The Disenfranchised Grief of a Blackbird: Teacher Discernment, Introspection, and Healing through Autoethnography

Crystal Marcella Voegele

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THE DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF OF A BLACKBIRD: TEACHER DISCERNMENT, INTROSPECTION, AND HEALING THROUGH AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

by

Crystal Marcella Voegele

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education Major: Adult and Higher Education

The University of Memphis

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Gratitude has been a constant source of hope throughout my dissertation journey. I have found solace in my seasoned guidance (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Thank you to my committee. Dr. Edith taught me perseverance, proving me a model and space to develop my writing stamina and a lens, Marxist feminism, to make sense of my lived experiences. Thank you, Dr. Edith Gnanadass, for your encouragement and belief in me, especially, when I forgot to believe in myself. Dr. Alison Happel-Parkins challenged me to think beyond myself and abilities, but, most importantly, she reminded me of writer’s worth. She dared me to take risks and find my voice through methodology. Her authenticity moves and inspires my own. Thank you, Dr. HP. Dr. Nancy Gallavan has been a source of inspiration for many years. Her brilliance is noted in her successful career as a teacher and teacher educator, but her heart is what sets her apart. She has mentored marginalized students for most of her career; me being one of them. She has been not only served as my guide through these torrents but an interpreter, an encourager, and a reminder that teaching transcends roles, ranks, and obligations. Thank you, Dr. Nancy Gallavan. Dr. Wendy Griswold pulled me from the mire. After my dad died, I quit my doctoral studies. Becoming a doctor had been Dad’s dream for me, and without him, I no longer had the drive to continue, but Dr. Wendy checked in and reminded me of my worth. I had a year of coursework with her following Dad’s death and found that pieces of my soul were beginning to heal. Her contemplative approach along with her cultivating spaces for community to develop was the impetus for my research and current teaching philosophy. Her time, energy, and love have served my spirit in the darkest of days. Thank you, Dr. Wendy. You are a model of grief-informed education.
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Finally, I thank God for pulling from the pit and putting a new song in my heart. You light my path and lead me through the depths and valleys unknown. You have placed these most wonderful people in my life, and, to you, my friend, I am thankful.
Dedication

To the voices within me—my ancestral wellspring, I pay homage. Grandmother’s wisdom was warmth, her stories sustenance, thawing my fingers with her flame. She is my story. She has stood with me throughout this work; her presence noted in every page; her legacy lives through me. My dad’s perseverance was strength, his model I witnessed in awe. He ushered me onward when I desperately wanted to give up. Channeling his spirit has been a vital part of my grief work throughout this most difficult process. He was a warrior, and somehow he made me one too. Dad, I love you THIS much (arms stretched wide as only you could do).

Of the living, my mom is often an unsung hero, and not until this work did I really understand why. She has served without notice, and that is by design. You are my heart. You gave me life, fed me, clothed me, and supported me come Hell or high water. You are this work. You have been my advocate my whole life, and, for you, I am most grateful.

To my daughters and granddaughters, I found you within my words, my worry, and my whys. You grounded me and reminded me why this work is most important. May this work help you find your voice as you have helped me find mine.
Abstract

Throughout my life, grief’s torrents have run undercurrent to my personal and professional journey. It has taken my arrival to mid-life, decades of professional and life experiences as well as higher education for this awareness to flow. I have been grieving for my lost self as woman; my shattered voice as a teacher; and the freedom to choose as a daughter of this nation. Utilizing a Marxist feminist lens, I will examine how patriarchal loss and capitalistic constructs rooted in an undeveloped class consciousness have perpetuated my own sense of powerlessness, detachment, and compulsivity, reifying my indoctrination into the teaching profession (Apple, 1988, 2019; Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959). Coming into this awareness has been the work of discernment whereas healing has been the result of grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988).

This dissertation is an examination of my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief and subsequent transformational learning within my personal, professional, and pedagogical intersectionality. Storying my way within these concentric spheres through autoethnography, a healing methodology, I will examine dialectically how my positionality intersect with my profession and pedagogy, perpetuating grief while promoting healing (Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011; Pennebaker & Evans, 2014; Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016; Poulos, 2021). To shed light on disenfranchisement within any context, voices from the culture itself must rise up; silences must rupture (Adams et al., 2014). Stories must be shared to shed light on the struggles, and they must be accessible to reach the intended audience—educators from K-12, adult education, and higher education (Adams et al., 2014, Chang, 2008; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Poulos,
2013). It is my hope that by sharing my story, my lived experiences, others will shatter their own silences and heal with me.

*Keywords:* Autoethnography, transformative learning, individuation, grief work, discernment, healing, Marxist feminism, patriarchal loss, alienation
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Chapter One

Introduction

In my memory, everyone knew who I was when I entered the schoolhouse as a second grader. My kinfolk were well-established miscreants and even had a nook of town known for their namesake. I was one of them, White trash that would never amount to anything; and true to form, I was a failure by most accounts. The first days of school for many students are reaffirming and encouraging, but for me, I spent most of my days in the woods, choosing to skip out on the incessant ridicule and systemic bullying that plagued many kids like me. Not only were ridicule and bullying tolerated, but they were perpetrated by many so-called good-intentioned teachers. Poor Principal Tabor had to tear me from my mother’s junker-of-the-month on more than one occasion, my knuckles draining as my face would flush. Too hurt to cry, betrayed by my mama, I walked those 200 steps to the entrance of the school, and opened the heavy glass door with my oily, dirty, splotched hands, and my feet like the rest of my body, burning with resistance. Jail and school smelled and felt the same to me.

“Blackbirds, grab your readers and go to the hall,” Ms. Langston, holding her clipboard, spoke in her going-through-the-motions monotone. Click, clack, her brown-tassel heels sounded across the floor as sniggers erupted in the room. We blackbirds fumbled embarrassedly to escape the walk of shame that always ensued. “Dirty blackbird,” one boy always managed to whisper as I walked by, and he wasn’t lying. I was. No matter how many baths I took, dirt and smoke covered my tattered clothes and body-like scales. “Wild” was the word I heard Ms. Langston use one day in the hallway when describing me to another teacher. No matter how poor we were, though, my mama
made sure I had lunch money, refusing free lunches. Despite her sacrifice, I often got
trays but never touched a bite. To succumb to the food, in my child's mind, was to allow
myself to be broken no matter how hungry I was. Along with the other nonreaders, I
perched in a nest where nourishment never came. Nobody ventured to the hallway to
teach us; we were rejected from the class, starved for sustenance and acceptance,
expected to fail. The books we were provided were missing pages and words, remnants of
Dick and Jane for hours a day.

For years, I remained in this cycle of despair and grief. I hated school, and I hated
teachers. My existence beyond the school’s walls was no haven either. Worries and
experiences unbeknownst to the redbirds and bluebirds of the school filled my mind. I
loved my dad, and losing him to divorce and the Army that year was like losing myself. I
was an anomaly, a wild child being raised by wounded, broken women warriors. Before
age 12, I became well-versed in poverty, oppression, homelessness, and survival. Until
middle school, I deemed myself unteachable and learning disabled, reproducing and
replicating the brokenness that surrounded me, but hope took flight when I entered 6th
grade, leaving the building and teachers behind who to this day still haunt my dreams and
aspirations.

Middle school was different. For the first time, teachers began to see me. These
teachers were veterans, experienced teachers who wove a tapestry of delight in their
classrooms, cultivating spaces for creativity, expressive writing, choice, and autonomous
learning. No longer could I hide in the woods; I was missed. My unorthodox reading
teacher began encouraging me to read and write, things that never made sense to me. It
was not long after she began prodding and sharing materials with me that I began
teaching myself how language worked. After learning about the functionality of a dictionary, I began reading my grandmother’s yard sale novels, sounding out, underlining, and defining words, taking each sentence apart for meaning and visualizing scenes for imagery until I no longer relied on the dictionary for understanding. Weekends were spent pouring over books at our local library where I would greet morning staff and remain until the doors closed. Inspired by the characters, settings, and plotlines from novels, I began penning my own tales of adventures, crafting characters and detailing locales that had no limits other than my imagination.

My reading teacher took my newfound discoveries by not only asking me to share my stories with my class but going so far as to have me come to her other classes to read my most cherished works to them. Her classroom was a sanctuary for writing freely, being courageous, and taking risks. Writing workshop was often conducted with music and aromatherapy; her energy enveloped the room as her spirit ignited the spirits within her students. From captivating storytelling to rich discussions, every class was an awakening of the senses and the spirit, an opportunity to see and experience myself differently. Her classroom was like my grandma’s living room, where I was entrenched in spirit. We may have been poor, but the house was always filled with stories and conversations, a sense of belonging beyond explanation. I delighted in learning. These teachers were not just inspirations; they were soul sisters heralding me into the healing and most sacred sisterhood of teaching.

Heeding the call to teach became an anthem for me. From sixth grade onward, I took note of inspirational teachers; those gifts who sparked creativity, passion, and spirit; those authentic healers who weaved wellness into a holistic, responsive network of
education. Even as an adolescent, I knew that teachers with heart captivated instead of
encaging their learners. It is the phenomenon that contributed to my rescue from the mire
of poverty and destitution. They were vulnerable, sharing their lives and failures,
modeling, muddling, and mustering the courage to face the challenges that they all
encountered. They were real. The most seasoned teachers commanded their content and
pedagogical approaches and were deeply trusted to teach what needed to be taught and in
ways that transformed the minds of their students. No pacing guides determined
directions; progress relied solely on these teachers’ responsiveness to their learners and
their complex understanding of what each student needed. Although trauma still ran
through my blood and grief beckoned an audience, I began the slow process of healing,
one story at a time. It wasn’t until high school that I witnessed disenfranchisement in
teaching, specifically the disenfranchisement of teachers’ grief, and I am only now
understanding how it manifested in me and impacted my life.

Two student deaths occurred that school year. Both students were friends and
classmates of mine. One student’s death was sudden, an asthma attack. Not only was he a
classmate, but he was also my neighbor. Forever standing in my memory is this small,
white-headed high schooler whose smile still electrifies my soul. We used to fish from
the banks of a miry pond that ran alongside our homes. Our favorite fishing spot was
nestled under one of the most encompassing river birches that shedded her limbs but not
her secrets, rocks cascading beneath, perfect for perching. We spent many an evening
awash in the moonlight, bathing in the love song of whippoorwills, tree frogs, and
katydids. His white lab was always in tow. I used to joke that he and his lab could be
twins; they were both iridescent. As we would cast, his pup would wait anxiously for a
bite, then jump into the water the minute we began tugging through the tension of our lines. Days after my friend’s passing, I made the solo journey to the pond, finding his dog there waiting at our spot, his snout buried in his muddy paws. It is an image that remains seared into my spirit, the grief of a moment that I shared with this creature. Sitting on the bank, I cried and cried, his young pup at my side. Less than a week later, his family found the dog dead under our tree. I still sit with this grief. My friend’s death passed through the school like a cold breeze with little notice except in the classrooms where his seat remained vacant.

Just a few months later, the death of a most beloved student who had fought valiantly to live as she waited for a new heart, finally received it and, within days, rejected it. This loss reverberated throughout the community; her battle was public. The grief continued to accumulate for students who cried and commiserated whenever possible; however, most memorable were my teachers’ responses. Having been so inspired by my teachers’ creativity and responsiveness in the past, I was now shocked by the lack of compassion and empathy for students who were clearly suffering. I was likewise appalled by their own lack of sadness. Some teachers were stoic, moving desks, eliminating all presence of the deceased, staying true to the course of their curriculum. One teacher was so militant in her approach that she greeted us at the door of our classroom with a test. The grief failed to even be observed! Who had time to grieve when we had AP exams approaching? Some teachers took a moment to pause, superficially offering some kind words, sharing some odious platitudes, and upholding their beliefs about life going on. Witnessing these interactions made me question whether these
teachers had hearts or not. Yet, at the end of the day, I was finally taught by a grieving teacher.

Branded in my memory as a source of great grief is the teacher who dared to grieve. Entering her classroom, I felt a heaviness, a veil of sadness covered every corner. For the first time that school year, she was sitting on a stool in front of the class. Her typically made-up face was devoid of color—her blue eyes were glassy, her small lips pursed, her face aged in the moment. Our typical warm greeting at the door acquiesced into cold, hard silence. Normally an intensively talkative class, a somber presence enveloped the space. We were all still, sitting, and silent as the hum of the air conditioning pacified an armistice. Two chairs remained empty. Atop their desks were trinkets, flowers, letters, and colorful works of art. This expression was the first open acknowledgment of my white-headed friend.

After several minutes, she said she was not supposed to talk about what had happened to either student who had recently passed. Other than courteous civilities, teachers were encouraged to keep things as normal as possible to avoid student outbursts and concerned parents. The administration felt that it would be easier for the students to simply get back to business and not wallow in the losses. Teachers were told, “Put your big girl panties on,” which explained the apathetic responses of my teachers. As she explained her current reality, tears welled up in her eyes and burst forth; her containment was compromised. Within seconds of her unfolding, the entire class lamented in a collective moment of suffering. Resistance resulted in the form of our collective grief.

After several minutes of hysterics where we hugged and lamented, we began remembering. Stories of how each departed student touched our hearts began emerging.
From our tears and memories sprouted laughter and even joy as we remembered our peers. Our teacher spoke of her deep sadness yet felt convicted by her spirit, her faith that each student lived in interconnectedness that she could not comprehend or really explain. One student shared how prayer was a refuge for her when faced with losses. Another student spoke of a Psalm that brought him comfort after losing his father. Several students shared how they sought comfort with others. One student shared a poem she had written after the cumulative deaths. Another student spoke of how he found comfort in Pink Floyd (a favorite band of our friend in need of a heart) with reverence to the losses and even strummed “Comfortably Numb” on his guitar. The class ended with our recognition that we had witnessed a teacher gone rogue, but a thought that resonates with me today is that teaching can be oppressive, just like poverty, just like being a woman.

What would the price be for the teacher who chose to grieve?

**Background of the problem**

**Personal context**

Teaching is one of the most spiritual practices I know, yet, for many, it is not, and at times, even for the most spiritual of teachers, we spiral into complacency (Moore, 1995). For me, teaching as a spiritual practice encompasses interconnectedness (Tisdell, 2003). The middle school teachers of my memory cultivated a space where, despite my continued poverty, I belonged and felt a connectedness to the profession of teaching itself. Tisdell (2003) describes spirituality as the way we make and construct meaning, symbolically, unconsciously, and culturally, as we sojourn to wholeness and authenticity. For me, teaching as a spiritual practice is where my person, profession, passion, and purpose all converge and collide in a cosmic cacophony; it is a symphony that began in
middle school. To teach is to love and to learn, but mostly, it is to live. Teaching is life-giving.

Yet, despite my innate call to teach, I have struggled with my sense of self as a person and as a professional, a most destructive dichotomy. I have rumbled with feeling insufficient, inferior, and incompetent, plagued with feelings of impostership throughout my childhood, adulthood, and teaching career. Pushing myself through programs, certifications, committees, leadership initiatives, and schooling, I strived to do whatever it took to belong, to be seen as clean, credible, stable, and ethical. I desperately wanted professional approval. “Leave your life at the door” was a mantra I adopted from my teacher education program, yet the door was ajar. Personal and professional losses began to accumulate. The show went on, but I was spiraling during intermission. Unrealistic expectations and obligations as a wife and mother along with the castration of my creativity in the classroom left me depressed, depleted, and disconnected. I began a regimen of medications in addition to alcohol to drench the fire within. “Could I be grieving?” I remember asking myself as I reflected upon my experiences and subsequent discussions I had with other teachers who were struggling and leaving the profession.

**Daring to grieve**

If teaching is a spiritual practice, acknowledging and integrating grief, our testimony of love lost, is as necessary to the profession as content knowledge and pedagogical practice, yet grief is not encouraged in our culture because most are not comfortable with the “darkness grief brings” (Brown, 2015, p. 145). Facing grief is facing our fears. It is acknowledging our own death, losses, and change while searching for illumination, a light in the dark, and wholeness. Teachers’ intentions must be focused
on their own self-actualization, their own healing, in order to empower students through their practice (hooks, 1994). Unfortunately, by failing to grieve, we deprive not only ourselves but our students, our loved ones, models of healing themselves when faced with their own losses (Doka, 2016; Neimeyer, 2016; Rando, 1993). By failing to grieve, we fail to heal.

Daring to grieve is acknowledging our grief and its many sources and obstacles (Doka, 2016; Kumar, 2005). Still embattled by what a therapist would later term PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), I had experienced losses I was unable to grieve, losses that took decades but resurfaced as I began teaching, raising a family of my own, and facing new losses both in and outside of the classroom (Hays, 2017; Winfrey & Perry, 2021). Those previous losses along with the myriad losses I have endured since becoming a teacher have mostly been unrecognized professionally and personally, subjugating myself to the shadows as a griever, the disenfranchised grief of a teacher (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Kauffman, 2002; Kumar, 2005; Rowling, 1995). Disenfranchised grief occurs when either grief or the griever fails to be acknowledged (Doka, 2016). The grieving teachers I witnessed years ago, I have since witnessed in myself, and now I seek to study her. I dare to be the grieving teacher.

**Personal context**

I want to study my own dissonance evident as protest, despair, and detachment, the disenfranchised grief I experienced while teaching that forced me to teach in a space between two worlds, in the margins, becoming a fragmented educator, inflicting a disease upon myself, and at times, my practice (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Investigating my own mind/body/spirit split and subsequent transformations allows me to acknowledge the
forces that pulled me apart, the systems to which I ascribed and actively promoted, and, ultimately, revisiting and revisioning a path to healing—personally, professionally, and pedagogically (Apple, 1988, 2019; Harris, 2010). Examining my lived experiences as a woman, mother, wife, and grandmother from deep poverty within the culture of teaching, I want to explore how my own disenfranchised grief, unacknowledged, hidden, grief, manifested and mutated and how grief work rectified inspiration, creativity, and transcendence through teaching because, ultimately, I believe teaching is healing (Doka, 1989; Castrellón al., 2021; Palmer, 2017). However healing teaching may be, there is no denying the profession is hurting.

**Professional context**

Cardoza (2021) likened the stress of teachers to that of nurses detailing how teaching is one of the most stressful professions. Akin to first responders, teachers are prone to stress-related illnesses, depression, and a host of other psychosomatic problems, including PTSD (Cardoza, 2021; Dabrowski, 2020; Kolk, 2015). Yet, despite the stress and high teacher turnover, the well-being of teachers has failed to be a notable concern. National surveys fail to capture other possible causations of attrition and burnout (GBAO, 2022; Jotkoff, 2022; Steiner & Woo, 2021).

Teachers are grieving, yet little is being done to acknowledge and support them (Case et al., 2017; Harris, 2010; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). Studying this dynamic through my own descent into the darkness of disenfranchised grief and ascent into the light of holistic healing through transformative learning and grief work, I hope to add my voice, and my experiences to the literature in the accessible format of autoethnography. Narrowing on
myself as an experienced woman teacher, I hope to share my experiences with disenfranchised grief and subsequent, healing through grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Daloz, 1986; Dirkx, 1998).

Beyond that realization, I hope to continue to revive and reflect upon my own practice, healing through the process, journeying to wholeness. Experienced teachers, those educators who have taught for more than ten years, positioned in midlife, and those teachers who are developmentally ready to transform are often neglected in the literature, which is why I hope to share my story to illuminate the suffering and the healing of all disenfranchised teachers but with special attention to the experienced woman teacher (Daloz, 1986).

