a critical pedagogy of the body” in teacher education. Jones and Hughes-Decatur argue that in teacher education, “Exploring the assumptions we have about our bodies that are always being read by others, including students in the classroom—opens up possibilities for articulating how and why our bodies matter in education” (p. 54). We need further tools for discourse about the body, particularly in relation to equity and inclusion of historically marginalized populations. In this vein, Jones (2013) invites literacy educators to

tend to literacies we use to make sense of bodies—our own bodies, bodies of colleagues, bodies of students, bodies filling public and private spaces… In these critiques we might wonder how and why teachers talk about their bodies and body image with colleagues and their students, and how these literacies influence the ways bodies and pedagogies are performed and experienced inside and outside the classroom. (p. 526)
Teachers need practice talking about their bodies and recognizing their bodies as an important component of their teacher identity. We can work to normalize naming body parts and needs.

**Limitations and Areas for Future Study**

**Focus for Analyses**

There are areas for analysis I would like to pursue in the future. I would like to analyze my data while considering the construction of white femininity and white ideals of motherhood. This would be an instructive way to notice specifically how race is at play for the white participants in my study. Another area for future analysis is what can be learned from the bodily sensations that accompany lactating at work, especially hunger and tiredness. There is such a clear tie between the need to eat and to rest during early parenthood and while expressing milk. I want to use a social reproduction theory lens to think about how sleep is a necessity that is given up by lactating workers who do not have paid time off after giving birth and during the initiation of breast/chestfeeding, when babies typically nurse every two to three hours, including through the night, for the first six months. The energy given up by the birthing and/or bodyfeeding parent is considered “not work” and so they do their daily job despite lack of adequate rest.

I was also captivated by how many participants discussed “under producing” and anxieties about producing enough milk. Given that the amount of milk produced is affected by the amount of time someone pumps milk, by feeling relaxed enough to let down, and by being able to pump often, it would be another way to show the relationality between our bodies and the spaces we operate in.
Another strand I had to let go of related to “champions”—people who made a difference for lactating teachers and came up in interviews as those whose care helped them to get through the day. I tried to include these folx throughout, but I would like to focus on the work of champions to create grassroots change, and how this can lead to structural change. Related to this, I would like to better understand the relationship between individual acts of care, grassroots organizing, and local and systems change. This in some ways relates to my decision to focus on lactating teachers as my primary participants, with community expert conversations used to contextualize my work. I could spend more time with community expert interviews in the future.

Finally, I am interested in the correlation between teacher burnout and the tight control of teachers’ time in school, which manifests itself clearly in the experiences of lactating teachers. Skaalvik E., & Skaalvik, S. (2011) found that “Time pressure has been found to correlate positively with teacher burnout” (p. 1031). In addition, “Time pressure was particularly strongly related to the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout” (p.1031). Further studies could include whether time pressure leads to teacher burnout for lactating teachers and/or teachers who are parents of small children.

Participant Demographics

If the participants in the study, who “fit” the institution of schooling in terms of identity markers like their class, sexuality, race, and nationality, are having dehumanizing experiences expressing milk at work, then what about teachers whose identities have been historically suppressed and oppressed within the racist, ableist, homophobic history of schooling? What about teachers whose bodies don’t fit the normalized white cisgender
female teacher identity? What is their experience with lactation in schools? A critical limitation of this study is that the experiences of those across demographics and identities are not accounted for. Future studies could include lactating teachers across racial, gender, and class identities. In addition, while it is outside of my training as a qualitative researcher, a large-scale study that compares the conditions for lactating teachers in those states that do and do not have parental and medical leave would be useful to show whether and how policies make a difference. It would also be helpful to conduct a study that include participants who work in schools in a variety of roles, such as those who are paraprofessionals. This would reveal more dimensions of how time and space are navigated by those in schools, and how institutional support in terms of policy varies across school roles.