**Theoretical framework**

This dissertation will examine the disenfranchised grief of an experienced woman teacher and how, despite the disenfranchisement, teaching can be situated as a location of healing. My theoretical framework consists of Marxist feminism as the encompassing macro theory that will allow for a closer examination of how patriarchy and capitalism continue to shape my lived experiences. Transformative learning theory will serve as the micro theory in that transformative learning through discernment and grief work has been foundational to my surviving and healing professionally, personally, and pedagogically. As a unifying construct, disenfranchised grief will be examined as it pertains to my lived experiences as a teacher and a woman from deep poverty.
Rooted in transformational learning, my study explores three lenses of transformative learning, including consciousness-raising, development, and individuation through discernment and grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1997, 1998; Scott, 1997). Consciousness-raising led me to Marxist feminism which is critical to recognizing disenfranchised grief (Freire, 1970, 1973). Age, experience, and education have all played a vital role in my developing and coming to an awareness of my grief experiences (Daloz, 1999). Examining transformation in teaching through discernment and, ultimately, grief work enables me to lay as my foundation the tenets of transformative education that are, unlike Mezirow’s transformational learning theory, rooted in depth psychology (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1997, 1998; Scott, 1997). Reflecting critically and conducting interpersonal dialogue, valued tenets of transformative learning and
teacher development, are supplanted by discernment and intrapersonal dialogue (Dirkx, 1998). Boyd and Myers (1988) define discernment as “an orientation which enables a person to explore within the mélange of the rational and the extrarational in order to locate and anchor those forces which are leading towards great integration of the Self,” turning “away from those which contaminate it” (p. 275). Discernment is more than a tool to reflect; discernment paves the way for meaningfully integrating ourselves within our worlds. Grief work is birthed in the practice of discernment where receptivity, recognition, and grieving are integral parts of transformative learning and healing (Boyd & Myer, 1988).

**Disenfranchised grief**

By examining my own disenfranchised grief experiences, this dissertation study enables me to explore disenfranchisement and illuminations as I grew in age, experience, and education in the profession of teaching. Acknowledging teaching as a spiritual practice, transformation as individuation will be explored through grief work and discernment, utilizing autoethnography. While examining grief work through a transformative, extrarational lens, the overall goal of this process is, ultimately, continued healing. To journey through healing requires a theory that compliments and drives the process of mindfully grieving while aligning with other aspects of my theoretical framework (Kumar, 2005).

In addition to transformational learning theory, I will examine grief within the context of the disenfranchised grief of an experienced woman teacher. Through the deconstruction of my own narratives of disenfranchised grief, I will examine the transformative illuminations birthed in discernment and grief work. Disenfranchised grief
in teaching may be rooted in the oppressive systems of society and schooling, which I will likewise explore through Marxist feminist theory. Doka (2002) was one of the first researchers to pioneer the concept of disenfranchised grief as a whole and within the context of societal roles. Rowling (1995) applied the concepts of disenfranchised grief to public school teachers, and limited research has been conducted since her landmark study. Examining the repetition of socially imposed disenfranchised grief and self-imposed disenfranchised grief will be conducted through autoethnography, a qualitative methodology that allows space for storytelling of lived experiences within the context of culture (Doka, 2002).

**Marxist feminism**

Writing from a Marxist feminist perspective allows me not only to pay homage to my heritage but to explain how disenfranchised grief manifests through me professionally, personally, and pedagogically. Class consciousness, the production of our social, materialistic, and natural way of being, embodies an awareness that continues to shape and shade my positionality and intersectionalities in that no matter my subsequent experiences, changes in social positions, and the assumption of professional titles and degrees, I am always a woman from deep poverty traversing a middle-class profession (Allman, 2001). It is no secret that many teachers work beyond their paid duties to ensure the success of their students. In many states, teachers fail to earn a livable wage (Wong, 2019). Not only is this type of sacrifice expected in teaching, but it is also revered. The economics of teaching places the profession, composed primarily of women, as one of the lowest-paid professions based on the experiences and educational attainment of the
workforce, with the social status of the profession likewise ranking low (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

Further, teaching can become a place where “alienation” is made possible both personally and professionally, ensuring that teachers remain silent yet stay focused on production (Brooks et al., 2008; Tong & Botts, 2018, p. 78). This study will examine alienation through the lens of patriarchal loss and powerlessness (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959). The disenfranchised grief of an experienced woman teacher is multifaceted in that disenfranchisement is symptomatic of patriarchal loss and living under the constraints of a capitalistic system, perpetuating a state of constant sorrow, detachment, and even compulsivity (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Time to grieve is a luxury few women teachers can afford.

My theoretical framework will elucidate how disenfranchised grief is symptomatic of an oppressive profession and patriarchal culture where perpetual grief may be a constant companion for the experienced woman teacher. Coming to this awareness, acknowledging these hidden sources of grief, is the work of discernment and griefwork- transformative learning (Boyd & Myers, 1988). I have written through most of my grief experiences throughout my teaching career. Higher learning and developing as a reflective practitioner have elucidated not only my grief work but the dark side of disenfranchisement. Drawing a connection between disenfranchised grief and transformation; I will examine my own stories of grieving and healing, finding my way through a darkened profession, finding light in learning and teaching, finding my voice through autoethnography. Transformation through grief work is made possible through discernment, a process that involves being receptive to our grief, recognizing our grief,
and daring to grieve (Boyd & Myers, 1988). For over twenty years, I have been transforming personally and professionally through my grief experiences, writing my way through the darkest of days, sense-making through autoethnography with hope of healing (Adams et al., 2015). Beyond my own healing, autoethnography moves others to act, to empathize, to transform as well (Schroeder, 2017).

**Statement of the problem**

*Leaving*

When I began this research, I wanted to explore the reasons why experienced women teachers were leaving the profession. The more conversations I conducted with colleagues and K-12 teachers; the more disenfranchised grief surfaced. I began thinking deeply about my own decision to leave K-12 in 2013 to teach at the university level. Could we be leaving because we are grieving? Is this what I had been experiencing all along? Why, despite moving to higher education, am I still experiencing it?

Disenfranchised grief is a problem in and of itself because the griever or the grief experienced fails to be recognized, leaving the griever to mourn in silence without support typically given to those facing losses deemed socially acceptable (Doka, 1989, 2002, 2016). For oppressed, marginalized groups, disenfranchised grief can have a detrimental impact, perpetuating detachment, dissociation, depression, alienation, and departure from sources of joy and creativity (Doka, 1989, 2002, 2016; Neimeyer, 2016; Rando, 1993). As an experienced, woman teacher, I, like many of my colleagues, fall into the norms of disenfranchised grief due to the patriarchal and capitalistic control located within the professional standards of teaching as well as living as woman in this world (Apple, 2019; Freedman, 1988; Goodman, 1988; Knopp, 2012). Notably, women
teachers face additional burdens of expectancy with dual demands of home and work, perpetuating a sense of alienation through powerlessness, detachment, and compulsive caregiving and, ultimately, grief at home and at work (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Doka, 1989, 2002, 2016; Folbre, 2001; Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959).

**Grieving**

Akin to first responders, teachers are prone to stress-related illnesses, depression, and a host of other psychosomatic problems, including PTSD (Cardoza, 2021; Kolk, 2015). Yet, despite the stress and high teacher turnover, the well-being of teachers has failed to be a notable concern. National surveys fail to capture other possible causations of attrition and burnout (GBAO, 2022; Jotkoff, 2022; Steiner & Woo, 2021). Until my research into this topic, my cumulative grief responses were guised as burnout, resistance, depression, rebellion, and dissatisfaction (Cardoza, 2021). My “stress” may have been my body’s response to acute and prolonged, disenfranchised grief, yet I had no awareness of my experience (Harvard Health, 2019). From my teacher preparation program to continued learning and professional development, never had teacher grief been supported let alone discussed. I was in the dark by design.

By training, I was indoctrinated in reflecting upon my practice, analyzing my pedagogy, beliefs, management and their impact on student learning, always taking a “needs to improve” approach, perceiving myself as the problem without questioning the constraints and oppressive, deskilling nature of teaching itself (Apple, 2019; Knopp, 2012). There is no denying I experienced stress. My work was never done. From home to classroom, mother to teacher, wife to colleague, sickness and sadness, I knew stress, but I deeply grieved my vision of teaching. Instead of becoming the teachers that pulled me
from the mire, I was becoming the mire itself. I chose to leave teaching in K-12 to reclaim my stolen voice, my shattered selfhood that lay barren from the pillage of patriarchal loss and bureaucracy (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Shedding light on the disenfranchised grief of an experienced teacher is my attempt to bring awareness to a problem that I believe is plaguing myself and others.

**Representing**

The teaching profession perpetuates a culture of silence and servitude where sharing our stories and struggles is often not supported (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Kauffman, 2002; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Runte & Runte, 2007). This systematic silencing and failure to acknowledge and value teachers has rooted and rotted the profession, yet investigations into why teachers are leaving barely scrape the surface, failing to delve into the depths of the real reasons behind their decisions to depart (Jotkoff, 2022). We are a dying breed with massive staff shortages in schools becoming the new normal, yet little is being done to retain teachers (Jotkoff, 2022).

Marxist feminism calls for a dialectical examination of social, political, familial, and cultural problems (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Heilbroner, 1980; Mojab, 2015; Tong & Botts, 2018). Instead of seeing problems as simply binary, we examine problems within a multiplicity of contexts to name the faces of oppression, subjugation, and stagnation (Freire, 1970). We have a naming problem in education that is rooted in ideologies that fuel indoctrination and sustained silence and status quo (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Freire, 1970; Haug, 2015; Knopp, 2012; Love, 2019). Unraveling the system begins with awareness. Stories like mine must be told.
The scarce research focusing on this population with a lens on disenfranchisement speaks volumes when focused on framing disenfranchised grief as a problem worthy of notice. Teacher-centered research in disenfranchised grief is scant in that students mostly serve as the epicenter of concern in most educational endeavors, and teacher grief is studied only as it pertains to grieving students (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). A holistic view of teacher grief, one that encompasses the various intersectionalities, complexities, and positionalities of the experienced woman teacher’s personal, professional, and pedagogical lived experience is not currently represented in the literature. Acknowledging and examining grief in all its complexities, including variance of origins, is a must to promote healing (Neimeyer, 2016).

Finally, recognizing and owning our grief will provide spaces for discernment and healing (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Stories of grief must be told to encourage others to voice their experiences and heal through their renderings (Brewster & Zimmerman, 2022). Removing the veil of silence that has long since shrouded our professional and personal walks, teachers may begin to find the classrooms as sites of restoration (Castrellón et al., 2021).

**Research purpose**

**Researcher interest**

Grief work, if properly supported, can lead to both illumination and liberation (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Brown, 2015; Dirkx, 1997, 1998; Scott, 1997). My substantive interest was the disenfranchised grief of teachers, how it manifested and perpetuated alienation within oneself and within the profession, and how, despite disenfranchisement,
teachers can heal. My epistemic interest was exploring and explaining the lived experiences of a disenfranchised teacher, uncovering connections within oneself through grief work while examining the intersectionality of culture and positionality personally, professionally, and pedagogically.

**Sense-making**

From storying my way through my profession, I examined how teaching, although oppressive, can be healing. Capturing this data, I utilized autoethnography, a methodology that “involves the self (auto), culture (ethno), and writing (graphy)” that allows experiences to be “turned inside out” (Adams et al., 2015, p. 46). Sense-making is both an interpersonal and intrapersonal experience where the autoethnographer connects, critiques, and extends upon the experiences of others while simultaneously exploring the innerworkings of the self through reflection and reflexivity (Adams et al., 2015; Brommel, 2017). Exploring and interrogating my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief through a professional, personal, and pedagogical lens, sense-making emerged through writing as inquiry (Adams et al., 2015). Most importantly, autoethnography provided a conduit for the integration of my identities where meaning merged with personal positionalities, and sense derived from experience (Brommel, 2017). Making sense of my experiences may help others make sense of theirs.

**Crisis of representation**

To shed light on disenfranchisement within any context, voices from the culture itself must rise up. Stories must be shared to shed light on the struggles, and they must be accessible to reach the intended audience, educators from K-12, adult education, and higher education. Addressing the crisis of representation, stories from teachers who have
experienced disenfranchised grief must be voiced (Case et al., 2017; Harris, 2010; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022).

In autoethnographic writing, the subject is self; therefore, the unit of analysis was me. Collecting data required a series of writings that I have been crafting since the inception of this dissertation. Reliving my stories from my current positionality and awareness, I examined internal and external factors that contributed to the disenfranchised grief of an experienced women teacher. An iterative framework for reflexivity was conducted on the data collected throughout the study (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

**Accessibility**

Raising awareness through accessible literature such as autoethnography is key to elucidating grieving teachers of disenfranchisement and possible transformation. With an emphasis on the disenfranchisement of grief in teaching, accessibility was central to my methodological decision-making, bridging the cognitive and affective, providing a point of entry through engagement in storytelling (Adams et al., 2015). From writing to consuming, autoethnography makes research accessible to those who need it most—teachers.

**Relational and transformational**

As a methodology, autoethnography can both connect and transform the creator and the consumer (Adams et al., 2015; Adams et al., 2022). Connecting to the experiences of others through accessible literature cultivates a relationship between the reader and the writer, one that allows for an embodied, emotive experience (Adams et al.,
The autoethnographer seeks to connect to the wider community and the cultures to which the autoethnographer ascribes by crafting a space where dialogue and thinking critically are encouraged (Poulos, 2013). I believe my story will resonate with other teachers and encourage them to voice their own.

Autoethnographers challenge norms through their craft, weaving aesthetically stories of “epiphanies (moments of transformation in thinking, emotion, and approaches to living)” that impact not only the writer but the reader in most profound ways (Poulos, 2013, p. 46). Through the creation and consumption of autoethnography, “therapeutic shifts or transformations may occur” (Poulos, 2013, p. 46). The autoethnographer writes to move the reader to act (Adams et al., 2015; Poulos, 2013).

Writing my way through grief with a focus on my experiences with disenfranchised grief has been a challenge beyond depiction, yet, undeniably, the renderings have served as a locus of solace where grief has been unmasked, and I have been undone in its reveal. Autoethnography is the breath of wonderment where healing is a manifestation of my creation.

**Research questions**

Autoethnography allows for the study of culture through the eyes of Self (Chang, 2008). This research was based primarily on my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief through three concentric lenses that represent my Self and my cultural affiliations: professional, personal, and pedagogical. Undeniably, my story intersected with many; however, this was ultimately my lived experiences and may not represent the cultures to which I ascribe (Chang, 2008). Fully acknowledging this, it is my belief that my research
will serve as a springboard of inquiry into the lived experiences of women experienced teachers, but this work represented my story.

Autoethnography as a qualitative methodology served as an investigative and expressive tool for both research and representation (Adams et al., 2015). This dissertation examined three questions. As a process, (1) how can an experienced teacher recognize her disenfranchised grief? This question required introspection, discernment, and grief work that was conducted through autoethnography and reflexive analysis. As a purpose, (2) how can disenfranchised grief perpetuate harm professionally, personally, and pedagogically? I decided to examine harm through three concentric lenses, including professional (the rules governing teacher behaviors and codes of conduct), personal (life beyond the school, the innerworkings of womanhood), and pedagogical (how we teach, what we teach, and who we teach). Examining alienation constructs-detachment, compulsive caregiving, and powerlessness- through autoethnographic study, I reflexively examined not only the sources of my disenfranchised grief, but the harm inflicted upon me and perpetuated through me professionally, personally, and pedagogically. Finally, as a product, (3) how can an experienced teacher heal through disenfranchised grief? Grief work grounded in individuation can prove transformative (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998; Grabove, 1997; Scott, 1997). Through autoethnography, I not only examined my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief via the sources and my responses, but I studied how healing was manifested through personal, professional, and pedagogical illumination. Autoethnography and reflexivity allowed for authentic examination and integration of each of these questions.
Significance of study

Undoubtedly, teaching is a stressful profession where burnout and attrition are becoming more commonplace (Cardoza, 2021; Freedman, 1988; GBAO, 2022). With that noted, teacher stress, burnout, and attrition could also be indicative of disenfranchised grief (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021). Complex problems require dialectical thinking (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). We must be willing to dig deeper into the recesses of the realities that our experienced women teachers are facing beyond the rational, measurable constructs. Sharing our stories is only the beginning of our healing journeys (Brewster & Zimmerman, 2022). We must acknowledge that our world is grieving; students are grieving; but, significant to this study, teachers are grieving.

The scarce research focusing on experienced women teachers with a lens on disenfranchisement speaks volumes when focused on framing disenfranchised grief of experienced women teachers as a problem of significance (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). Teacher-centered research in disenfranchised grief is scant in that students mostly serve as the epicenter of concern in most educational endeavors, and teacher grief is only studied as it pertains to grieving deceased students and students’ grief (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). A holistic examination of teacher grief, one that encompasses the various intersectionalities, complexities, and positionalities of the experienced woman teacher’s personal, professional, and pedagogical lived experience is not currently represented but is desperately needed in the literature. This study aimed to provide a voice to the lived experience of the disenfranchised grief of an experienced woman
teacher in hopes of inspiring others to divulge their own stories. Examining grief in all its complexities, including variance of origins, is a must to promote healing professionally, personally, and pedagogically.

**Overview of study**

Chapter Two frames my study’s theoretical framework, subsequent review of the literature, and provides investigative insights into my research questions. Serving as my framework’s foundation, my macro-level theory, Marxist feminism, was utilized to examine the interconnectedness of discernment, grief work, and healing through the disenfranchised grief of an experienced woman teacher.

The review of Marxist feminism features an overview of the theory in the context of teaching as an oppressive profession for women experienced teachers. I began the review with an analysis of assuming a poverty perspective and how this positionality continues to shade my middle-class experiences personally, professionally, and pedagogically. From there, I briefly set the stage that schools can be manufacturers of oppressive ideologies that continue to subjugate women teachers (Apple, 1988, 2019; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Freedman, 1988; Goodman, 1988). Concluding, I discuss how experienced women teachers may face alienation through proletarization and patriarchal grief (Apple, 1988; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). This underpinning served as foundational to understanding teacher disenfranchised grief and subsequent healing through discernment and grief work.

Following a review of Marxist feminist literature, transformative learning theory through individuation served as my mid-level theory. This review of the literature examined transformational learning theory through extrarational experiences with a focus
on transformation as individuation through discernment and grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998; Grabove, 1997; Scott, 1997). Taking a holistic approach allowed for a detailed examination of transformation, healing, that results from the multiplicity of transformations an experienced woman teacher may be experiencing personally, professionally, and pedagogically. Chapter Two concludes with a brief review of the literature featuring disenfranchised grief, narrowing in on the disenfranchised grief of teachers. Exploring the oppressive nature of disenfranchised grief from a Marxist feminist perspective allowed for a multi-faceted examination of grief as oppressive which serves to disenfranchise experienced women teachers. Autoethnography as a methodology was investigated in Chapter Three along with an overview of my research plan of action, including methods, data analysis, and rigor of the study. Chapter Four consists of my renderings, several vignettes, featuring my experiences with disenfranchised grief, and Chapter Five is a presentation of my findings and implications.
Chapter Two

Introduction

The road map for this journey never ceases to change, but the destination has remarkably remained the same. By examining the disenfranchised grief and transformations of an experienced woman teacher through autoethnography, teachers with whom this work resonates may be encouraged to dig deep, voice their own stories, and transform through their practice. The navigational system I am using to guide my travels is Marxist feminism. This lens is not about taking the scenic route of study. Quite the contrary, this lens is about traveling off-road, off-grid, and into the wilderness.

This literature review begins with an exploration of Marxist feminism as the macro theory—the foundation of my theoretical framework. Examining critical aspects of Marxist feminism will support and guide my investigations into the lived experience under study—the disenfranchised grief of an experienced woman teacher and subsequent transformations. Critical attributes of Marxist feminism in this investigation include an examination of poverty positionality; division perpetuated by capitalism and patriarchy; and teacher indoctrination. Examining my own experiences with disenfranchisement, I will utilize the constructs detachment and compulsive caregiving of patriarchal loss (Gilligan & Snider, 2018) and powerlessness, a subconstruct of alienation (Seeman, 1959). I have drawn upon several significant Marxist and Marxist feminist scholars, including Sarah Carpenter, Shahrzah Mojab, Sarah Knopp, Nancy Folbre, Paula Allman, Robert Seeman, Robert Heilbroner, and Himani Bannerji.

Substantial gaps exist in the literature connecting the alienation of teachers, specifically experienced women teachers, under capitalistic control, encountering
patriarchal rule and disenfranchised grief (Apple, 1988, 2019; Goodman, 1988; Freedman, 1988; Hextum, 2014; Knopp, 2012; Runte & Runte, 2007). Developing an awareness to the disenfranchisement and subsequent grief will allow for an integrative connection to be examined through autoethnography.

Following an extensive review of Marxist feminism, transformative learning theory will be examined as the mid-level theory of my theoretical framework. Dirkx’s four lenses of transformative learning will be briefly reviewed, including transformations as critical reflection, consciousness-raising, development, and individuation. Each of these lenses is significant in the study of the disenfranchised grief of an experienced teacher in that most teachers are indoctrinated in reflection throughout initial licensure programs but lack the education and support for critical awareness, consciousness-raising, development, and individuation (Cranton, 2001; Dirkx, 1998). Consciousness-raising provides insights into disenfranchisement, and development is critical to discernment through grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998; Scott, 1997).

Primarily, this review of the literature will focus on transformation as individuation through discernment and grief work, fully acknowledging that transformative learning is circuitous, integrative, on-going, and complex (Dirkx, 1998; Taylor, 2008). For experienced women teachers, transformations through development and conscientiousness may be prompted by age, experience, education, and cultivating an ability to think dialectically (Merriam, 2004). Significant players that have influenced this review include Jack Mezirow, John Dirkx, Patricia Cranton, Laurent Daloz, Paulo Freire, and Robert Boyd.
A Marxist feminist standpoint elucidates the inner workings of self and social reproductions that both impede and inspire transformative learning. Awakening requires a merging of both rational and extrarational transformative learning experiences; specifically, discernment and grief work through individuation will ultimately bridge awareness and transformative learning for an experienced woman teacher.

Reviewing the literature on disenfranchised grief as an object of study will complete my theoretical framework, ensuring a comprehensive approach to addressing my research questions. Examining the disenfranchised grief of experienced women teachers through a Marxist feminist lens has likewise been neglected in the literature. Disenfranchised grief will be explored with an emphasis on silencing. My study will explore the disenfranchising effects of grief ignored and the transformative, healing potential for grief observed (Lewis, 1994). This review of disenfranchised grief of experienced women teachers will examine grief in its Marxist feminist complexities, including an overview of disenfranchised grief, the hidden rules of grief, patriarchal grief, and social and self-disenfranchised grief.
Marxist feminism

Introduction

Connecting my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief begins with a discussion about underdeveloped class consciousness (Lambirth, 2010; Manstead, 2018). Following this discussion, I will provide an overview of teaching as an oppressive profession for an experienced woman teacher through indoctrination and the grief this brings. This section concludes with an examination of teaching through patriarchal loss and alienation as a product and perpetuation of disenfranchised grief.

Living in the shadows

“Even if they make it to dorms on leafy-green campuses, disadvantaged students still live in poverty’s long shadow” (Jacks, 2019).

Undoubtedly, there was no choice in approaching my research from a Marxist feminist lens. I have always experienced life from this perspective but did not have the words to name my positionality until I began contemplating and discussing critical literature. Marxist feminism is a dialectical approach using both a class and a gendered lens in the study of the oppression of women (Tong & Botts, 2018). As a child from deep poverty, I carry with me not only my lived experiences but also an altered perspective and sense of self. Bannerji (1995) asserts that we must be willing to see ourselves, relationally, both reflexive and dialectically, to understand who we are in the world (p. 18).

Acknowledging the historical and cultural contexts interwoven within my story requires an admission that the world I live in is fraught with violence against women, in addition to a delimitation of women’s rights, opportunities, and voices (Carpenter &
Mojab, 2017; Folbre, 2001; Jaggar, 1988; Mojab, 2015). Carpenter and Mojab (2017) contend that under the “patriarchal forces of capitalism, imperialism, and fundamentalism,” women continue to be subjected physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally to unspeakable violence, subjugation, and degradation on a global scale (p. 1). Despite our professionalization, women are not only working full days for less pay than their men counterparts but are also laboring in their homes and for their families (Folbre, 2001; Hochschild, 2003a, 2003b; Lussier & Backer, 2020). My impoverished beginnings serve as the impetus to my inquiry and an epilogue to my eternity, a lifetime of struggle and sacrifice I have faced and continue to endure and witness as a woman living in a broken world, teaching in a broken system.

**Undeveloped class consciousness**

Weaving in and out of different educational and social contexts, I have never been able to anchor myself in any one stratum. Before this writing, few people knew my beginnings. This reality continues to shape and shade my positionality as I edgewalk between poverty and the middle class (Krebs, 1999). Although I am fluent in middle-class cultural norms and have chiseled a teaching career for myself, I am entangled in vines of the past. My story reverberates in every social setting and lecture hall I encounter.

Manstead (2018) argues that “the material conditions in which people grow up and live have a lasting impact on their personal and social identities and that this influences both the way they think and feel about their social environment” as well as impacts their behaviors (p. 267). Lambirth (2010) details that people from the working class may lack the means of constructing cultural and social capital and oftentimes
remain in a state of “nonpossession,” lacking a sense of belonging (p. 213). Further, this lack of cultural and social capital perpetuates an “undeveloped class consciousness” which contributes to continued stagnation, subjugation, and even alienation (Giddens, 1973, as cited in Lambirth, 2010, p. 213). Specifically, Lambirth (2010) describes how teachers from working class, despite education and acquired financial and cultural capital, still identify as working class (p. 212). People from lower classes entering professional spaces may struggle to maneuver through social hierarchies (Apple, 2012; Manstead, 2018; Hoyle, 1969).

Weiler (1991) asserts that feminist teachers will struggle under the pressures of institutional hierarchies that perpetuate patriarchy and control. Understanding that schools are hierarchies, a teacher must be in possession of middle-class currency in the form of cultural capital in order to be able to maneuver her way through the arena (Bourdieu as cited in Apple, 2019). Working from an outsider's perspective may delimit teachers from the lower class in their being able to transgress social norms to which they have no context, connection, or experience, making mobility close to, if not, impossible (Apple, 2019; Weiler, 1991).

Ultimately, this juxtaposition may result in a teacher existing ambiguously between classes, a contradictory class location (Apple, 2012; Lambirth, 2010). Examining these dualities dialectically can be attempted reflexively through discernment and grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988). My reasoning for conducting an examination of class consciousness and an underdeveloped sense of class is important to note in my review of the literature on Marxist feminism. These constructs establish the fundamentals for understanding the stories of our positionalities; examining them most fully through
autoethnography may prove transformative for the willing (Adams et al., 2015). By naming the many faces of oppression, researchers, especially experienced women teachers, may be empowered to liberate themselves from their snares (Freire, 1970). In my review of the literature, studies featuring teachers who were raised in deep poverty are rare and do not capture the multitude of struggles women specifically endure (Belkhir, 1996; Dunkin, 2008). Examining my lived experiences with deep poverty may provide elucidation as to its continued impact professionally, personally, and pedagogically.

**Indoctrination**

Marxist feminism is an examination of women’s oppression through class and gender, understanding that both work in tandem (Bannerji, 1995; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Gimenez, 2005; Tong & Botts, 2018). Historically, understanding the power structures perpetuating women’s oppression from a Marxist lens begins with examining the economic structures that hold women teachers captive. Capitalism is defined as “an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods” (Merriam-Webster, 2023). People are dependent on the system to fulfill their needs that results in an inability to survive on their own, creating “an experiential reality of a fragmented social life” (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017, p. 7). The system itself perpetuates dependency and division. The bourgeoisie controls the wealth while the proletariat works tirelessly and fruitlessly for it (Heilbroner, 1980).
Division

Delineating these characteristics as they pertain to teaching begins with examining the concept of division. “School is one institution where we see and experience” both division and oppression (Knopp, 2012, p. 30). Engels, a significant influencer in Marxism, extended the notion that capitalism divides and isolates nature and knowledge; subsequently, this dividing drives people away from their “connection with the vast whole” (Engels, 1980, as cited in Knopp, 2012, p. 16).

Love (2019) describes schools as sites where oppression is systemic and in the constant reproduction of poverty, a reflection of “political economy” (p. 17). Students from poverty will remain shackled in that taxes go where the money is, and that is not in poor America; therefore, “the system renders schools ineffective in providing poor students any type of real social mobility (p. 17). From better-resourced schools to highly effective teachers, students from wealth receive better educations and have more opportunities to excel— to the victor goes the spoils (Love, 2019). With more privatization of education, paying for an education has allowed for segregation by choice (Love, 2019). Schools are divided structurally, with those in more affluent towns receiving more resources than those schools from more impoverished areas (Love, 2019). Private schools and charter schools are options for those wishing to segregate themselves, and families will pay a hefty price to be isolated for a coveted education. Privatization is commonplace in education, and the stakes couldn’t be higher.
Hierarchies

“Schools are an amplified microcosm of all of the oppressions that exist in society; it is where some learn to oppress, and where many more learn to live with oppression” (Knopp, 2012, p. 28). Hextrum (2014) argues that schools tend to “reproduce rather than minimize social inequality” (p. 90). It is vital to see how schools maintain some modicum of responsibility for perpetuating patriarchy, oppression, and alienation and how this manifest in both social and self-disenfranchisement (Brännmark, 2021; Knopp, 2012; Love, 2019; Rowling, 1995). Schools are entrenched in bureaucracy, hierarchical and governed by rules, where like students, teachers are monitored and managed. Schools recreate hierarchies of society at large where middle-class culture is currency (Apple, 2019). Schools create people, legitimate knowledge, and distribute dominant culture, and teachers, like students and their families, are a part of that system (Apple, 2019). Despite appearances of shared governance, teachers, primarily female, have little control in the hierarchy (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Ingersoll, 2007, 2011; Knopp, 2012; Russom, 2012). We are a product of the system, created with submission and subjugation in mind. We are made to be ruled (Apple, 2012).

For teachers, hierarchies in schools are most noted with male administrators lording over female classroom teachers, and these hierarchies are internalized and socialized beyond the school (Apple, 2012; Dreeben, 1988). “Hierarchies, status, and domination are characteristics of the patriarchal mentality” that continue to rule schools (Apple, 2012; Brännmark, 2021; Knopp, 2012; Mitrano, 1978, p. 59). Statistics nationally do appear promising in that more women are becoming school principals, constituting fifty-six percent according to the latest National Center for Education survey of schools
(National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). These statistics are touted by educational leaders as validation that the system is equal; however, it is vital to note that it is still not equitable when considering parity. Men are still ushered through the streets with a grand marching band, heralded into administration, leaving few males to teach in a disproportionate representation as these statistics demonstrate, with only 24 percent of the teaching force being male and double that being administrators according to the National Center for Education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

**Feminization**

Notably, teaching is a female-dominated, feminized profession; it is labeled as women’s work in literature that explores this construct (Drudy, 2008; İnandi et al., 2018 et al., 2018; Mitrano, 1978; Ullah, 2016; Unesco, 2020;). Teaching is viewed as an idealized as a profession for women and mothers, making teaching an extension of our culturally designated, feminized roles (Boyle, 2004; Folbre, 2001; Isomöttönen, 2018; Lortie, 1975; Skelton, 2009). Despite awareness around feminized professions, women are still being encouraged to take “pink collar” jobs—those professions, such as teaching, that exploit women in caregiving professions that require emotional labor (Chun et al., 2020; Folbre, 2001, p. 44). Pink collar jobs are service-oriented, emotionally driven, and primarily performed by women (Chun et al., 2020). The gendering of the teaching profession has been to its detriment in that women’s work is often viewed as extending the natural duties of the feminine; consequently, this devaluing has a market price that results in lower wages, longer hours, and loss of autonomy (Apple, 1988, 2008; Gimenez, 2005; Hextum, 2014; Quintero et al., 2023).
Education is an industry, a multinational cooperation, and men control this market and the value placed on a woman’s worth (Apple, 1988, 2008, 2019; Gimenez, 2005; Lussier & Backer, 2020). Women teachers who remain vested in the profession may find incremental salary increases as stagnant, “a fixed ceiling,” with little economic mobility and independence possible (Lortie, 1975, p. 7; Quintero et al., 2023). Women who teach are socially and financially shadowed, serving many masters (Boyle, 2004; Kreuzfeld & Seibt, 2022; Lortie, 1975).

**Deskilling**

Finally, because of the feminized nature of teaching, and that it is a profession of mostly women at 74 percent, teachers have lost control over their practice through deskilling and reskilling, professionalism, and proletarization (Apple, 1988, 2008, 2019; Apple & Teitelbaum, 1986; Freedman, 1988; Ingersoll, 2007, 2011; National Education Association, 2021; Runte & Runte, 2007). Professionalism has become another aspect by which teachers’ bodies and teaching practices are evaluated, controlled, and conditioned (Ozga, 1988). Professional developments for teachers are designed and “dictated” for and by upper-ranking school officials within the hierarchy (Freedman, 1988, p. 135). With the induction and indoctrination of curriculum, teachers become more and more proletarianized or deskilled (Apple, 2012; Freedman, 1988). No longer responsible for curriculum design, control is perpetuated, and creativity is stifled (Runte & Runte, 2007).

Apple (1988) asserts, “It is not a random fact that one of the most massive attempts at rationalizing curricula and teaching had as its target a group of teachers who were largely women” (p. 103). Proletarianization of teachers involves “the loss of skill or craft or traditional knowledge” along with dehumanizing efforts that may come in waves
to remove teachers from creativity and connection (Lawn & Ozga, 1988, p. 90).

“Deskilling is an effective mechanism of ideological control precisely because it erodes
the knowledge worker’s autonomous control and centralizes design functions within a
central bureaucracy more readily subject to direct political supervision and control”
(Runte, 1992, as cited in Runte & Runte, 2007, p. 5). From top-down curriculum and
policy initiatives to “upskilling” teachers in the art of delivering indoctrination, teachers
are finding themselves slowly being upgraded or exiled (Runte & Runte, 2007, p. 1).
Teachers are facing pressure, especially the outspoken and the experienced, to perform or
perish (Russom, 2012). Ultimately, deskilling can have detrimental effects, resulting in
both disenfranchisement, loss, and alienation, culminating in grief (Allman, 2001; Doka,
2002; Freedman, 1988; Goodman, 1988; Rando, 1993).

**Patriarchal grief**

Remembering that “women teachers often work in two sites” that exploit them in
their varied roles is critical (Apple, 1988, p. 100). As a society, we must recognize the
“double day” in which women teachers labor and how this doubling of the day
perpetuates inequalities not only at home but in the workplace (Cobble, 2004). Apple
(1988) describes teachers as not only “classed actors” but “gendered actors” who are
subject to more control professionally than men (p. 100). Capitalism and patriarchy are
ingrained in everything women do, including how they view ourselves as women and
teachers (Brännmark, 2021; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Knopp,
2012). Women teachers are subjected to patriarchal rule in and outside the classroom but,
most importantly, in their homes— there is no escaping it.
Patriarchy represents the spoken and unspoken rules of our society and schools under capitalism. It is the standard of femininity, beauty, motherhood, and professionalism under domination (Johnson, 2005). It is silence when women need to speak, and it is speaking “truths” that are rooted in Capitalist language and beliefs. Gilligan and Snider (2018) argue that patriarchy persists in large part because women both enforce and oppose it despite our efforts to destroy it. Because of its “ghost” like presence in our society and within us, it penetrates women’s vulnerability and mimics loss (Gilligan & Snider, 2018, p. 7). It is patriarchal grief, and all women are susceptible.

Examining patriarchy through the lens of loss, a patriarchal loss is experienced through the stages of grief, including protest, despair, and detachment (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). “At the center of patriarchy” is “loss,” and it is “hidden under the shackles of shame and cloaked in the guise of normalcy” (Gilligan & Snider, 2018, p. 100). Grieving our lost humanity, our lost connection, and our lost voices, women can get caught in a cycle of despair, disconnection, and detachment and become alienated (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959).

**Alienation through detachment, compulsive caregiving, and powerlessness**

Alienation, despite the myriad definitions and understandings, for women teachers is rooted in patriarchy and sustained by capitalism. Heilbroner (1980) describes alienation as “a condition of social and psychological deformation” that results in a splintering of wholeness, a fragmentation, where unity is a casualty of capitalism and domination of class (p. 71). For the purpose of this study, alienation will be examined with a focus on the subconstructs detachment, compulsive caregiving, and powerlessness (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959).
Gilligan and Snider (2018) share that Bowlby proposed two types of detachment, both pathological, including “anxious attachment or compulsive caregiving” and the “detachment or compulsive self-reliance” (p. 77). Using Bowlby’s theory of detachment, Gilligan and Snider apply the constructs of detachment and compulsive caregiving as symptomatic for women living in a patriarchal society where we are always grieving, giving up our voice and connection to one another, perpetuating alienation (2018).

**Detachment**

According to Gilligan and Snider (2018), “Detachment is a dissociative defense that seeks to eliminate the potential for irreparable rupture by splitting parts of the self, notably the longing for relationship, off from awareness” (p. 53). Detaching can manifest in “detachment of the intellectual from popular cultural standards” as well as assign “low regard to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society” (Seeman, 1959, pp. 788-789). Detaching perpetuates alienation by disconnecting from ourselves and other people as well (Case, 2008; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Detaching or “emotional withdrawal” may be our way through grief; it is how we move forward when we have no control, but life still requires our service (Sweeting & Gilhooly, 1990, p. 1075).

Becoming increasingly removed from the products of our labor, people who labor alongside us, and the subsequent elimination of our creative outlets often results in dehumanization and subsequent alienation (Knopp, 2012). According to Pulliam (1974), “Teachers are often expected to play roles that conflict with their own self-images,” which may inadvertently cause the teacher to detach from herself (p. 88). When teachers become an “instrument” of the organization, they may lose their self-respect as well as endure a loss of pride and meaning in their work (Pulliam, 1974, p. 88). And they may
experience detachment. In one study of healthcare providers providing end-of-life care, participants struggled with conflicting role identities, how to maneuver their grief responses, and emotional detachment, perpetuating detachment both personally and professionally (Funk et al., 2018). Detachment was a form of self-protection (Funk et al., 2018).

**Compulsive caregiving**

For many women teachers, care of children and the home may fall upon their already overburdened shoulders. Jianling (2000) describes women teachers as subject to role conflicts between their prescribed role as an educator and their gendered role in their homes. This role conflict- serving schools and homes- can create imbalances, physical and psychological, along with job dissatisfaction, and fueling alienation (Jianling, 2000). Moore (1995) found that role conflicts had adverse implications for women teachers who had significant home and childcare burdens. Behera and Padhil (1993) examined role conflict in women teachers, finding that many complexities contributed to dissatisfaction, observing conflict and dissatisfaction increased for women who had an economic need to work, had children, and/or had the additional burden of caregiving for extended family members.

Contradicting roles for women mean “dual demands” and constant performance pressure resulting in dissonance, detachment, and other adverse effects (Behera & Padhil, 1993, p. 7). Women teachers are socialized in their roles and experience guilt as a result of their conflictive commitments to home and school (Apple, 2012, 2019; Mitrano, 1978). “Women are caught in a double bind” (Mitrano, 1978, p. 60). Defining a woman’s goodness and worth based on her performance of prescribed roles applies unattainable
measures both in the home and in the classroom. Teachers are set up by the system to fail their students and themselves.