Methodology

There are a few different ways I could approach poetic inquiry in the future. One challenge given to me was to include my voice as a researcher in more of the poems I constructed from participant interviews. Doing so could make my role in the interview process more explicit. I also aspired to write one poem from the transcript of each participant, and I would like to go back and do so. Related to this, in a separate study, lactating teachers could meet together to write and share poems about their experiences lactating at work. We could engage the theoretical frames used in this study to critically examine what personal experiences reveal about institutional norms.
Concluding Story

I chose to investigate the experience of lactating teachers because I wanted to understand my own journey expressing milk at work. I didn’t have the capacity to do anything to change the conditions for myself while I was pumping. But once I was done pumping, I created a lactation space in my building to reclaim what I experienced as an embodied, dehumanizing encounter with the institution I worked for. The same holds true for researching, writing, and sharing this dissertation. The physical, mental and emotional labor of creating a lactation space and of gathering data and writing up this dissertation were ways to establish that actually, how lactating people’s bodies feel in institutional spaces matters. How my body felt—vulnerable, unsafe, exposed, not cared for—matters.

From 2020 to 2021, I spent 40 hours applying for an equity grant to fund a lactation room in the building where I worked, dealing with the red tape of institutional restrictions, and creating the space. My colleagues spent additional hours applying for the grant with me and helped me to clear out the space, paint it, and assemble furniture. All of this was unpaid labor. In an embodied way, I experienced another manifestation of how capitalism invisibilizes carework. If creating a lactation space was truly valuable to the university education department where I worked, or the university overall, my colleagues and I would have been compensated for our labor.

Creating the space cost about $1,000 dollars, funded through an equity grant. The lactation space can be checked out via Google calendar; the Google calendar is maintained by the front office in the building. There is a comfortable chair with a table for setting a pump. A floor lamp allows for dimmed lighting. Someone donated a fridge
and microwave; the fridge can be used to store milk and the microwave can be used to sanitize pump parts. There are hooks for hanging bags or clothing, and a mirror for adjusting clothes after pumping. There is a white noise machine for privacy. I bought art from a local artist for the walls, and asked people to bring in drawings by their children to put in additional frames. A floor rug and artificial plants also add to a calming setting. A bulletin board in the space has resources for support in the community and at the school. There is a changing table for a baby.

Figure 11

*Lactation Space at my Work—Before and After*
I hope that for those who use the space, it communicates that the work they do to pump milk matters and that they belong. I hope that this dissertation study contributes to our ability to account for the multiplicity of teacher bodies in schools, and adds to an understanding of the embodied, daily experiences of lactating teachers.

In *all about love*, bell hooks (2000) encourages us to embrace a love ethic, which counteracts capitalist ways of interacting. She says that awakening to love can happen only as we let go of our obsession with power and domination. Culturally, all spheres of life in the United States—politics, religion, the workplace, domestic households, intimate relations—should and could have as their foundation a love ethic… A love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well. (p. 87)

hooks goes on to explain that living with a love ethic changes the way we live each day, because we believe everyone is interconnected. We “make choices based on a belief that
honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions” (p. 88).

I wonder what schools would look like if they prioritized a love ethic? Is this even possible? I think it is hard in school environments. I think of how many of the teachers I interviewed that had the worst experiences of pumping at work were in schools with the most progressive values—often in urban schools where commitments to anti-racism, to combating ableism, homophobia and classism are explicitly part of the school’s ethic. Yet the way time and space were organized stifled the manifestation of these values. What if an ethics of care determined choices in schools, rather than laws and traditions steeped in racism, sexism, and ableism?

For now, those of us working in these spaces can make a choice, when possible, to prioritize a love ethic over the capitalist values of the institution. Individuals who don’t fit the design of schools can collaborate to complain and to challenge policies and practices. The solution to lactating teachers’ loneliness, stress, and anger should not be all up to them: There are policies and practices that districts and states can put into place that are more humanizing. In the same breath, those of us who have experienced being a misfit can use this to cultivate a love ethic, which often runs counter to how schools currently function and runs counter to the begrudging and reluctant tide of institutional change.
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Appendix A: Community Expert Recruitment Email

Research Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Elise Toedt. I am a PhD candidate in Literacy, Language and Culture in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Minnesota. I am conducting qualitative research to explore the daily, visceral experiences of lactating teachers navigating institutional constraints in order to feed their babies. Across disciplines, scant research has been conducted that focuses on the embodied and emotional experiences of lactating parents at work. I am interested in this topic because of my personal experiences as a working and breastfeeding parent. The title of the research study is “It’s Really Hard to Pump as a Teacher!”: An Inquiry into the Embodied Experiences of Lactating Teachers.” This research is supported by the University of Minnesota.