Compulsive caregiving is likewise symptomatic of patriarchal loss, yet this type of caring is lauded as exemplary, gold standard behavior (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Under patriarchal rule, women receive the message that to care selflessly for other people is the ultimate reward and caring for oneself is selfish (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Caregiving requires physical, emotional, and mental engagement, and, for the most part, falls upon women in both professional and personal circles due to expectations of other people and women themselves (Forssen et al., 2006). Compulsive caregiving may result when a woman is concerned that only she can deliver a level of care needed by people in her care (Forssen et al., 2006). Compulsive caregiving can be alienating (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Women teachers may feel conflicted in their work and home roles, experiencing a loss of their sense of self in addition to feelings of alienation and grief (Apple, 2012; Behera & Padhil, 1993; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Role conflicts plague many women teachers in that the work at school and home is never done, and the expectations of society and self are beyond attainment.

Compulsive caregiving also is noted as a domestic barrier that may perpetuate alienation professionally, preventing many women from assuming leadership roles (İnandi et al., 2018 et al., 2018). Riley (2013) investigates how compulsive caregivers might in fact choose teaching as a profession. The understood code of conduct for teachers is their adherence to emotional norms (Hochschild, 2003a). For the woman teacher, both cognitive and emotional labor may perpetuate a mental overload that is invisible, boundaryless, and enduring, contributing complicated grief (Dean et al., 2021;
Doka, 2002; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). We avoid our grief by pouring ourselves into others.

**Powerlessness**

Powerlessness entails “the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his (or her) own behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he (or she) seeks” (Seeman, 1959, p. 784). This sense of powerlessness is a byproduct of the division of labor and the control of workers in a capitalistic society (Seeman, 1959). Sarfraz (1997) examines powerlessness as a “lack of control” of circumstances and a lack of influence over systems in which a person is enmeshed (p. 51). Power is controlled by external forces which have physical, emotional, and mental alienating effects upon those people lacking control and influence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 1988; Hoyle, 1969).

In 2008, a study of alienation in the teaching profession by Brooks et al. revealed that teachers felt powerlessness due to several reasons, including the lack of shared governance; teachers’ input was devalued despite their experiences. “Powerlessness increased the further a teacher strayed from their room, and at the school level, informal and nontransparent decision-making processes caused teachers’ sense of powerlessness to heighten” and morale to dampen (p. 51). According to Goodman (1988), “Women educators’ lack of power is clearly reflected in the substance and form of the education found in our schools,” promoting hegemonic, mechanical curriculum, and perpetuating conformity (p. 212). For women teachers, alienation in the form of powerlessness may result in systemic silencing (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Silencing may be perpetuated at the home and in the communities in which women teachers engage.
Limited studies exist in the research that examine teachers’ experiences of alienation, but studies utilizing these subconstructs for analysis of disenfranchised grief have not been located in my review (Brooks et al., 2008). This study of my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief will investigate how my cultural intersectionalities through discernment and, ultimately, grief work has been impacted by alienation and patriarchal grief.

**Transformative learning theory**

Transformative learning theory stands as one of the most recent and researched theories in adult learning (Merriam et al., 2007). This literature review of transformative learning theory will provide an introduction and an examination of transformative learning theory utilizing Dirkx’s four lenses with an emphasis on extrarational transformation through grief work. These lenses will fuse a connection between theory and practice, providing justification for research, responsive methodology, and, ultimately, integrative implications for cultivating healing, a quest for wholeness, for experienced teachers through discernment. Acknowledging the hurdles, this literature review responds to the many challenges teachers are facing to teach, who are in desperate need to teach from whom and where they are, reflectively and reflexively, healing through the turmoil of teaching while grieving.
Defining transformative learning theory

Studies rooted in transformative learning theory are as manifold as its interpretations and critiques, yet transformative learning theory is timeless, its sustainability grounded in its ambiguity, evolution, and subsequent reimaging (Baumgartner, 2001; Desapio, 2017). Defining transformative learning, Mezirow, who is credited with its conceptualization, states, “It is the process of learning through critical self-reflection, which results in the reformulation of a meaning perspective to allow a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of one’s experience” that ultimately guides actions (Mezirow, 1990, p. xvi). Transformative learning has evolved in its meaning over the years. Holistically, it is a process of making sense of one’s world and one’s place within it through reflecting, discerning, grieving, connecting, and grounding in experience- prior, present, within, without, and futuristic- where forming and reforming understandings results in changes in perceptions, interactions, awareness, and states of being (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Cranton, 1994, 2006; Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learning changes the learner.

Specific to my study, no research has been conducted featuring the experienced woman teacher reflexivity through grief work and subsequent transformations (Feucht et al., 2017; Stîngu, 2012;). Transformative learning theory will inform my research through reconstructing and deconstructing my own stories of disenfranchised grief as an experienced woman teacher. Simultaneously, transformative learning theory serves as a contemplative conduit for not only my own educational journey but the analysis of it, specifically regarding transformation through individuation. Therefore, it is important to note that gaps in the literature are most evident concerning extrarational transformations,
especially with a lens on the experienced woman teacher (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Cranton, 2001, 2006; Grabove, 1997; Macdonald, 2002; Scott, 1997). This research aims to represent the voice and lived experiences of an experienced woman teacher in the lacking literature.

Viewing transformative learning as holistic and integrative, I will pursue this research endeavor by examining my topic and questions under investigation by utilizing an all-encompassing approach. Dirkx’s four lenses, transformation as critical reflection, transformation as consciousness-raising, transformation as development, and transformation as individuation, are most critical to this study, proving fruitful when conceptualizing transformative learning theory through teaching as healing (1998). Of interest to this review is the interconnectedness, or integration, of this theory with a particular focus on teacher transformation through grief work (Dirkx, 1997; Scott, 1997). According to Grabove (1997), “There is no single model to transformative learning” in that the variations of the theory are “interconnected” (p. 90).

Most importantly, this theory aims to address the three research questions with an integrative focus on the socio-emotional tending of teachers and how this neglected area of research is manifesting in detachment and the disenfranchisement of an experienced woman teacher (Cardoza, 2021; Castrellón al., 2021). Through participation in reflexive, introspective autoethnography, teaching as healing will emerge through discernment and grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Transformative learning theory epitomizes not only a destination, a circuitous pathway for learning but as a grief journey where teachers are finally invited to travel and heal.
**Transformation as critical reflection**

Growth is a central tenant to transformative learning where shifts in perspectives are made possible through critical self-reflection, discourse, and action (Dirkx, 1997, 1998; Illeris, 2017; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1997, 200). Through revisioning one’s experiences, learners become empowered to act in the world around them, becoming critically self-aware through the process (Baumgartner, 2001). Mezirow’s theory is a relational process where the ultimate outcome is the cultivation of “individuals who are more inclusive in their perceptions of their world, able to differentiate increasingly its various aspects, open to other points of view, and able to integrate different dimensions of their experiences into meaningful and holistic relationships” (Dirkx, 1998, p. 4; Mezirow, 1991). Grounded in the notion of a frame of reference where learners’ habits of mind and perspectives are situated, it is within this framework that transformations are realized (Mezirow, 2000). Revisioning one’s frame of reference in conjunction with critical reflection upon one’s experiences ultimately paves the way for a “paradigmatic shift,” a transformation of perspective (Taylor, 2008, p. 5). These shifts are the result of a life-altering event or multiple events experienced by the adult learner.

**Transformation as consciousness-raising**

Transformation as consciousness-raising originates from Pablo Freire’s work with oppressed, often illiterate communities in Brazil during the 1960s (Freire, 1973). Consciousness-raising or conscientization is an “awakening of critical awareness” that is grown out of critical education, one that Freire is credited for developing (Freire, 1970, p. 19). Inspiring political movements and educational reforms, consciousness-raising is a theory within the transformative theory realm that seeks liberation and emancipatory
education with a focus on “freedom from oppression” (Freire, 1970). Acknowledging major hurdles with liberating oppressed peoples, Freire (1970) describes that many oppressors are likewise oppressed people, dehumanized and dehumanizing, within a system where the “fear of freedom” keeps people in a vicious cycle of oppression where only the oppressed can break themselves free (p.46). Freire goes on to detail that “oppression is domesticating;” to no longer be ensnared by it, “one must emerge from it and turn upon it” (p. 51). Further, Freire explains that the only way recognition and critical awareness can be conducted is “by means of praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51). Transformations are made possible through recognizing, naming, and questioning oppressive cycles to which we are captive.

Of great importance to this study is the connection between Marxist feminism and Freire’s conscientization (Freire, 1973). Class consciousness, or in the case of oppressed people, false class consciousness, creates a dichotomy between the served and the servers (Freire, 1970; Tong & Botts, 2018, p. 71). Awareness of the role that a lack of class consciousness plays within the capitalist context of mass production runs parallel in both Marx's and Freire’s works. Mass production also referred to as massification, involves adults becoming complacent, domesticated, uprooted, and, ultimately, dehumanized while shackled to oppressive, commodified systems of which they themselves are not even aware (Freire, 1973, p. 34). Alienation, fragmentation of significance, and division often result in oppressive systems which further the distances between people who labor and people who benefit from the labor (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Seeman, 1959, 1972; Tong & Botts, 2018, p. 78). Critical reflection is a necessity for naming the structures to which one is held captive (Freire, 1970). To guide this process requires insider
knowledge and a willingness to serve alongside, not ahead of the oppressed (Freire, 1970). Awareness of my experiences with disenfranchised grief has been birthed in critical learning.

**Transformation as development**

Daloz’s holistic approach to transformative learning is one that examines “intuition, holistic, and contextually-based” processes through a more humanizing methodology of narrative, believing that it is through storytelling we “negotiate developmental transitions and are changed in the process” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 17; Daloz, 1986, 1999). The premise of this perspective is the idea of being developmentally able to “let go” of old ways of knowing by stepping into a new understanding, seeing the self and the world through new eyes as one matures and develops into adulthood (Daloz, 1986; Dirkx, 1998, p. 6). Delving deeper into the construct of readiness, researchers examine who is developmentally able to transform. Some theorists propose that age and educational attainment make transformative learning possible, and without these constructs, transformative learning may not be fully realized or possible (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Baumgartner, 2001; Daloz, 1999; Merriam, 2004; Myers, 1988).

For example, Daloz posits that aging makes way for wisdom and argues that students are seeking educational opportunities to help them make sense of life when it goes “frayed” (1999, p. 4). Merriam (2004) explores the construct of development and its impact on the outcomes experienced through transformative learning. Bringing to light some valid concerns, Merriam argues that transformative learning has the propensity “to lead to a more mature, autonomous, more ‘developed’ level of thinking,” but one must be at a level that is able to critically reflect upon assumptions of other people and on oneself.
in order to “think dialectically” and participate in discourse (2004, pp. 61-62). King and Kitchener (1994) suggest that this transformative process may not be seen until students are well within graduate programs and maybe not even then, claiming that both age and education affect one’s ability to transform.

Boyd and Myers discuss learning as development where the first half of one’s life is exploring, ego-driven, responsive to the demands of the lived experience, and responsible for the development of work and personal identities, while the second half of one’s life is seen as a time for introspection and integration where the ego is called to befriend the Self (1988).

**Transformation as individuation**

Transformation as individuation honors the spiritual, emotional, and extrarational ways of knowing, healing, and growing with a focus on developing the unconscious (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Cranton (2001) describes this type of transformation as developing who we really are authentically, allowing us to engage meaningfully with the world. This lens “embraces the concept that transformative learning is an intuitive, creative, emotional process” grounded in analytical, depth psychology (Grabove, 1997, p. 90). Dirkx et al. (2018) insist that self-understanding can result through exploration of “emotions and emotion-laden experiences” and that this “imaginative engagement” must be encouraged for learners to bring to life their “inner story” (p. 5). Swartz and Tisdell argue that adult education must consider ways to harness powerful emotions that foster storytelling and reflection in making meaning, helping students navigate the inner terrains of their lives (2012). Merging reflection and imaginative work helps when addressing the “multiple selves” of the learner, “mediating between the extra-rational demands of the unconscious...
and the prevailing structures of a parental culture and society” (Dirkx et al., 2018, p. 6). Storying is a way to bridge awareness and birth illumination.

Dirkx (2006) explains how individuation is “mediated” through “emotion-laden images” that may surface from “deep, underlying issues” (p. 18). Images in the context of individuation mediate meaning in a poetic sense, “a kind of psychic representation with no actual correspondence in an outer reality,” but based in the soul (Dirkx, 2001, p. 1). These images may surface from creative renderings such as fantasies, poetry, stories, dance, and fantasies (Dirkx, 2001, 2006).

Acknowledging the importance of expression and the “emotional-spiritual dimensions of learning and integrating these dimensions,” both holistically and conscientiously, Boyd and Myers examine how such measures will bring to consciousness an awareness of Self through symbols, or images, where meaning is made at an unconscious level (p. 7). Identifying these symbols as they emerge situates learners in a place to commune with them, to orchestrate a relationship between ego and Self (Dirkx, 1997, 1998). Healing begins with naming and engaging these structures embedded deep within the collective unconscious- Ego, Self, Shadow, Anima, Animus, Persona- befriending them because herein is where selfhood is anchored, giving way for our personal and professional identities to converge, either working together or against each other (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998; Scott, 1997). Discernment proves as pivotal to this process as critical reflection is to transformative learning; however, both may be necessary to fully actualize (Dirkx, 2006; Dirkx et al., 2018).

Grabove (1997) explains that transformations within the realm of depth psychology may be experienced as “an expansion of consciousness rather than a
cognitive change of a distorted or uncritical frame of reference” (p. 91). From a psychoanalytical lens, transformations may be triggered by “internal events” within the “second half of life” when questioning one’s purpose and life begin surfacing, bringing about a “letting-go process of grieving” (Scott, 1997, p. 41). This notion aligns with Merriam’s argument regarding cognitive development as readiness for transformative learning (2004). Where one’s first half of life is dedicated to earning, learning, and succeeding with ego at the wheel, one’s second half of life heralds a time of introspection when one has more access to the collective unconscious (Scott, 1997). Adults at this stage may be able to do the critical work to move beyond rational constraints, yet this type of transformation results from intensive grief work.

**Discernment**

Boyd and Myers (1988) detail a grieving process akin to Mezirow’s stages of transformation, where discernment, an intuitive way of knowing, serves as the impetus of transformation and “leads to a contemplative insight, a personal illumination gained by putting things together and seeing them in their relational wholeness” unlike critical reflection where understandings are taken apart (p. 274). Discernment is where the division in transformative theory can meet in the middle, enabling a merger between one’s inner and outer worlds and exploration of the rational and the extrarational to integrate and heal (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Discernment navigates space for introspection and integration where one dives into the waters of the unconscious, remaining open and responsive to the structures within the psyche, cultivating a sacred space for questioning that was never available to the rational, reflecting mind before (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Personal growth is a manifestation of three activities of discernment, including
“receptivity, recognition, and grieving the inseparable dynamic of psycho-spiritual loss” (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 276).

To transgress requires intention and introspection, a willingness to go inward and face oneself. Within this location, Boyd and Myers (1988) explain how the four phases of grieving transpire.

**Numbness and panic**

Phase one, numbness and panic, is synonymous with limbo. One is no longer restrained by old patterns of knowing but is still not certain of how to move forward in the light of new understandings. This is a place where one seems “suspended in time,” moving from nothingness to panic likened to waking up from a sedative state (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 278).

**Pining and protest**

The next phase, pining and protest, is identified as a time of emotional shifting of extremes as one protests the present while painfully grieving the past, “clinging to and searching for a lost object,” yet only finding “frustration (protest and blame)” (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 278).

**Disorganization and despair**

Transitioning to the third phase, disorganization and despair, which is where despite one’s intentions and attempts, his or her efforts at stabilization and initiation of new processes are met with defeat. This stage harkens “a climate of apathy and depression” where one cannot seem to get their bearing (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 278).
Restabilization and reintegration

These phases culminate in the final phase of grief, “restabilization and reintegration of identity,” made possible by shedding the shackles of “old patterns,” freeing the being for personal transformation (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 278). Progression through these stages is ongoing and circular, like ascending a mountain by looping around, visiting the same sides but from different locations, multiple times prior to ever reaching the summit (Boyd & Meyers, 1998; Prend, 1997; Scott, 1997).

In my review, I was able to find a study from the healthcare profession that applied transformation through individuation to their experiences (Macdonald, 2002). Macdonald, an experienced nurse educator, examined her own experiences with unlearning and transformation that developed from her experiences with evolving, evidence-based practices in her profession (2002). She divulged her spiraling through grief as she grieved previous thinking and teaching practices (Macdonald, 2002). Notably, she revealed how grieving her practice “touched the emotional core of” her nursing identity (Macdonald, 2002, p. 174).

Boyd and Meyers (1998) emphasize two virtues they view as fundamental to this practice, which include seeking “seasoned guidance” where adult educators must have experiences from which to draw upon to guide other people in their journeys and “compassionate criticism,” calling seekers to “enter into a process of discernment which unlocks the present and leads to a new future based upon a new integration within the Self” (p. 283).
Disenfranchised grief introduction

Defining grief

We all grieve yet some are forced to grieve in the shadows. We experience minor grief almost daily in some situation or another” (p. 6). Grieving is our body’s unavoidable, universal, response to loss (Doka, 2016). No grief experience or griever is the same (Kumar, 2005). Undoubtedly, our responses to grief and loss are unique, individualized, and incredibly complex (Doka, 1989, 2016). It is never ending and why grief confounds us all.

Grief researchers examine the body’s many responses to grief and loss as well as the plethora of ways grief manifests in the body (Bowlby, 1982; Cacciatore, 2017; Doka, 1989, 2002, 2016; Neimeyer, 2016; Parkes & Weiss, 1983). Although there are commonalities of responses to grief, there are complications that render prescriptive delineations problematic. The embodied grief experience may be rushed, silenced, or even shunned in our families and professional circles (Doka, 1989, 2002; Rando, 1993). Cultural norms and grieving rules often control and suppress our grief expression, constricting and restricting the griever, complicating and cumulating loss. “Grief consists of countless particles, countless moments, each one of which can be mourned” (Cacciatore, 2017, p. 3). Each particle is consuming. For many, grief is a constant companion. Having a relationship with her is work—grief work (Rando, 1993). She struggles right alongside me in murky waters.

This review of disenfranchised grief features a definition along with characteristics. From there, grief will be examined as oppressive through social and self-disenfranchisement. Closing this review is a discussion on grief work.
Defining disenfranchised grief

Doka (2002) defines disenfranchised grief as a grief experience that is “not openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly observed,” integrating “psychological, biological, and sociological perspectives on both grief and loss” (Doka, p. 5). Disenfranchisement in grieving presents an “active process of disavowal, renunciation, and rejection” (Carr, 2002, p. 40). Disenfranchised grief perpetuates and complicates grief while simultaneously eliminating or greatly reducing systems of support (Doka, 1989). Doka (2002) describes five types of disenfranchised grief.

Relationship is unacknowledged

Lacking kin or ties to family and friends may disavow mourners who were close to the lost or deceased (Doka, 2002). The assumption is that closeness and intimacy can only be experienced with those people with whom one shares familial bonds. Even when roles such as stepparents, stepchildren, caregivers, teachers, and friends may be recognized, mourners lack the guidance and support extended to family (Doka, 2002). Carr (2002) explains, “As instances of disenfranchised grief, such relationships have often been or may be deemed by society to be an insufficient or inappropriate foundation for grief” (p. 43).

Relationships that we forge with work colleagues, students, and friends may be considered insignificant and lack social approval (Doka, 2016). Of importance is that losses remind us of our own mortality and may provide insights into why avoidance and repression play a part in this type of disenfranchisement (Doka, 2016).
Loss is unacknowledged

A loss becomes disenfranchised when the loss is not viewed by society as significant (Doka, 2002). The death of a most beloved pet can cause enormous pain for the pet owner; however, the loss fails to garner socially-sanctioned support (Doka, 2002). Undoubtedly, people endure a wide range of losses that are not death-related, such as divorce, changing jobs, loss of income, secondary losses, transitions, and loss of freedom, along with many people (Doka, 2002; Rando, 1993). Secondary losses are those losses that result from original losses, e.g., the loss of a couple’s friends following a divorce; the loss of parent support groups once a child is an adult; or the loss of health following an illness (Rando, 1993). Most importantly, the same grief responses that may be triggered by a significant death are likewise responsive to the loss of anything we are attached to, including dreams, hopes, goals, and even objects (Doka, 2002). Moving forward in this research, any loss may trigger grief in the same perfunctory way as death.

When a loved one is alive but is psychologically dead due to mental illness, addiction, or brain impairment, the loss is experienced as death by mourners although the person is alive (Doka, 1985; Doka & Aber, 1989). Boss (2009) describes this type of loss as ambiguous in that “grief is frozen, life is put on hold, and people are traumatized” (p. 137). Missing loved ones would constitute a physical absence, but their presence is still experienced, whereas a loved one who is lost to drug addiction would be considered physically present but psychologically absent (Boss, 2009). Frequently, the loss not only fails to be recognized, but the mourner may face scrutiny and subsequent disenfranchisement for their association. These losses fail to receive social support or
acknowledgment except in extreme cases, constituting disenfranchisement. Additionally, these losses can cause significant trauma to caregivers and mourners.

**Griever exclusion**

Grief exclusion research is highly-focused on the exclusion of people deemed unable to fully grieve or understand loss. Doka (1989) explains that these characteristics might exclude mourners from social acceptance and subsequent support. Mourners are denied the right to grieve (Doka, 2002, p. 13). Children, the elderly, and persons with special needs might find themselves excluded in their grief experiences.

**Circumstances**

When death is situated in disturbing circumstances, this could lead to disenfranchised grief (Doka, 2002). “The nature of the death may constrain the solicitation of the bereaved for support as well as limit the support extended by others” (Doka, 2002, p.14). Stigmatized deaths such as homicides, suicides, AIDS, child deaths, assisted suicide, and accidental overdoses may all perpetuate anxiety or embarrassment, leading to disenfranchisement and alienation (Doka, 2002; Rando, 1993). These types of deaths or losses prevent griever from experiencing the loss fully (Doka, 2002).

**Teacher disenfranchised grief**

By no means exhaustive, this review frames mourners, losses, and circumstances where grief is denied. Lacking recognition or support, disenfranchised griever can experience detrimental, complicated, and alienating effects where grief and griever are silenced (Doka, 1989, 2002, 2016; Neimeyer 2005, 2016; Rando, 1993). This is particularly true for women teachers.
The experienced woman teacher is disenfranchised, constituting an intersectionality of exploitation and oppression where being a woman, a teacher, and experienced are not a winning trifecta (Apple, 2012; Goodman, 1988; Hextrum, 2014; Russom, 2012). Her loss is perpetual in that she is shackled by and through oppressive systems, capitalism and patriarchy, in which she attempts to survive (Gilligan & Snider, 2018).

Rowling (1995) pioneered the notion of disenfranchised grief of teachers, examining social and self-disenfranchisement teachers experienced within the school setting where teacher grief manifested from student loss. Teachers’ disenfranchised grief, also referred to as hidden, surfaced through monitored journal keeping, where their duality was under constant scrutiny, putting their “welfare and teaching performance at risk” (Rowling, 1995, p. 321). Three articulations occurred through these dualities, including the need to humanize themselves; professional belief systems where controlling emotions is valued; finally, the duty of care for students (Rowling, 1995). Teachers suffering from loss were caught between their roles, unable to fully grieve, hence, disenfranchising themselves along with being disenfranchised.

It is important to note that the literature does not distinguish between personal and professional grief, although the literature on teacher disenfranchised grief solely focuses on student death and grief experienced at school (Case et al., 2017; Doka, 2002, 2016; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). This constitutes griever exclusion. Teachers are grieving losses beyond the doors of the classroom but are not enfranchised in their grief nor are these experiences represented in the literature.
Social disenfranchisement

Taking a Marxist feminist perspective when analyzing the disenfranchised grief of an experienced woman teacher has not been attempted in the literature I encountered while reviewing disenfranchised grief indicating there is a gap. Grief is a personal, professional, cultural, political, financial, social experience (Devine, 2017; Doka, 2016; Kauffman, 2002; Rando, 1993). Phenomena such as technologization, urbanization, industrialization, social mobility, family dynamics, violence, economic problems, diseases, poverty, unemployment, sexism, and racism still plague an individual’s grief experiences (Rando, 1993, p. 6).

“Western society is basically described as a death-denying and product-driven society whose foundation rests upon capitalism and patriarchal hierarchies in all significant social institutions” (Wood & Williamson, 2003, as cited in Harris, 2010, p. 244). Situating myself with a Marxist feminist perspective, this study will highlight that grief can become a complicated cycle of turbulence, stagnation, oppression, and alienation living with capitalism and patriarchy. We can become numb nestled outside our grief, going through the motions, alienated, and failing to ever face the darkness within and surrounding us. Grieving without upsetting the family, school administration, or students requires drowning to feign sobriety. “Bereaved individuals often experience profound social pressure to conform to societal norms that constrict the experience of grief rather than support it” (Harris, 2010, p. 241). Women teachers have the extra burden of care to remain calm and collected, a model of how others should respond to grief (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rowling, 1995;
Shalev et al., 2022). Acknowledging our grief within our Western culture where drowning is seen as admirable is an act of rebellion.

**Unacknowledged**

Rowling (1995) observed three origins of social disenfranchisement for teachers: relationships are unrecognized; grief is unrecognized; and pervasive grieving rules. For example, attending students' funerals was allowable by “bending the rules” for teachers (Rowling, 1995, p. 323). Also, despite teachers having strong bonds with their students, their relationships failed to be recognized as significant. The caring teacher conflicted with the professional teacher. Some teachers in the study even denied support to keep a “strong upper lip” (Rowling, 1995, p. 323). Finally, teachers’ losses failed to garner attention during times when students are struggling because of their “duty of care” responsibilities (Rowling, 1995, p. 323). Teachers are expected to hold it together and hold everyone else together as well.

**The rules**

Harris (2010) examines the social norms and conditions that foster oppression with a critical theory lens. Examining power dynamics and how social norms benefit the dominant culture, Harris (2010) explores the expectation of conformity through social rules and how a violation of these rules or failure to conform by a griever can result in shaming, exclusion, and exploitation. Specifically, Harris (2010) reveals several hidden rules for grieving in Western society that govern who can grieve, what one grieves, and how one grieves. Rules for how long one is allowed to grieve have even become policy in most workplaces.
According to Doka (2002), “policies then serve to reflect and project societal recognition and support, again, reaffirming and sanctioning the familial relationships” while disenfranchising other losses (p. 8). Likewise, rules for how grief is experienced and expressed may manifest (Harris, 2010). “Gender socialization and stereotyping are strong social forces that shape the expectations of how individuals should grieve” (Harris, 2010, p. 245). These rules further complicate and oppress grief and mourners (Doka, 2002; Harris, 2010).

Notably, grieving rules dictate how people living within various societies should respond to loss (Devine, 2017; Doka, 2002; Harris, 2010). These norms not only “frame grieving” but govern behavior, feelings, thoughts, expressions, and beliefs (Doka, 2002, p. 6). Societal expectations of grieving appropriately, policies, and “grieving rules” are adopted by institutions to control and privilege “certain individuals” and socially acceptable, recognizable losses (Doka, 2002, p. 6). Hochschild (1979) describes both emotive rules as well as feeling rules that are socially sanctioned and acceptable. “Feeling rules reflect patterns of social membership” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 17). If a loss or a griever fails to fit the description of acceptability or is “discordant with the society’s grieving rules,” the griever and their grief are disenfranchised (Doka, 2002, p. 7).

Teachers adhere to unspoken rules of conduct that are dismissive and detrimental to their grief experiences (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022).

Losses for women teachers are many, yet studies in teacher grief focus on teacher grief is restricted to student death (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). Women teachers
face professional and personal changes and losses that result in grief beyond the deaths of students, yet student death serves as the focal for teacher disenfranchised grief in the reviewed literature (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). Additionally, these studies lack a clear delineation of grief experiences of women teachers, and most failed to capture the personal grief teachers are facing. Restrictions persist in the profession, deeming when and who may grieve in addition to what may be grieved.

**Silencing teacher grief**

“Our cultural avoidance-and denigration- of our very human losses and pain creates so many problems, it wouldn’t be a stretch to say we have an epidemic of unspoken grief” (Devine, 2017, p. 54). This epidemic of silence is symptomatic in a get-over-it society. According to Kuhn, “These and other unusual losses can lead to a silence that inhibits the working through of grief” (1989, p. 243). Silence is a major contributing factor in disenfranchised grief, perpetuated by the lack of social support as well as self-imposed (Kuhn, 1989). Kuhn (1989) discusses the concept of “communal silence” when a community fails to recognize the loss or is uncomfortable with the loss (p. 244).

Mourners’ aversion to grief responses prolongs their suffering, yet avoidance is often encouraged (Harris, 2010). Western society is fueled on marginalizing mourners in order to maintain economic vitality because grief poses a threat to consumerism and production (Harris, 2010; Reynolds, 2002). With so much at stake in a capitalistic society, “grief goes underground” which further perpetuates disenfranchisement of the griever or the grief itself (Harris, 2010. P. 247). In addition, Harris (2010) asserts that “male-dominated patterns of stoicism and denial of emotionality” are favored in
hierarchical, patriarchal structures (p. 247). The message to mourners who labor is to move on. The need to remain in control and to be strong in all struggles has become entrenched in our social norms and serve as unattainable, unrealistic goals for those who grieve (Harris, 2010).

**School-sanctioned**

The profession of teaching has its own standards of conduct for behaving and, consequently, grieving. Strength is expected and being vulnerable is not acceptable (Case et al., 2017; Levkovich and Duvshan, 2021; Rowling, 1995). In one study of teacher grief, teachers claimed the school had unwritten rules and procedures, creating inconsistencies in the support structure as they grieved the loss of students (Shalev et al., 2022). Holding it together in the classroom to only “fall apart at home” teachers must repress grief when faced with losses (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021, p. 1). Most teachers pushed through their own grief to support students without receiving support themselves (Case et al., 2017; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rowling, 1995). Avoidance strategies such as returning to routines and business as usual were encouraged (Case et al., 2017; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rowling, 1995). As in other studies focusing on teacher perceptions, most felt inadequately prepared to navigate grief in their classrooms and felt pressure to get back to learning despite limited assistance and direction from administration (Hart & Garza, 2013). Additionally, staff were profoundly struggling with the loss themselves, having to table their own grief until they got home (Shalev et al., 2022). Detaching becomes a survival mechanism (Gilligan & Snider, 2018).
Self-disenfranchisement

Not only may mourners face social disenfranchisement, as indicated previously in this review of the literature, but they may also disenfranchise themselves. Kauffman (2002) describes, “Oneself is the agent carrying out the sanctions against the self and operating psychologically on behalf of societal grief expectations” (p. 61). Self serves to enforce codes of conduct upon oneself and one’s grief expressions (Kauffman, 2002). Disenfranchised mourners are socially and, sometimes, culturally conditioned to disenfranchise themselves. Specifically, Kauffman (2002) believes self-disenfranchisement to be psychologically-induced and may be incited due to past experiences with disenfranchisement, disallowing and disavowing one's own grief, recycling oppression internally through repression, shame, and guilt. The illness brought about by the failure to grieve, self-disenfranchising oneself, is bondage (Kauffman, 2002). “Self-initiated disenfranchised grief may merge into socially disenfranchised grief, or it may occur entirely on its own in an act of self-disenfranchising or as an implicit exposure anxiety that permeates grief” (Kauffman, 2002, p. 71).

Soldering onward

Self-disenfranchisement emerged in Rowling’s (1995) study as teachers dealt with grief. Fear of breaking down or being reduced in the eyes of their students, teachers repressed emotions and soldiered on (Rowling, 1995). Shame and powerlessness proved to be significant factors when teachers lose control of themselves while grieving (Rowling, 1995). Also, teachers who struggled with their own grief felt inadequately prepared to support their students (Rowling, 1995). Teachers in this study were impacted by past disenfranchised grief, which complicated their current experiences. Implications
for practice include recognizing that teachers are doing grief-intensive work and need the same support as first responders; teachers can be traumatized through these experiences (Rowling, 1995).

**Repression**

In one study, teachers discussed their lack of language to articulate feelings and the need for emotional suppression to maintain a sense of stability (Case et al., 2017). Despite teachers’ comfort with talking about grief, they were guarded with their emotional displays (Case et al., 2017). Emotional repression complicates disenfranchised grief, increasing feelings of hostility, shame, guilt, and powerlessness (Armstrong, 2011; (Doka, 1989, 2002; Neimeyer, 2016; Prend, 1997). Concerns were raised about authenticity and how repression reproduces societal norms and disenfranchised grief (Case et al., 2017).

**Powerlessness, compulsivity, and detachment**

Levkovich and Duvshan’s (2021) study featured regular classroom teachers’ perceptions and experiences following the death of a student, finding that teachers experienced profound grief that profoundly affecting their personal lives. Some teachers were unable to cope, and some even chose to leave the profession (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021). Teachers in this study felt they needed time to process and grieve, yet they felt a sense of responsibility and urgency to be there for their grieving students (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021). One teacher described the ongoing grief she experienced years after the death as “a bleeding wound” (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021, p. 9). Feelings of guilt, powerlessness, fear, and sorrow were pervasive. Two important findings emerged from this study.
Like medical professionals, compassion fatigue, a condition marked by exhibiting exhaustive compassion for people and failing to care for one’s own suffering, was experienced by these teachers (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021). Educators can also be adversely affected through their compassion rendering in that secondary traumatization may occur in their support of struggling students, with 24 percent of educators reporting this condition (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Levkovich & Ricon, 2018). Compulsivity is institutionalized and internalized (Gilligan & Snider, 2018).

Another interesting finding is that teachers had to practice avoidance in order to resume life as usual (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021). Supporting students without supporting teachers perpetuates their continued disenfranchisement. Detaching ensures nobody misses a beat (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Again, it is institutionalized and internalized (Gilligan & Snider, 2018).

Of significant importance is the continuation of minimizing teachers’ needs to meet students’ needs. Teachers will remain hard pressed to continue to serve in so many capacities without much-needed support. Understanding that both social and self-disenfranchisement may be working in tandem may help to further our understanding of the complexities surrounding experienced women teachers and their disenfranchised grief.
Conclusion

In their personal lives, women face substantial changes and losses that result in grief. In fact, losses of any significance may trigger a grief response, yet these losses fail to be acknowledged socially (Doka, 1989, 2002, 2016). For women teachers, the duality of their roles along with the unrecognized griefs they mourn may perpetuate a silencing of voices, conformity, detachment, compulsivity, and alienation in all its many forms, just to name a few (Devine, 2017; Hochschild, 1979; Kauffman, 2002; Rando, 1993). Women teachers are expected to live by unspoken codes of conduct both in and out of the classroom, disenfranchising not only them but eliminating their right to grieve (Devine, 2017; Harris, 2010; Hochschild, 1979; Kauffman, 2002). There is a strong connection between patriarchal loss, alienation, and disenfranchised grief of women teachers, yet this review of the literature failed to unearth research examining these connections (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Harris, 2010; Rowling, 1995). This dissertation is my effort to add my voice to this lived experience.

This literature review has provided an examination of my macro-level theory, Marxist feminism, my mid-level theory, transformative learning theory, and disenfranchised grief to study the lived experiences of an experienced woman teacher. Connections were established, forming my theoretical framework that will ultimately address my research questions when conducting my study. By utilizing a Marxist feminist lens and reconstructing my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief, I will be able to examine how transformative learning has been healing while also providing me creative outlets professionally, personally, and pedagogically for grief work.
Most importantly is naming and dismantling oppressive strongholds that keep women teachers captive. This type of work requires critical and revolutionary learning (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). Writing my way through my personal and professional life and learning, I have come to understand that both teaching and writing have provided me with a grief outlet for expression. Additionally, having knowledgeable people to share critical discourse with has provided me with much-needed insights and guidance (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Freire, 1970). I see transformative learning, both rational and extrarational, as my motivation for both teaching and learning throughout my educational experiences (Dirkx, 1998). After all, teaching is a learning profession.
Chapter Three

Introduction

Grief work, if properly supported, can lead to both illumination and liberation (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Brown, 2015; Dirkx, 1998; Scott, 1997). Autoethnography provided a safe, healing space for healing to begin (Ellis, 1999; Poulos, 2013). My substantive interest in this topic was the disenfranchised grief of teachers, how it manifested and perpetuated alienation within oneself and within the profession, and how, despite disenfranchisement, teachers can heal. My epistemic interest was exploring and explaining the lived experiences of a disenfranchised teacher, uncovering connections within oneself through grief work while examining the intersectionality of culture and positionality personally, professionally, and pedagogically.

Autoethnography allowed for the study of culture through the eyes of Self (Chang, 2008). This research was based primarily on my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief through three concentric lenses that represent my Self and my cultural affiliations: professional, personal, and pedagogical. Undeniably, my story intersected with others; however, this study ultimately detailed my lived experiences; therefore, I do not claim that my experiences represent the experiences of all experience women teachers (Chang, 2008). Fully acknowledging this, it is my belief that my research will serve as a springboard of inquiry into the lived experiences of women experienced teachers, but this work represents my story.

This dissertation examined three questions. As a process, (1) how can an experienced teacher recognize her disenfranchised grief? As a purpose, (2) how can disenfranchised grief perpetuate harm professionally, personally, and pedagogically?
Finally, as a product, (3) how can an experienced teacher heal through disenfranchised grief?

In autoethnographic writing, the subject is self; therefore, the unit of analysis was me, while my research site are the various locales I have served as a teacher and student. Collecting data required a series of writings, vignettes, that I have been crafting since the inception of this dissertation. Reliving my stories from my current positionality and awareness, I examined reflexively internal and external factors that contributed to the disenfranchised grief of an experienced teacher.

Following this introduction, I will provide a brief overview of my theoretical framework, connecting each theory to my methodology. Next, I will introduce autoethnography, including divulging its unique characteristics and history. A description of methods along with a discussion about data analysis will follow. Divulging representation, disclosing my positionality, discussing limitations of autoethnography concludes this chapter.

**Theoretical framework**

Theoretically, the exploration of the disenfranchised grief of a teacher was conducted utilizing a Marxist feminist lens, creating a space for an in-depth analysis of intersectionalities of gender, class, and disenfranchisement in teaching through subconstructs of patriarch grief, including detachment and compulsive caregiving in addition to powerlessness, a subconstruct of alienation (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959). Despite disenfranchisement, the possibility of transformative learning through grief work is foundational to the theoretical framework of this dissertation (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998). Finally, autoethnography served as the methodology,
allowing for an exploration of my cultural intersectionalities, positionality, and subsequent experiences with disenfranchised grief.

**Marxist feminism**

Before conducting my study, I selected Marxist feminism as a lens to view disenfranchisement I have personally, professionally, and pedagogically experienced throughout my teaching career primarily because it allowed for deeper, dialectical examination of how my own intersectionalities converged. Capturing this data called for a responsive methodology, one that endeared the subjective voice instead of silencing it (Bochner, 2018). Autoethnography provided the opportunity to dialectically explore and name facets of oppression that I faced as a woman teacher from deep poverty and continue to face as a woman living in this world (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Tong & Botts, 2018). Autoethnography lifted and valued my voice (Chang, 2008). Focusing my efforts, I examined my lived experiences by narrowing my lens on class consciousness and alienation and the harm these constructs perpetuate.