I am contacting you because you have been identified as someone who may be able to offer additional insight into the structural and systemic barriers faced by people expressing milk at work, and more specifically, lactating teachers. I am wondering if you are willing to be contacted for 1 or 2, 60 minute follow up interview(s) on Zoom? If you agree, I will contact you to set up an interview & will send you a consent form with further information about the study and privacy protections. You can also leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you. Consent forms can be changed at any time.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP, the Research Participants’ Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 or go to https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns.

If you have any questions or would like to sign the consent form to participate in the research, I can be reached by email at toedt012@umn.edu.
Appendix B: K12 Teacher Recruitment Email

Research Recruitment Script—Teachers

Hello, my name is Elise Toedt. I am a PhD candidate in Literacy, Language and Culture in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Minnesota. I am conducting research to explore the daily, visceral experiences of lactating teachers navigating institutional constraints in order to feed their babies. Across disciplines, scant research has been conducted that focuses on the embodied and emotional experiences of lactating parents at work. The title of the research study is “It’s Really Hard to Pump as a Teacher!”: An Inquiry into the Embodied Experiences of Lactating Teachers.” This research is supported by the University of Minnesota.

I am recruiting participants for this study. If you have expressed milk while working as a K-12 teacher from 2010 - present, you are eligible to participate. I am especially interested to hear your perspective if you identify as someone historically marginalized within the profession of teaching (due to race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.) and/or if you have navigated expressing milk at work as a single parent. I am interested in this topic because of my personal experiences: If you choose to participate, I envision interviews as collaborative and conversational.

Participation in this research entails a one hour interviews(s) on Zoom. Interviews will be recorded using the Zoom record function or a digital voice recorder and stored on a password protected device. All the transcripts of the interviews will be anonymized. Interviews will be scheduled at a mutually beneficial date and time.

You can choose not to participate in this study, or leave the study at any time, and it will not be held against you. You can also leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you. Consent forms can be changed at any time.

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and data materials to people who have a need to review this information. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this institution.

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 or go to https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns.

If you have any questions or would like to sign the consent form to participate in the research, we can be reached by email at toedt012@umn.edu.
Appendix C: IRB Approved Consent Form

Title of Research Study: “It’s Really Hard to Pump as a Teacher!”: An Inquiry into the Embodied Experiences of Lactating Teachers

Researchers: Timothy Lensmire, Elise Toedt

Supported By: This research is supported by the University of Minnesota.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to take part in this research study because you have identified interest as a) If you have expressed milk and/or breastfed your child while working as a K-12 teacher from 2010 - present, or b) someone who may be able to offer additional insight into the structural and systemic barriers faced by lactating workers, and more specifically, lactating teachers.

Investigator Team Contact Information:
For questions about research appointments, the research study, research results, or other concerns, contact the study team:

Faculty Research Adviser: Timothy Lensmire, lensmire@umn.edu

PhD Student Researcher: Elise Toedt, 630-306-9007, toedt012@umn.edu

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore the embodied experiences of K-12 lactating teachers in the United States. Teachers’ experiences expressing milk in the workplace are a relevant but understudied topic in educational research. Seventy-seven percent of teachers identify as female. This study is practically and theoretically important because it establishes the need for, at the very least, workplace lactation accommodations and illustrates one specific gender equity issue resulting from the capitalist, patriarchal institutional design of U.S. schools. This study addresses the following key research questions:

1. What are common discourses concerning time and space evoked by teachers that situate the lactating body in schools, and what might they reveal about institutional values?
2. How do teachers describe their milk production in school spaces in terms of emotions and bodily sensations?
3. To what extent do lactating teachers collaborate to change school policies and practices that hamper bodyfeeding at work?
4. To what extent does the visceral experience of “not fitting” the commonplace role of a teacher provide an opportunity for teachers to interrogate how the institution of schooling is designed and for whom?
5. How has COVID 19 affected bodyfeeding teachers?

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

What happens if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research”?

There are a few types of participation in this study:

**General participants:**
- Answer a brief questionnaire about your experiences lactating while at work
- One, 60-minute interview on Zoom.
- You are invited to share arts-based artifacts like pictures of your lactation space, written poems, stories or images that give an audience insight into the experiences lactating teachers face. Any arts-based artifacts will be anonymized if you select to share them for the study.
- Interviews will be recorded using the Zoom record function or a digital voice recorder and stored on a password protected device. Transcripts of the interviews will be anonymized.
- Interviews will be scheduled at a mutually beneficial date and time on Zoom.