**Class consciousness**

Writing from a Marxist feminist lens is the result of my raising and subsequent conditioning. As a woman from deep poverty, assuming this positionality is a natural extension of who I am in my world. Embodying a Marxist feminist perspective, I explored the exploitive nature of living and teaching as a woman. Writing about painful childhood experiences calls for a healing methodology (Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2010; Poulos, 2021; Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker & Evans, 2014; Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016). Disenfranchised grief in teaching may be rooted in the oppressive systems of schooling that I explored through Marxist feminist theory.
**Alienation**

Undoubtedly, alienation is made possible personally, professionally, and pedagogically, ensuring that women teachers remain silent and focused on production (Tong & Botts, 2018, p. 78). Examining teaching from a Marxist feminist perspective, alienation is perpetuated through detachment, compulsive caregiving, and powerlessness, perpetuating the disenfranchised grief of an experienced teacher (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959). Autoethnography and subsequent introspective reflexivity allowed for a dialectical examination of each of these subconstructs of alienation and their reciprocal relationship with disenfranchised grief (Allman, 2001; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Chang, 2008; Haug, 2015; Poulos, 2013, 2021).

**Transformational learning theory**

Rooted in transformational learning, my study utilized Dirkx’s four lenses of transformation, including transformation as critical reflection; transformation as consciousness-raising; transformation as development; and the often-neglected extrarational transformation as individuation (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998). Each lens was utilized to answer the research questions under study. Teacher education privileges critical reflection, often neglecting introspection and reflexivity (Feucht et al., 2017). Examining transformation through discernment and, ultimately, grief work enabled me to lay as my foundation the tenets of transformative education, unlike Mezirow’s transformational learning theory, rooted in depth psychology that may not fit the mold of traditional thinking about transformative learning (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998).
Discernment and grief work

This view of transformative learning “embraces the concept that transformative learning is an intuitive, creative, emotional process” (Grabove, 1997, p. 90). Awareness of Self is vital to transformation and healing, made possible through discernment, introspection, and grief work (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Boyd & Myers, 1988; Ellis, 1991; Scott, 1997). By reexamining my own grief experiences during my life’s transitions from a novice to an experienced teacher, I explored my own illuminations as I grew in age and experience within the cultural context of teaching as a woman.

Writing autoethnographically provided diverse ways of grieving, crafting creative manifestations, interpreting, and, most importantly, healing through the writing, creating, and reflecting processes (Brewster & Zimmerman, 2022; Doka, 1989, 2002; Neimeyer, 2016; Nelson, 1997; Poulos, 2021; Rando, 1993). To journey through hurting and healing required a theory and a methodology that fueled the process of mindfully grieving while aligning with other aspects of my theoretical framework.

Disenfranchised grief

In addition to transformational learning theory, I examined grief within the context of the disenfranchised grief of an experienced woman teacher. Through the construction and analysis of my own narratives of disenfranchised grief, I painstakingly examined the sources of disenfranchised grief and how it manifested professionally, personally, and pedagogically.
Social and self-disenfranchisement

An examination of the repetition of past social and self-imposed disenfranchised grief was conducted through autoethnography—a qualitative methodology that allows space for storytelling lived experiences within the context of culture (Doka, 2002; Rowling, 1995). Introspective grief work created a space for elucidation, creative exploration, expression, and healing, which will ultimately be examined throughout this study (Brewster & Zimmerman, 2022; Rando, 1993). Naming the sources of my disenfranchised grief was conducted with a lens on the subconstructs of alienation, detachment, compulsive caregiving, and powerlessness (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959). In addition, I wrote my way through grief experiences which calls for a methodology that will serve as a conduit for discernment, grief work, and ultimately, healing (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Neimeyer, 2005, 2016; Scott, 1997).

Introduction to autoethnography

Autoethnography is a most elusive, creative methodology, an approach to qualitative research that allows “multiple layers of consciousness” to emerge, ultimately fusing a connection between the “personal and the cultural” and the outer and inner landscapes of the researcher (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Adams et al. (2015) describe autoethnography as “stories of/about the self-told through the lens of culture” that “are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience,” beckoning the researcher “to engage ourselves, others, culture(s), politics, and social research” (p. 1). Critical to the maintenance of its integrity as a methodology, autoethnography must embody the “triadic balance” between self, culture, and writing (Chang, 2008, p. 49). Central to the credibility
of autoethnography is its emphasis on cultures in the context of living, i.e., a self-examination of one’s lived experiences (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008; Poulos, 2021).

Finding its origins in the autobiographical and personal narrative genres, autoethnography embodies a qualitative methodological approach to research and writing that provides a space for the researcher to focus both inward and outward, “exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 65). It is from the positionality of the researcher as the subject that stories are crafted from the “I” perspective, first-person accounts, much unlike traditional qualitative research (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Poulos, 2021). Through this positionality, evocative, critical autoethnography is conceived and constructed (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008; Poulos, 2021).

Poulos (2021) describes intersections where the researcher serves as “both observer and participant in the scene,” making way for “deeper, richer, fuller evocations of cultural scenes” that manifest through autoethnography (p. 9). This insertion allows the researcher to be fully embodied in their study while connecting their inner and outer worlds. Autoethnography reaches beyond the researcher’s experiences into the lived experiences of the cultures in which the researcher ascribes and chooses to study (Chang, 2008). Capturing my own intersectionalities while bringing my vulnerable Self into the full view of narrative renderings, I was able to narrow the lens on myself; however, my renderings involved others, those with whom I shared space from childhood through adulthood (Adams et al., 2022; Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 1995b; Méndez-
López, 2013; Poulos, 2021). It is important to remember that writing about the self through a cultural lens implicates others (Chang, 2008).

Autoethnography is a responsive, empowering, and liberating methodology, providing a pathway to inquiry and illumination; however, autoethnography can be challenging, triggering, and heart-wrenching (Behar, 2012; Berry, 2022; Ellis, 1999; Poulos, 2013; Ronai, 1996; Tullis, 2022). Writing my way through disenfranchised grief has been most arduous, and at times, beyond what I could mentally and emotionally process. This work has taken a few years to come into full view in large part due to the need to suspend the stories, detach, and regulate my emotional responses. Finding myself drawn to continuing, needing to feel and story the experiences, I would return and cycle through grief all over again (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Healing came through the hurting, through giving life to words, lifting them from the mire, dedicated to their being heard.

**Why autoethnography**

A methodology should be responsive to the research, the researcher, and the researched. Autoethnography is noted as a transformative methodology, one that has the potential to transform both the researcher and the reader through the rendering, consuming, and connecting (Adams et al., 2015; Poulos, 2013). With that said, I sought a methodology that would be accessible, representative, and healing, aligning my research questions, theoretical framework, and, ultimately, research purpose.
**Accessibility**

Accessibility is of major importance and one of the many benefits of choosing autoethnography as a methodology (Adams et al., 2015; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Chang, 2008; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Poulos, 2021). Lauded for its versatility, autoethnography offers another way to share research with those practitioners who may be in need but may not be able to sort through the jargon of traditional research (Poulos, 2021). From creating to consuming, autoethnographies allow for engagement, connection, and reciprocity (Adams et al., 2015). The stories capture and move us; however, the writer must be skillful in crafting accessible stories (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnography requires both skill and creativity— it is art made accessible through story (Adams & Holman Jones, 2018). Accessibility does not imply easy to write. Autoethnography requires skills that exceed research; the writer must be able to engage, evoke, and even transform audiences (Poulos, 2013). Additionally, Poulos (2021) cautions that some researchers intent on sharing research may be unable to represent their study in a well-written format, i.e., they simply lack the skills to write well. What use is research if it is never read?

**Representation**

Weaving the political, professional, and personal, autoethnography is a methodology that flows through the various intersectionalities of the lived experiences of self and society, making way for often unheard voices and narratives to emerge (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnography provides an inclusive, organic space where the marginalized can express and connect to other people (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It is a liberating methodology with transformative potential for both the creator and the
consumer (Bochner, 2012, 2016, 2018; Poulos, 2013). Notably, autoethnography is popular when writing from a feminist perspective due to its narrative constructs and readability, cultivating spaces where silenced voices may emerge and be heard in an accessible format (Ellis, 2004). According to Adams et al. (2015), “autoethnographers create a textual space for talking back to neglected cultural experiences” while refusing and disputing traditional “canonical narratives that promote hegemony” (p. 41). This methodology empowers traditionally silenced voices to speak, filling in the spaces where stories have been left unheard, “breaking the silence” and bearing witness (Adams et al., 2015, p. 41). Behar (2012) discusses how feminist writers are focusing efforts on writing autobiographically to encourage identification and connection, allowing for subjectivity to flow within their works as opposed to a strict adherence to objectivity and maintaining dominant discourses that have served in many traditional research endeavors, freeing feminists to tell their stories. Liberation from subjugation is one of the many transformative possibilities of writing autoethnographically (Adams et al., 2015).

Subjectivity,

*Healing*

Autoethnography is not solely about producing knowledge in hopes of someone reading it. It is coconstruction of meaning between the reader and the researcher, a transactional engagement. Bochner (2012) explains, “Autoethnographies are not intended to be received, but rather to be encountered, conversed with, and appreciated” (p. 161). Beyond this transaction, autoethnography has the potential to transform both the creator and the consumer through emotional, vivid renderings that serve as both a process and a product (Ellis et al., 2010; Poulos, 2013). I sought this methodology for its healing
qualities, hoping to dip my toes in its “curative” springs (Poulos, 2013, p. 46). Most ardently, I believe in autoethnography’s power to heal.

I have found solace, healing, and even transformation through my own consumption of autoethnography that resonates deeply with my own stories (Boylorn, 2015; Carter, 2002; Chawla, 2013; Goodall, 2005; Popli, 2022; Ronai, 1995; Wyatt, 2020). I am in awe of the feelings that stirred within and the connection that formed between their worlds and mine. Much like the tattered threads that connect me to my own grief, they somehow, despite the messiness and the vulnerability of doing autoethnography, connect me to others (Adams et al., 2015).

Pivotal in the pursuit of personal illumination is introspection which can come to fruition through writing, specifically writing to heal (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 1991; Pennebaker & Evans, 2014). Sociological introspection cultivates deepening awareness of our emotional threading throughout memory mining and rendering the evocative narratives birthed from our lived experiences (Ellis, 1991; Poulos, 2013). Encouraging researchers to begin with themselves, one’s personal experiences can ignite the impetus for emotional unleashing, cultural examination, and reflexive introspection, crafting a story from the lens of self (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004.)

Opportunities for “self-transformation” and, ultimately, healing from “emotional scars of the past” can be possible through autoethnography (Chang, 2008, p. 53) rooted in both reflexivity and introspection (Adams et al., 2015; Bochner, 2018; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 1991; Ellis, 2004; Poulos, 2021). Examining the social and personal intersections of my own emotions and bodily responses as I remember and story required “systematic sociological introspection,” where emotions and thoughts emerged
introspectively through the recall of an experience (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 168). These awakenings birthed multiple voices and “emotional recall” that allowed introspective renderings of an experience after the experience had occurred and I had “lived through it” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 168). This process is especially important when digging deep into the memories of grief, and in my case, disenfranchised grief. Additionally, examining my stories through a Marxist feminist lens allowed for the dialectical exploration of the overarching impact of capitalism and patriarchy, providing a nuanced view into disenfranchised grief and continued healing. Awareness of the sources of my disenfranchised grief and consequently naming my disenfranchised grief comprises the initial stages of grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Freire, 1970).

Poulos (2021) asserts that autoethnography can help the researcher make sense of “traumatic memory recovered during the writing and building clarity about its impacts in everyday life,” consequently coming to a place of deep understanding and therapeutic outcomes (p. 9). Brewster and Zimmerman (2022) discuss the healing potential, including physical and mental health improvement, of telling and sharing our stories; in addition, they divulge that storytelling is therapeutic while grieving. Writing autoethnographically was exceptionally challenging, but this process itself has had a transformative impact on me professionally, personally, and pedagogically.
**History of autoethnography**

Rooted in existentialism, phenomenology, narrative theory, symbolic interactionism, and social constructionism, autoethnography is a way of life that makes way for carving meanings out of experiences with other people and the world, subjectively and narratively, valuing the point-of-view of the researcher as well as new perspectives that the researcher encounters (Poulos, 2021).

Moving from an objective lens to a more subjective approach has been the evolution of anthropology and sociology, where the objective outsider became the subjective insider, acknowledging that researchers are also human and incapable of pure objectivity (Poulos, 2021). Pioneers began experimenting with the notion of inserting themselves into their studies, journaling their experiences and reactions to their research, and developing rich, “thick descriptions” of their observations and encounters (Poulos, 2021, p. 7). Earlier autoethnographers such as Geertz (1973), who documented his experiences with cockfighting and gambling and Goodall (1991, 1996a, 1996b) who crafted ethnography that focused on communities and groups paved the way for current champions of the methodology (Poulos, 2021). Most notable are Ellis and Bochner, who began taking risks with the methodology in the 90s and have been forging ahead ever since. Bochner’s (2016) *Coming to Narrative: A Personal History of Paradigm Change in Human Science* details his own transformation as a researcher from the positivist stance. Ellis (1995a) explores her personal struggles with grief in *Final Negotiations: A Story of Love, Loss, and Chronic Illness*.

The term “autoethnography” is often credited to David Hayano (1979), who called on anthropologists to share the “voices from within,” encouraging researchers to
seek and share stories from “neglected populations” (p. 103). Autoethnography is a response to the “crisis of representation,” i.e., the lack of representation and false representation of research, the idea that a researcher stands apart from their study, calling into question some social science research in response to the lack of representation of hidden voices (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Poulos, 2021).

Research site and participants

For the purpose of this study, my research site is a collection of locations from my personal and professional past that spans approximately 40 years—an integration of layered experiences and recollections. For the purpose of this study, I refrained from sharing specific locations to ensure the anonymity of the characters that I detailed and described through my cultural encounters and contexts (Adams et al., 2015; Poulos, 2021). Generically, my study featured my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief as a teacher in school districts and in higher education from a woman from deep poverty positionality. Writing autoethnographically, I situated myself as a researcher, storying through my personal, professional, and pedagogical lived experiences with education in rural and urban areas of Arkansas.

Examining disenfranchised grief through Marxist feminist and transformative learning lenses required questioning and naming intersections of experience so that illuminations could occur, processes that required documenting my experiences with other people’s experiences (Chang, 2008). According to Adams (2008), “writing about the self always involves writing about others” (p. 720). Out of respect for the anonymity of both family and colleagues, all names were changed using pseudonyms. Additionally,
efforts were made to obscure locales and interactions that might compromise others or myself (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). My participants were represented as characters featured in my story; identifiable characteristics were altered accordingly (Ellis, 2004). Notably, I have received informed consent from living family members as well as shared my interpretations and representations with them throughout this process (Adams, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Tullis, 2022).

In autoethnographic writing, the subject is self; therefore, the unit of analysis is me. Because autoethnography is situated with the researcher as the subject, my rendition of events and encounters is subject to scrutiny; therefore, I fully acknowledge that my story is my interpretation of my lived experiences. However, this does not make my story less valuable, credible, or important. I am an insider with a unique perspective, positionality, and diverse experiences; my voice matters as does my story (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008; Tullis, 2022). From my topic’s conception to its birth, I have been privileged to present stories and address questions of my own choosing. I was able to shape and shade my renderings as can any researcher; however, autoethnography calls for a reflexive approach to explore how power and privilege intersect within our renderings, committing the autoethnographer to the task of filtering their story through an analytical net (Adams et al., 2015, 2022; Poulos, 2013). Again, efforts, such as name changing and obscuring identifiable data, were taken to remain ethical in accordance with both “research and representation” of my story and the people who inhabited it (Adams et al., 2015, p. 11). However, it is imperative to note that blood may be drawn from the shards of the stories that I told (Wyatt, 2020). Although intentional efforts were made in my representations of others and renderings of events through attentive detail to my craft and
reflexivity, there is always a risk of harm in research (Ellis, 1995b; Ronai, 1996).

Silencing my voice to protect others perpetuates the very oppression I sought to expose and exploit in my renderings (Berry, 2022; Tullis, 2022).

Spanning 40 years of field notes, journals, experiences, and encounters, some of my memories involved people who are no longer living. The same care was applied to people no longer here as will be people who remain here. Most notably, the researcher as a subject increases the vulnerability of the researcher. Adams et al. (2015) caution that “the personal risks of doing autoethnography can be significant,” especially when confronting unsettling events and losses (p. 63). Therefore, it was vital that I told stories that I could live through and with, including facing the consequences that may accompany the risk of doing autoethnography.

Data collection

IRB approval

I sought IRB approval from the University of Memphis and was informed that I would not need it. With that said, I have completed CITI training.

Self-observation

Vital to the process of writing autoethnographically is being present throughout the process of research and writing (Poulos, 2021). Chang (2008) details a process called self-observation whereby the researcher records herself sharing narratively or in accordance with a pre-structured format. I established weekly recording sessions featuring personal reflections on my research process. I also continued to read other researchers’ autoethnographies that featured studies and discussions on grief and challenges of writing autoethnographically, making connections to the literature available
while also eliciting my own experiences. Because autoethnography can be emotionally
evocative and even risky to the researcher’s wellbeing, caring for the self by maintaining
a pulse on my progress and growing awareness was critical; therefore, maintaining video
self-observation greatly supported this process, providing me with insights. Capturing
emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, in addition to insights regarding my research process
and progress, recording myself in the moment proved useful in the autoethnographic
process (Chang, 2008). For the sake of this study, I recorded self-observations
responsively, tracking my way through my research process while monitoring and
adjusting as needed using Screencastify, a web-based platform and videoing using my
iPhone as needed.

These logs were reminders of the intensive nature of choosing to write
autoethnographically. Oftentimes, I would record and talk my way through dialectical
connections, internal strife, and aha moments. These videos were often the impetus for
wellness checks as well.

Taking time away from traumatic and grievous renderings, I sought counseling,
seasoned guidance, and connection with peers and family (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Compa-
nionate conversations contributed greatly to my perseverance.

Additionally, I began a routine of mindful grieving (Kumar, 2005) through
walking and communing in nature. I participated in this practice daily throughout my
research, providing me with an additional healing pathway when facing so many painful
experiences through my renderings (Kumar, 2005).
Journals and expressive writings

From social media and coursework to expressive writing and journaling, I began the process of situating myself within my story through curating my writings once I decided upon this topic and methodology. For most of my teaching career, I maintained a journal of my experiences in and out of the classroom, especially in times of struggle. In addition to journals, I have written poetry and other expressive works. These works were curated to inform the autoethnography I rendered. Likewise, I have also written about my experiences with grief on social media and throughout my university studies. According to Chang (2008), “Personally produced texts, however, are particularly invaluable” to an autoethnographic study “because they preserve thoughts, emotions, and perspectives at the time of recording, untainted by your present research study” (p. 107). I began a substantive review of my postings which provided insights into the lived experience under study. This review was conducted in the initial stages of my study and ultimately inspired the stories I rendered.

Field notes

Locating and gaining access to the “field” is a much different process for autoethnographers (Adams et al., 2015, p. 50). In the case of my field notes for this study, “gaining access” may be “discursive and relational, constituted or dominated by language and interaction” instead of the “physical space” where my various experiences occurred (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnography is informed by the researcher’s lived experiences with other people and can span a lifetime and a plethora of locations; therefore, the mind serves as a site where fieldwork is conducted; in my case, grief work through autoethnography (Poulos, 2021).
Informing my story are my memories. “Personal memory is a building block of autoethnography because the past gives a context to the present self, and memory opens a door to the richness of the past” (Chang, 2008, p. 71). Unlike traditional ethnography, where attempts are made to silence the researcher, autoethnographic researchers’ voices are privileged, becoming the “primary source” in their research (Chang, 2008). Memory serves autoethnographers as the “primary data set” for their research (Poulos, 2021, p. 27). Poulos (2021) describes this process of working with memories as “mining memories,” where autoethnographers acknowledge their memories in relationship to their research, digging, sifting, and sorting while making meaning of lived experiences. This excavation has the potential of yielding a wealth of memory data for the autoethnographer to begin the process of crafting stories.