**Community Expert:** You will be contacted for one, 60-minute interview on Zoom.
- Interviews will be recorded using the Zoom record function or digital voice recorder and stored on a password protected device.
- Transcripts of the interviews will be anonymized.
- Interviews will be scheduled at a mutually beneficial date and time.

Is there any way that being in this study could be bad for me?

There are no foreseen risks for participating in this study.

Will being in this study help me in any way?
We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include time to critically reflect on your own experiences.

**How long will the research last?**
Data will be collected until Spring 2022; however, the time frame for your participation is as detailed above.

**How many people will participate in this study?**
We expect the up to 200 people participating in the questionnaire, up to 30 people as general participants & community experts, and 3-5 people as focal participants.

**What happens if I do not want to be in this research?**
You can choose not to participate in this study, or leave the study at any time, and it will not be held against you.

**What happens if I say “Yes”, but I change my mind later?**
You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you. Consent forms can be changed at any time.

**Will it cost me anything to participate in this research study?**
Taking part in this research study will not lead to any costs to you.

**What happens to the information collected for the research?**
Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and data materials to people who have a need to review this information. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this institution.

All data will be store in password protected digital platforms:
- All recordings/transcripts will be stored on a private password protected computer.

**Will anyone besides the study team be at my consent meeting?**
No.

**Whom do I contact if I have questions, concerns or feedback about my experience?**
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 or go to https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns.
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.

**Will I have a chance to provide feedback after the study is over?**

The Human Research Protection Program may ask you to complete a survey that asks about your experience as a research participant. You do not have to complete the survey if you do not want to. If you do choose to complete the survey, your responses will be anonymous.

If you are not asked to complete a survey, but you would like to share feedback, please contact the study team or the HRPP. See the “Investigator Contact Information” of this form for study team contact information and “Whom do I contact if I have questions, concerns or feedback about my experience?” of this form for HRPP contact information.

**Research Participation:**

Please initial which levels of participation that you give consent for as part of this research.

I consent to participate in the study as a **General Study Participant**

I consent to participate in the study as a **Community Expert**

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

_________________________________________  ______________
Signature of Participant  Date

_________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

_________________________________________  ______________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent  Date

_________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent
To digitally provide consent, please copy the segment of text above that matches your interest in participation, paste it in an email, sign and date digitally, and send it to Elise Toedt (toedt012@umn.edu).
Appendix D: K12 Teacher Interview Protocol

Opening Script

I am interviewing you today to learn more about your experiences as someone who bodyfed while working as a K-12 teacher. The purpose of my study is to explore the daily, visceral experiences of lactating teachers navigating institutional constraints. I am interested to focus on the embodied and emotional experiences of lactating parents at work. The findings from this study may be used for future publications and/or conference proposals.

During our interview, please let me know if you want us to repeat or restate a question. If you do not wish to answer a question, you can just say, “I want to pass on the question.”

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview? [After answering questions or if there are no questions]. I am going to begin recording now so that we can begin the interview.

Starting points:
Where do you work now? What has your day been like so far? What is your site like?

Possible topics to be covered:

- Stories about bodyfeeding / expressing milk at work
- The sensory experience
- The emotional experience
- Navigation of time and space during the school day
- People that helped or any coalition building or advocacy
- Other ways your intersectional identity has made you feel you don’t “fit” the space of schools or the occupation of teaching, including race, gender, sex, and ability
- Experiences of agency and triumph

Possible Questions:

1. What dates and in what buildings did you pump at work?
2. Can you describe the space where you expressed milk while at work? Who created the space? What feelings do you associate with the space? How close/far were you from a bathroom?
3. Did your school site have a specific policy and/or practice in place to ensure you had sufficient time and space to express and store breast/chest milk during the school day? Can you explain? Why do you think this policy or practice was/was not in place?
4. Did you have co-workers who supported you in specific ways so that you could express milk at work? How about administrators? Who else provided support?
5. Briefly describe where you stored breast/chest milk (i.e. personal cooler, refrigerator in staff lounge)
6. Did you express milk at work or breast/chestfeed during COVID-19? If yes, how did COVID-19 impact your experience?
7. Do you prefer pumping or bodyfeeding? Why?
8. Can you tell me a story related to your biggest challenge while pumping at work?
9. Can you tell me a story related to an experience of agency or triumph while pumping at work?
10. What are three emotions you associate with your experience pumping at work? Can you explain why you chose these emotions?
11. What are a few words you would use to describe the bodily sensation of pumping at work? Can you explain why you chose these words?
12. What are a few words you would use to describe the bodily sensation of breast/chestfeeding your infant? Can you explain why you chose these words?
13. Who do you think values the work you do when you express milk at work and why?
14. Are you willing to send me a picture of the place where you pumped?
15. I know for some people I have interviewed, it is difficult for them to produce as much milk if they don’t feel comfortable and safe when they breast/chestfeed. Some teachers also need to look at pictures of their child while they pump. Does any of this resonate for you?
16. Some teachers I have interviewed have mentioned that breast/chestfeeding also causes changes in other daily work routines, like when they arrive at school, how much water they drink, or how much they use the restroom. Do you find your daily habits or routines change at all when pumping? How?
17. Do you feel that U.S. society supports breastfeeding parents? Why or why not?
18. What are your biggest motivators for expressing milk at work?
19. In an ideal world, how would you create the experience for teachers who are breastfeeding?
20. What advice would you give a new teacher about to begin expressing milk at work?

Helpful probes:
Would you explain further?
Would you give me an example of what you mean?
Would you say more?
Appendix E: Community Experts Interview Protocol

Opening Script

I am interviewing you today to learn more about your experiences as someone who may be able to offer additional insight into the structural and systemic barriers faced by breast/chestfeeding workers, and more specifically, lactating teachers. The findings from this study may be used for future publications and/or conference proposals.

During our interview, please let me know if you want us to repeat or restate a question. If you do not wish to answer a question, you can just say, “I want to pass on the question.” The recording function may be turned off at any point, upon your request.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview? [After answering questions or if there are no questions]. I am going to begin recording now so that we can begin the interview.

Possible Topics to be covered:

- Stories about your experiences working with and/or advocating for lactating workers
- Stories about systemic and structural barriers faced by lactating workers
- Stories about community work you’ve done to support bodyfeeding workers, including collaboration and policy changes
- What barriers or challenges you perceive to reform regarding lactating teachers, including as related to parental leave, health insurance, laws, workplace norms
- What barriers or challenges you perceive lactating workers face, especially those whose identities are under-represented in the field of teaching due to race, sexual orientation, gender, ability, etc.
- What victories and alliances you have witnessed or been a part of related to lactating peoples’ experiences in the workplace.

Questions:
1. What work do you do to support breast/chestfeeding parents and families and why you think it is important?
2. What dilemmas and challenges do you think are faced by lactating workers?
3. What have you learned about supporting lactating workers?
4. I noticed you have a breastfeeding equity statement – What is breastfeeding equity to you? What are barriers you see to achieving bodyfeeding equity?
5. What are some efforts you are making to reduce the disparities in breast/chestfeeding rates?
6. Are there any special challenges schools might face in meeting the expectations for a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace?
7. What are some efforts you are making to reduce the disparities in breast/chestfeeding rates?
8. In an ideal world, how would you create the experience for teachers who are
bodyfeeding?

*Helpful probes:*
Would you explain further?
Would you give me an example of what you mean?
Would you say more?
Appendix F: Informal Survey Questions for Teacher Participants

1. Email
2. First and last name
3. Preferred Pronouns
4. Racial Identification
5. Sexual Orientation
6. Are there any other descriptors that are important to your identity? (class, ability, nationality, ethnicity, etc)
7. Primarily what type of school were you teaching in when you pumped at work?
8. How would you describe the geographic setting where you worked when you expressed milk as a teacher?
9. How many years have you worked in a school? (As a teacher or in another capacity).
10. What year(s) did you express milk while working in a school? (can include as a teacher, a paraprofessional, substitute, etc and includes while working remote). For example: 2017 & 2019
11. All together (including any time you pumped) how long did you pump while working in a school?
12. Was there a dedicated lactation space in your building?
13. Did your school have a specific policy and/or practice in place to ensure you had sufficient time and space to express and store milk during the school day?
14. If you have time: What are three words you would use to describe your experience pumping at work?
15. If you have time: What are a few words you would use to describe the bodily sensation of pumping at work? What are a few words you would use to describe the bodily sensation of bodyfeeding your infant?
16. If willing, share an image of the lactation space you used or another image that represents your journey expressing milk at work in some way.
17. Optional description of image