Working in tandem with memory mining, introspection requires the researcher to remain attentive to the details of life and the inner workings of the Self. For example, Poulos (2021) details a reflexive, emotional process whereby he engages his consciousness through a systematic review of his emotional responses through self-questioning to “collect data” (p. 29). Recording these recollections aided in the rendering of my stories as they in my remembering. I mined memories prior to writing my autoethnography, taking notes on significant, recurring and emerging themes that were evident in my earlier writings and memories.

From curating my written work to consuming it, I interrogated my experiences with disenfranchised grief through three spheres—personal, professional, and pedagogical, examining recurring themes from my earlier works that ultimately fueled the narratives I chose to render (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). This requires an introspective
approach to data analysis in that autoethnography is writing as inquiry, both creative and analytical (Adams et al., 2015, 2015).

Autoethnographic writings

According to Poulos (2021), “Following a systematic practice of participation, observation, querying, reflection, introspection, memory mining, story analysis, and exploratory writing, the autoethnographer works through the deeper contours of the phenomenon under study (p.20). This process is highly integrative. Adams et al. (2015) discuss several forms of autoethnography, many of which overlap as renderings are produced. My study featured three forms of autoethnographic writing that will undoubtedly overlap throughout my renderings.

Expressionism

One form that assisted in my examination of disenfranchised grief is expressionism which allows autoethnographers an opportunity to express themselves fully through the twists and turns of their own writing, moving through suffering and struggles with the overall outcome of improved life circumstances (Adams et al., 2015). Much like confessional tales, expressionist texts “take us into the narrator’s perspectives on the research process, the storied experience, and the researcher’s interactions and relationships with others, as well as how the story and the storyteller are situated in, produced, and changed by cultural beliefs and practices” (Adams et al., 2015, p. 87). Additionally, because my renderings featured experiences throughout my grief journey where losses and subsequent learning will be shared, “devotional texts,” those texts that honor, “pay tribute to others, identities, caregiving” surfaced (Adams et al., 2015, p. 88). Expressionism is inspired from within the researcher and features both emotional and
embodied experiences as told by the researcher. Introspection is a conduit of creation throughout this writing process.

**Critical autoethnography**

Another form I utilized was conceptualism through critical autoethnography, which allows the autoethnographer to convey and critique “cultural experiences, breaking silences, and reclaiming voices” (Adams et al., 2015, p. 89). Whereas expressionism features the inner workings of the researcher, conceptualism examines the outer workings, i.e., the culture in which the researcher resides, a highly reflexive process. Reliving my stories from my current positionality and awareness, I examined internal and external factors that contribute to the disenfranchised grief of an experienced teacher, including writing my way through my own experiences with oppression rooted in my childhood. Revisiting my story with learned lenses empowered me to critique my experiences by remaining grounded in introspection and reflexivity with the ultimate goal of sense making (Poulos, 2013).

**Layered accounts**

Finally, since my story weaves the spheres of personal, professional, and pedagogical lived experiences with disenfranchised grief through the intersectionalities of childhood and womanhood, layered accounting allowed for multiple voices to emerge (Ellis et al., 2010). Layered account provided for the positioning of my experiences alongside the research, data, and experiences of others as well (Poulos, 2013). From voicing my childhood and young womanhood experiences with poverty to storying their impact on my personal, professional, and pedagogical walk, layered accounts provided a space for brokenness and healing (Ronai, 1995).
Ronai (1992) describes layered account as “multiple layers of reflection- a layered account- shifting forward, backward, and sideways through time, space, and various attitudes” where self-examination is possible through introspection and autoethnographic renderings. Layered account is featured throughout my renderings, threading my childhood to my professional walk as a teacher and my personal walk as a woman in this world.

*Data organization and storage*

Understanding that the organization of data is as important as the collection of data is especially vital with autoethnography. I will utilize Google Sheets to curate, sort, and categorize data as well as track my research endeavors. Utilizing Google Sheets allowed for all data to be seamlessly accessed and examined for the purpose of this study. Google Drive allowed for easy storage, collaborating, and sharing with my committee and, when needed, participants. I am well-versed in the applications that I utilized for the storage and retrieval of data, making the selection of this platform a necessity.

*Timeline*

**Stage One**

*Curation*

During Stage One, I began curating and organizing data gathered from my personal journals and other writings. Since this methodology is more organic, construction and reconstruction of the data, setting hard deadlines was initially problematic. I allowed myself a month to gather data and was able to meet this deadline without issue. Having materials stored within my home and office; accessibility was not a problem.
Memory mining

Following the gathering of data such as journal entries and postings, I began developing field notes based on memory mining (Poulos, 2021). This process allowed me to fill in the gaps and fully capture my story. I expected this process to be ongoing throughout the research, and it was in that when I began rendering my story, layered accounts emerged, and memories revived (Ronai, 1995; Tullis, 2022).

Thematic connections

Data analysis is iterative and requires introspective reflexivity, integrating creation and analysis (Poulos, 2013, 2021). Writing from a Marxist feminist perspective, utilizing introspective reflexivity provided a more dialectical approach when storying my experiences; however, unlike traditional qualitative research and data analysis, this process began with the initial stages of gathering and reading, consequently, creating themes from my written work about my lived experiences (Poulos, 2021). Drawing thematic connections in my work actually began while digging into the writings from my past experiences with disenfranchised grief as well as through the writings I, ultimately, rendered autoethnographically (Adams et al., 2015; Poulos, 2021). It was a cumulative, circuitous process but began here. At this stage, I filtered my readings and renderings through the lenses of my theoretical framework and research questions, cultivating themes, both reflexively and analytically (Poulos, 2021). These themes would later be expressed through my renderings.

For example, I noted early on in my research a theme of abusive practices throughout my professional journey. Several of my earlier writings were ruminations about my response or lack of response to bullying and harassment by students and
administrators. I traced this theme over several instances from childhood through adulthood, deciding to include this theme in my renderings because of its significance to my disenfranchised grief in teaching.

**Stage Two**

*Corroborations*

During Stage Two, I consulted with others as needed to corroborate or critique my rendition and interpretation of events. This involved several conversations with my mother, husband, aunt, and daughters as well as colleagues who were connected to some of my renderings. Subsequently, I shared my stories with family who are represented in my writings to ensure transparency in my representations throughout this process.

*Self-observation logs*

I completed self-observation logs daily throughout my study to connect my thinking with what I am produced, fostering reflexivity through reflection. These logs are likewise curated using Google Drive.

**Stage Three**

*Writing as inquiry*

During Stage Three, I completed the process of crafting my story through experiencing the data from my current, evolving positionality. Writing evocative autoethnographically, my journals, memories, emotions, and intersectionalities served as inspirations to my renderings and the flow of story (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Poulos, 2013). Poulos (2021) describes this process as “systematic reflexive introspection” where the writing process itself becomes a mode of inquiry and sense-making of life’s experiences (p. 32). I expected the actual writing of my autoethnography to take a
minimum of two months to complete, and it took approximately three months. Again, this process was intensive and required frequent pausing and engaging in acts of self-care.

Data analysis

Data analysis began with the conception of my topic. Before writing autoethnographically, I began sorting, connecting, and threading experiences analytically and thematically. Throughout the writing process, I conducted reflexive introspection and subsequent analysis (Poulos, 2021). As an additional layer of inquiry, I added the Iterative Reflexive Analysis Framework which required questioning the data in situ and once the data is rendered (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). The ebb and flow of writing reflexively required tapping into my head to “explicitly engage with the data analysis process,” providing an intimate space for data to speak continuously throughout and following creating the renderings (p. 78). This process was highly recursive and dialectical in that I had to cycle through the data, rereading frequently in order to provide an accurate representation. This process took one month to complete.

Stage Four

Integration

During Stage Four, I began the task of reviewing research questions and connecting iterations to my theoretical framework and subsequent review of the literature. This portion of the study took approximately one month to complete.
Representation

Naturally, autoethnographic writings serve as a representation of data when utilizing autoethnography as a methodology; however, to enhance the credibility of this research, I applied additional methods to ensure quality representation (Adams et al., 2015; Anderson, 2006; Ellis et al., 2010; Poulos, 2021). Chapter Four will serve as my representation of the data in story form while Chapter Five will divulge an analytical, reflexive chart, capturing my dialectical examination of the data and subsequent findings. See figure 3 in Chapter Five.

Conducting iterative analysis through reflexivity and questioning allowed for a deep exploration of iterations that surfaced from “attunement” to data and autoethnographic renderings (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2010; Poulos, 2021). Additionally, I represented my data by addressing each of my research questions through use of the Dirkx’s four lenses of transformation (Dirkx, 1998). This integrative process was exceptionally challenging.

Trustworthiness and credibility

Addressing credibility from an autoethnographic stance, Pathak (2013), utilizes Gonzalez’s (2000) four ethics to “disrupt colonialisit systems,” including accountability, context, truthfulness, and community (p. 599). Understanding the importance of quality, I made concerted efforts to ensure every aspect of my study, including my own expertise, were conducted professionally and, most importantly, ethically.
**Expertise**

Regarding researcher expertise, as a doctoral candidate, I am still a novice researcher embarking on the nuanced methodology of autoethnography. Despite my limited research experiences, however, I do possess experiential knowledge that empowers me to embark upon and engage in this work credibly and truthfully. Establishing context, “the naming of the social, political, economic, and cultural forces that shape the story being told,” requires that I own my positionality and my identities as I write my way through my study (Pathak, 2013, p. 599). As a child and woman from poverty, I can write from a voice of my lived experiences as someone who has lived in two vastly different worlds (Bochner, 2000). Likewise, as a classroom teacher in K-12 and instructor in higher education for twenty-five years, I have gained knowledge and insights that have informed my practice as an educator of future educators while giving me a diverse perspective of teaching.

**Accountability**

Accountability required that I not only tell my story but also committed to reflexive practice, telling how I “came to know” the story I am telling (Pathak, 2013, p. 599). In addition to being accountable for the stories I divulged, I remained truthful in all renderings, requiring that I “push” myself to tell the parts of my story that have been “invisible” and have simply gone “unnoticed” (Pathak, 2013, p. 599). Being accountable to my story while also checking myself within my own truth was critical to this journey. Likewise, owning that I have a responsibility to the communities I am writing about was of utmost importance (Pathak, 2013). My story is set among other stories and lives,
requiring careful attention to ensure I inflict no harm on the people with whom I have shared my journey.

In telling my stories, I told stories of others, and some of these stories contain unflattering events, harsh words, and insider secrets (Boylorn, 2015). Taking responsibility for these renderings, I hold myself accountable for their outcomes, but I made extensive efforts to ensure that representations were accurate and handled with care.

Congruence

Congruence is not only a must when telling a story, but it is likewise a critical aspect of establishing credibility in my study. Creating methodological congruence began with the inception of my story and, eventually, my topic, research questions, and theoretical framework. My lived experiences, along with my view of the world I traverse, are integral to my methodological congruence; they are the inspiration for my study. Returning to my own reasoning allowed me to remain true to the ultimate purpose of my study, from design to implementation. Dutta and Birks (2014) assert that by remaining grounded in congruence, researchers can avoid such pitfalls as over-promising results, failing to remain rooted in a theoretical framework, taking ownership of limitations and inconsistencies, and diverging from the intended topic. Being responsive and transparent throughout the research process is a must. I was able to do with through tracking my efforts, documenting, using Google sheets.

Procedural precision

Finally, to ensure my research credibility and trustworthiness, I attended to procedural precision throughout my study. Dutta and Birks (2014) recommend that
researchers maintain an audit trail, manage data and resources effectively, and demonstrate procedural logic in order to validate procedural precision. Again, documenting my progress throughout this process was handled through self-observation logs that were conducted weekly using video reflections throughout my study.

Addressing procedural precision means tracking data generation and collection by way of documenting “research activities, changes in research direction, and a rationale for choices made,” which aids in “securing confidence” in my study (Dutta & Birks, 2014, p. 227). Specifically, I kept a methodological journal that addressed “methodological dilemmas, directions, and decisions” while also encouraging “reflexivity and to avoid preconceiving” data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 165). Taking extra precautions such as video logs and memoing through methodological journals helped to ensure credibility and trustworthiness in my study while also allowing me to see dialectical relationships between the data.

**Data analysis: Iterative Reflexive Framework**

With autoethnography, data analysis begins at the inception of the project (Poulos, 2021). Long before committing to this topic, I began the act of “attunement,” becoming mindful of the phenomenon and the people I sought to investigate (Poulos, 2021, p. 21). This required observation and informal interviews with colleagues, mentors, family, and friends as well as tuning into and exploring my reactions and emotions with each encounter (Poulos, 2021). From there, I began contemplating the raw data, the bits and pieces I discovered during attunement, seeking to study my gendered experiences with disenfranchised grief as a teacher, formulating a theoretical framework and subsequent questions for investigation (Poulos, 2021). I conducted “exploratory research”
through rudimentary reviews of the literature and having more discussions with colleagues, mentors, family, and friends, seeking stories and artifacts, further revising my research questions, theoretical framework, and research purpose (Poulos, 2021, p. 21). To conduct this portion of my research required that I scour my journals, artifacts, and other written works.

Memory mining began the process of reflexive introspection with the primary data set—my memories (Poulos, 2021). Reflexive introspection allows for the intersection of emotion, experience, memories, and culture to be experienced and explored, creating meaning, a coconstruction of remembering, renderings, and constant filtering (Poulos, 2021). Throughout my renderings, I turn outward, examining my observations, memories, theoretical framework, and research questions, engaging with these constructs, writing and rereading, while simultaneously turning inward, taking an emotional stance, questioning the experiences, centering myself, and ultimately discerning data (Poulos, 2021). Questions that guided my introspective reflexivity and subsequent renderings included:

Who and where am I in all this?
What do I bring to this place, event, culture?
What is my heart telling me?
What emotional and other affective responses do I feel?
What are the connections between my thoughts, senses, memories, emotions, and experiences?
Who am I here and now?
How do I feel?
What is my intellectual and emotional response to the situation at hand or the memory that is arising or the artifact I’ve stumbled on in my search? (Poulos, 2021, p. 29).

Answers to these questions have been represented throughout my vignettes, capturing the intersectionalities of my memory, research questions, and theoretical framework through autoethnography (Poulos, 2021).

Autoethnography allows for the convergence of data and analysis through the renderings of stories (Ellis et al., 2010; Ellis & Bochner, 2000, 2006; Poulos, 2021). The reader is given the reins of analysis, interpreting for themselves the meanings the words, in their totality, offer (Poulos, 2013). Choosing a holistic approach for further analysis, I utilized the Iterative Reflexivity Framework (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). This process is more inclusive of a researcher’s motivations, subjectivities, positionality, and insider knowledge, a “highly reflexive” process, “sparking insight and developing meaning” through continuous visitations with the data (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009; p. 77). Table 1 represents the framework and my application in its totality.
Table 1: Iterative Reflexivity Framework (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iterative Approach</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q1: What are the data telling me?</strong></td>
<td>Clarifying of lenses being used for investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q2: What is it I want to know?</strong></td>
<td>Connecting research objectives with subjectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q3: What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?</strong></td>
<td>Refining focus and linking back to research questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research on analytic reflexivity and data analysis is scarce (Anderson, 2006). Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) suggest that this may be due to the abstraction of having to journey inward and communicate with oneself through and about the data. Self-reflexivity is promoted through a “triangulated reflexive inquiry throughout the research process for self-reflexivity” (Patton, 2002; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009, p. 78). According to Srivastava and Hopwood (2009), questioning for self-reflexivity involves asking questions. Questions that the reflexive researcher must explore throughout this process include:
Q1: What are the data telling me?

Addressing this question requires that I “clarify the lens…. through which I viewed the data” (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Reading and rereading my stories, I entered each reading, asking the data to speak to me. Although I constructed and created the data, this process allowed for deeper attunement, allowing the data to come forward (Poulos, 2021). This process was highly introspective and deeply reflexive (Poulos, 2021; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). I began the process of narrowing my iterations to support my theoretical framework of Marxist feminism, disenfranchised grief, and transformative learning. Iterations began surfacing (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

Initially, throughout my stories and those connected to my stories, iterations of disenfranchisement began accumulating. Disenfranchisement is having privilege, rights, voice, power, and opportunities removed or never offered; it is having no representation at the table (Cambridge, 2023). Tracking occurrences, I utilized Google Sheets.

From there, throughout my stories, I sought iterations of disenfranchised grief, mine and others, finding that grief recurred throughout my renderings. Grief is defined as one’s response to loss, including physical, emotional, and mental manifestations (Doka, 2016). Disenfranchised grief occurs when the griever, their grief, or circumstances surrounding the loss experienced are not acknowledged (Doka, 2002). Tracking iterations, I utilized Google Sheets.

Finally, I began searching for iterations of transformations, including changes, healing, and illuminations. As iterations occurred, I also tracked them using Google Sheets.
**Q2: What is it I want to know?**

After I conducted several rereadings, rendering a multitude of iterations featuring disenfranchisement, disenfranchised grief, and transformations, I began connecting the iterations categorically based upon my literature review, research focus, and questions, examining connections between what I wanted to know and the renderings I offered. Categorically, I sorted iterations personally, professionally, and pedagogically, finding blurred lines between many iterations. Rowling (1995) noted overlapping between the profession/personal duality in her research of disenfranchised grief of teachers. I also found this to be evident in my study, making stringent delineations cumbersome.

Further, I subcategorized iterations that were representative of several characteristics of personal, professional, and pedagogical disenfranchisement. These initial categories included dehumanization, exploitation, passing, appearances, division, hierarchy, lacking awareness, unlearning, control, disenfranchising self and others, generational grief, time/support, and recurring losses. These categories were generated from RQ2, how can disenfranchised grief perpetuate harm professionally, personally, and pedagogically.

From there, I reorganized and sorted iterations categorically by tenets of Marxist feminism and patriarchal grief (Tong & Botts, 2018). Marxist feminism tenets included alienation, indoctrination, and powerlessness (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Knopp, 2012; Tong & Botts, 2018). Patriarchal loss included compulsivity and detachment (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). I also added categories of silencing, pervasive rules for grieving, and perpetuating harm (Rowling, 1995). These categories were generated from RQ2, how can
disenfranchised grief perpetuate harm professionally, personally, and pedagogically. Again, I utilized Google sheets to document this process.

In addition, I added a category for transformations, linking my experiences with disenfranchised grief and subsequent healing, illuminations, or change (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Doka, 2002). This category allowed for the examination of RQ3, how can an experienced teacher heal through disenfranchised grief.

Further, in examining RQ1, I sought iterations that answered the question, how can an experienced teacher recognize her disenfranchised grief. Specifically, I considered iterations that featured awareness, including discernment and receptivity (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Also, I noted iterations of generational and patriarchal grief as sources of disenfranchised grief that would need to be considered to fully address RQ1 (Gilligan & Snider, 2018).

Narrowing categories, I began the work of dialectical examination, seeking relationships between iterations, my theoretical framework, and research questions.

**Q3: What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?**

Returning to my renderings and subsequent reflexive iterations, relationships began surfacing, allowing me to narrow and focus on what the data had to reveal. This process was most time consuming and required self-observation logs, discussions with the data, and discussions with others. I had to frequently step away from the data to dive deeper into the dialectical relationships (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

On the surface, I noted commonalities between my data and Rowling’s (1995) study of teacher disenfranchised grief, but when I applied a Marxist feminist lens,
dialectically speaking, things began to unravel, and my lived experiences diverged from the literature.

Rowling (1995) detailed that teacher disenfranchised grief is rooted in self and social disenfranchisement. Socially, teachers are disenfranchised because their losses and relationships fail to be recognized and hidden rules of the school keep their grief controlled (Rowling, 1995). Rowling (1995) also noted that teachers likewise disenfranchised themselves through their beliefs about professionalism and competence; their shame because of feeling helpless; their perceived relationship between coping with their personal life and professional life; their suppression of grief if male; and their leader beliefs.

When applying a Marxist feminist lens to my iterations and attempting to fall into the social and self-disenfranchisement categories, I realized that my iterations, when dialectically considered, could not be categorized accordingly. I reflexively had to consider the data in the context of the research while validating the data and the lived experiences I rendered.

Characterizing autoethnography

As the methodology has gained popularity across disciplines, efforts are being made to characterize it (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). For example, Adams et al. (2015) describe autoethnography through various criteria, including the researcher’s description and critique of her experiences within a cultural context; the use of reflexivity to “name and interrogate the intersections between self and society;” demonstrating how people construct their understanding of life, balancing both “intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity;” and striving for social justice (pp. 1-2). Bochner (2000)
calls out arbitrary criteria used to pathologize artistic autoethnography as misplaced and even harmful, calling on creators and consumers to be mindful that these are narratives of the Self, designed to extract meaning and make sense of a researcher’s experience of phenomenon, and to evoke emotion. Additionally, he calls creators to provide sensory, evocative details that move readers to feel, think, or act; to resist timelines and structure, allowing the stream of consciousness to flow between past and present; to be vulnerable and honest about emotions; to allow the splitting of the Self, telling a story of two or more worlds and one’s ever-changing positionality within them; to be ethical in representations of others; and to move the heart as well as belly (Bochner, 2000, 2018).

Autoethnographers face additional burdens when it comes to the representation of findings, attending to aesthetics while attempting to evoke.

**Positionality**

According to Dutta and Birks (2014), “Positionality compels us to engage with our own power, privilege, and life histories and the biases and insights stemming from them” (p. 93). Positionality challenges researchers to critically examine how their identities “intersect with the research context,” ultimately being accountable for representation (Dutta & Birks, 2014, p. 93). Acknowledging that positionality is not static but fluid, dependent on a plethora of factors, including the situations and context a researcher may find themselves located within, I am growing in my awareness of my own evolving, ever-changing positionality (Holmes, 2020). As a novice researcher, I made efforts to “acknowledge and disclose” myself, including my biases, in the work I produced and attempted to expose any “influences” they have had on my study (Holmes, 2020, p. 3). I kept a pulse on my positionality through introspective reflexivity as well as

Positioning the researcher as a participant allows access to lived experiences that typically are only accessible to “insiders,” giving breath to the people who have been silenced (Bochner, 2018; Bochner & Ellis, 2016). According to Holmes (2020), “Self-reflection and a reflexive approach are both a necessary prerequisite and an ongoing process for the researcher to be able to identify, construct, critique, and articulate their positionality” (p. 2). It is through introspection and reflexivity that positionality and subjectivities can be viewed and deeply considered. For some, including myself, “hidden” positionalities may come to light through the reflexive work we do while researching (Holmes, 2020, p. 4).

As a reading specialist who is also dyslexic, I now help children, including my own, with a condition that I have faced myself and witnessed my father struggle with his entire life. This shift in my positionality, my budding awareness of my deficits, has empowered me to not only help other children overcome their reading struggles but to advocate with families for services for their children. Many, like my parents, are unable to circumvent the bureaucracy of special education. As an instructor of assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of reading difficulties, I am now able to support future teachers. My professional path has been highly influenced by my own struggles, birthed in deficiency and destitution of my childhood, the reading failure of the blackbird, while nurtured by my “insider” knowledge as a teacher.

My fixed positionality as a white woman from the South, whose upbringing in poverty and subsequent traumas, shades my lived experiences. Cultural affiliations in
which I have participated include serving as a teacher, clinical instructor, first-generation college student, mentor, mentee, advocate, mother, grandmother, wife, and caregiver, just to name a few affiliations. Each of my affiliations has evolved based on my encounters with other people, aging, higher education, and cumulative experiences, therefore, impacting my positionality as I weave in and out of political arenas; however, the lenses I view life through are tinted based on my early childhood and young adulthood experiences, rooted in an ensnarement of trauma, grief, and redemption. These lenses are unremovable; they remain shackled to me despite the privileges that the change in my educational, political, and social status has afforded me. Most naturally, my theoretical framework, crafted from my evolving positionality, proved foundational to the rendering of my narrative.

**Limitations**

Before embarking on autoethnography, I began asking and fielding questions, finding this methodology to be wrought with troubles. From well-meaning colleagues who were concerned with the lack of representation of doctoral work utilizing such methodology to the concerns of researching using myself as a subject, I am grossly aware of the complications of this methodology. Specifically, throughout this work, I have provided limitations that surround various aspects of doing autoethnography. From “ethical quagmires” and telling stories that implicate others to arguments within the autoethnography community regarding analytical autoethnography, this methodology continues to face scrutiny (Adams et al., 2022; Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 1995b; Méndez-López, 2013; Poulos, 2021).
According to Méndez-López (2013), “Autoethnographies have been criticized for being self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective and individualized” (Atkinson, 1997; Coffey, 1999, as cited in Méndez-López, 2013, p. 283). As with most qualitative endeavors, issues regarding the legitimacy of the craft, the accuracy of the stories being rendered, and ethical implications are plentiful as well. Divulging stories that implicate others is a concern for autoethnographers. Ellis describes this as relational ethics where autoethnographers must practice caution with the inclusion and representation of others in their stories (2007). Because my autoethnographic accounts will be situated in my personal and professional encounters and contexts, others will be included in my rendition of my lived experiences, but efforts will be made to protect any and all from sustained harm. Evocative autoethnography, experiencing the researcher’s inner landscape, can be troubling for readers, which should be considered before choosing to engage in reading such methodology (Méndez-López, 2013). Another important limitation to note is that my story is only as good as my memory. Autoethnography is solely dependent on my rendition of events and interpretation of my lived experiences which is deemed insufficient as research by some (Bochner, 2000; Poulos, 2021).

Conclusion

As a writer and a storyteller, I have sought refuge in stories most of my life, especially when grieving. How can I love teaching and students yet not grieve for my profession and the students I teach? Grief is ultimately an expression of love (Kumar, 2005), and this study is my love language for teaching. Teaching has and will always be a place of refuge and rebirth for me- teaching as healing, brought to light through autoethnography.
Chapter Four features several evocative, creative autoethnographic renderings of my experiences with disenfranchised grief (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 2001). Chapter Five features my findings as they pertained to my research questions as well as a discussion about theoretical, practical, and research implications, concluding this work.
Chapter Four

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief introduction, followed by several autoethnographic vignettes derived from data collection that spanned over twenty years. These vignettes serve as the representation of my investigations into the research questions under study. This dissertation examined three questions. As a process, (RQ1) how can an experienced teacher recognize her disenfranchised grief? As a purpose, (RQ2) how can disenfranchised grief perpetuate harm professionally, personally, and pedagogically? Finally, as a product, (RQ3) how can an experienced teacher heal through disenfranchised grief?

Autoethnography is both a product and a process; it is writing as inquiry, but the writing stands as the product of the process (Adams & Holman Jones, 2018; Ellis et al., 2010). More than that, autoethnography is art where both craft and creation converge through the act of storytelling (Adams & Holman Jones, 2018).

Months of memory mining, revisiting field sites, and conversations with family, friends, and colleagues have birthed representations, vignettes, that narratively divulge my experiences with disenfranchised grief and transformative learning (Poulos, 2021). I utilized three forms of autoethnography, expressionism, critical autoethnography, and layered account (Adams et al., 2015; Poulos, 2013; Ronai, 1995).

Expressionism allowed for emotional, devotional, and evocative renderings of lived experiences whereas layered account provides space for the splintering of self (Ronai, 1995). Critically interrogating lived experiences while on a mission to recover my voice, breaking silences of past transgressions, conveying and critiquing my
experiences with disenfranchised grief within the cultures I ascribed required the use of critical autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015). Layered accounting permitted “a stream of consciousness” where fragmentation is included in the work with the use of asterisks, breaking thought, laying experiences (Ronai, 1995). I begin with a glimpse into my experiences of living in poverty and how this upbringing continues to influence my personal, professional, and pedagogical walk.

I utilized various literary devices, but of notice is my use of flashback, an interruption to the narrative where the author takes the reader back to a different time in a flow of consciousness. Both flashback and layered account have allowed for my inclusion of events that may seem disjuncture but provide a generational map of disenfranchisement and generational grief (Ronai, 1995). Additionally, I applied recurring motifs, metaphors and extended metaphors, evoking imagery and emotion through this application. To add voice and develop characterization of the pieces, thick description as well as dialogue were utilized for evocative purposes (Adams & Holman Jones, 2018).

**White Trash**

I was ten the first time I was called white trash, and I have desperately been cleaning up my act ever since (Isenberg, 2016). I knew what it meant, the dirty, the poor, the backwards, the unwanted, and I knew members of my family had been called this before, but the words seared me when I heard them directed at me (Isenberg, 2016). White trash is a derogatory term often used to describe poor Whites, and, in most of my experiences, was spewed by middle- and upper-class Whites (Isenberg, 2016). Just a few streets over from the slums I roamed, the small houses were brick of different hues; the
yards manicured to perfection; porches adorned appropriately; and the forgotten toys littered the covered driveways. On freshly paved roads, clean children played hopscotch and rode their freshly adorned bicycles while animated mamas chatted and occasionally craned their necks, checking in with their offspring. The street may have looked and felt the same as the one that ran in front of Grandma’s, but that’s where the similarities ended, and the differences rooted.

Walking these roads with my dirty, bare feet, I imagined what life inside those homes was like and envisioned myself a resident, scripting many different scenarios through my head. Days of playing on the railroad tracks, scavenging in the woods, swimming in the rolling creeks and stagnant ponds and just living wild often ended with my walk of shame down Pope Drive. Storying was an escape; still is, and my imaginings brought me comfort and even hope during those courageous strolls.

I was labeled trouble. Any of the clean children that made the mistake of visiting with me longer than the allotted Southern greeting were scolded and made to return to their keeps. One day, as I was walking and composing, two red-headed sisters, or harpies as I liked to muse, chortled and snorted while examining me. The older one spewed, “Where are your shoes at, white trash?” She threw her giraffe-like neck back and howled with laughter.

I would love to say that I turned the cheek, but I would be lying. Fire blazed within me. I did not think of consequences; who I would offend; how my message might hurt feelings; I raged and knocked the older sister right off her bike. “You’re the only trash I see,” I retorted.
Within seconds, the harpies’ mother, a rotund, dark-headed Elektra was on the scene and began attempting to console her sobbing daughter whose freckles ignited in the dusk of the day. The other child was nowhere to be seen. “How dare you! You are white trash. Your whole damn lot,” she spat, flustered and red-faced attempting to lift her sour daughter from the asphalt.

Beyond my ten-year-old comprehension, the declaration of my white trash affiliation was systematically designed to dehumanize and alienate me and others like me although I doubt these two had any more insights into the insidious nature of the derogatory naming than I did (Isenberg, 2016). Regardless, they played their part in dividing and conquering, labeling and reducing me to nothing, dehumanization (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017).

Without hesitation, I spoke the words of my people, the white trash culture to which I was relegated. “I might be trash, but at least I ain’t a fat ass bitch whose husband is sniffing around ‘my lot,’” I retorted most poignantly.

Her round face contorted. She was raring to strike, but I took off as fast as I could with her hurling obscenities, I fear I summoned, at my back. I ran as fast as I could to a home that was not mine; to a life that was summarized so violently. The humor masked the hurt (Marvasti, 2006).

I was what she said. I still am.

Struggling deeply with a sense of selfhood, I have lived beyond my label, a name that I heard more times than I could ever author here. However, internalizing my identity, my actions, my thoughts, I find myself in a space between worlds. Here is where I begin my journey into indoctrination, dehumanization, detachment, powerlessness, and
compulsivity through patriarchal lands. A nomad in the valley. Finding my way through the heap, the landfills, the mires, white trash that keeps getting taken out, I grieve for who I was and who I never can be.

Tapping into my childhood, my past, has resulted in an awakening, an undoing, in my adulthood. I am my grandmother, her mother, my mother, her sister, my cousins, white trash that kept showing up, exploited and discarded.

As Boylorn (2015) portrays, “The story comes when I am ready to release the pain and the past that is attached to it” (p 90). These tattered threads of great grief weave their way into the fabric that cloaks my daily walk. It is a dingy, discolored bra that I cannot seem to stop wearing. “Every history has more than one thread, each thread a story of division” (Vuong, 2019, p. 8).

To tell my story, to voice the truth as I knew it and continue to understand it, has been years of transformation in the making. Words that failed to be spoken, reneging on their duty, treasonous consonants and vowels, have been given the form of articulation through my fingers. Tapping secrets, unleashing dragons, I channel Boylorn (2015), “Because telling all my business, was in fact, telling most of theirs” (p. 91).

**********

For a significant portion of my childhood, I was homeless. A product of a divorce and the ward of a single, uneducated mother, I, like her, was dependent on the charity of her people. My mother and I were fallen leaves at the mercy of feet and wind. I was at the mercy of a bird with broken wings, a child with a child, whose nest was in shambles (Ronai, 1996). Approximately three out of every five poor children live in homes headed by single mothers, and about a third of those single mothers live in deep poverty, a
condition marked by lower incomes and lasting emotional, physical, and mental effects (Fins, 2020; Knifton & Inglis, 2020). We were forgotten numbers.

Our years of homelessness were marked and marred by our living with my grandmother, whose dilapidated, two-bedroom home was packed with strangers, books, and whatnots, like rusty coins in a tin coffee can. Parts of the home and flooring were rotting. I can still smell the stale water and earth that permeated through a massive hole in the kitchen floor. Sitting on the toilet, I would feel it sink under my tiny legs into the peeling linoleum like a loose tooth in gums. Mouth breathing failed to filter the pungent smell of sewage and urine. Clothes from various decades were stuffed and hanging in every available space, including the shower. Rare were the moments that the stench of smoke didn’t fill the air; the once white walls were jaundiced from the constant flow of nicotine. Dirt, dust, and ash corroded every crevice and adornment. The house followed me everywhere. Dirty was a term I became grossly familiar with as a child, and this dirt doesn’t wash off with a warm rag (Fox, 2019).

Fortunately, we were recipients of food stamps and government commodities, yet despite these limited resources, food was scarce. Memories of waiting in line for necessities such as butter, lard, cheese, and beans still haunt and, sadly, embarrass me. Rain, heat, winter’s cold, we stood with empty hands. Alongside us, folks of all colors with small children, the elderly, the disabled, all would assume their role of waiting. Most were women. We would forage in these long lines without regard from those requiring the waiting and were often treated dismissively.

**********
I found every experience with welfare workers, Department of Human Services personnel, and officials with other charitable organizations to be humiliating, demoralizing, and dehumanizing. Some might say humbling, but that’s not what I experienced. Degradation of this type had to be by design. I felt my worth drain from my body with every encounter. Trips to the free health clinic for immunizations and check-ups were downright traumatizing.

My first pregnancy on assistance resulted in a visit with a physician whose exam was so painful and violent, I feared he was attempting to remove my baby from my womb with his large red face and chubby bare hands. Despite the pain, the risk, the discomfort, I gripped the paper lined examination table, tears betraying me, and remained stoically silent. I was encouraged to undergo tubal ligation at twenty-two years old, which I did, facing myriad unspoken feminine consequences from that one ill informed decision.

Taking my own babies to receive vaccinations made me feel dirty (Fox, 2019). I began playing my part in their indoctrination into the system that a few of my daughters are now moving through themselves. Unbeknownst to them, my granddaughters are likewise cycling through services (Gartland et al., 2019; Najman et al., 2018). Recalling Keskin’s (2021) story about sanction effort to include excluded, perpetuating alienation; we were outcasts by design.

The streets, schools, and government programs are where I grew into an acceptance of my white trash status and the role I played in keeping the status quo, much to the detriment of my daughters and women I have since mentored and guided professionally and pedagogically.
I will never forget my mother borrowing money from her battered sister-in-law so that she could buy me food for dinner at the sacrifice of her own belly. The chicken biscuit I ate that night tasted of guilt and shame, knowing she would have to forage for herself or go to bed with hunger pains she knew well from her own impoverished childhood. Mom told me horror stories about her father, Gerald, rummaging through garbage cans, pilfering through muck for meals for his brood.

What little we had was pillaged by itinerant family members who also knew hunger and the pain it brings. Whatever they snubbed or discarded, roaches and rodents would ravage. The less we had, the more the less disappeared. I struggled with Grandma’s hospitality. A well-fed uncle and his son would often show up with his viperous brood to indulge in our sparse bounty. We remained silent as he and my cousin plundered what treasures we had. Excuses were always made for their insensitivity, and to this day, they have never been confronted with their cruelty. They had dominion here, and we were powerless to their plunder. Silence is communal (Boylorn, 2015; Goodall, 2005). We inherently knew our place.

This began an induction into my role as a woman. When my mom and dad were married, she assumed all the duties of the house. She cooked, cleaned, and washed clothes as well as assumed responsibility for my care. She cleaned incessantly. Mopping floors, scrubbing bathrooms, she was in a perpetual state of caregiving. Additionally, she worked outside of the home. She was tired, a model of the good wife, mother, and
employee, always trying to prove her worth. She was superwoman (Sumra & Schillaci, 2015).

In every relationship she had following her marriage to Dad, she assumed these roles without question. Life always revolved around whatever man was in her life. My grandmother likewise assumed a submissive stance with men, her husband, sons, and their sons. We worked and served without question with concerted dedication to male authority and superiority over our lives.

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Despite destitution and the painful secrecy that accompanies it, my grandmother would craft the most soul-tending meals (Goodall, 2005). With so little, she made the most. Her lard and flour biscuits cut with the top of a tin can filled our bellies and anointed our souls. Poke salad pulled by her own hands from the overgrowth in our backyard, fried with rendered lard, was a delight. Wafts of boiled cabbage or greens, fried chicken or potatoes would sift in our bellies as we awaited her healing. Despite the oppressive heat generated by the stove, moments in her kitchen, watching her movements, spiderlike, masterful inspired joy despite the destitution. The kitchen, her artistic expression of both love and need, was a space of creation, resistance, and liberation. Our access to ingredients, resources, and much needed sustenance may have been limited, but there was no controlling my grandmother’s fire in that kitchen.

The women of the house all worked low-paying jobs and drove whatever vehicle they could salvage or borrow. My grandmother had toiled in factories and nursing homes and even spent some time as a maid. My mother worked as a grocery clerk, which she still does to this day, her hands peel from exposure. My aunt was a nursing assistant. The
work of these women was never done. They cared for others at the expense of themselves.

Even I, at ten years old, worked odd jobs. Oftentimes, I would walk beyond our neighborhood, door-to-door, offering to assist neighbors with any chores that needed tending. The local fire department allowed me to sweep, mop, and dust for pocket change. I even would lie about my age to get work as a babysitter. Despite our meager earnings, we were always lacking and wanting. There never seemed to be enough, yet these women warriors kneaded the skin I’m in. Somehow, we managed to scrape together an existence.

I remember being afraid. I was afraid of hunger. I was afraid of losing my family. I was afraid of being taken away. I was afraid of the house.

Every night before bed, my mother would take me through the house, a loaded gun in her hand, searching for things or people who might hurt us. Beginning in the kitchen, she would turn the knobs on the stove, touching and ensuring their off position by saying “off, off, off” repeatedly. From there, we would go to the back door, shoving knives into the tiny opening between the door and the frame, she would say “locked, locked, locked, locked,” checking the chain and the knives, ensuring their positions. Each room and every hiding place would be checked and double checked to ensure nobody was hiding in the nooks and crannies of the endarkened spaces. “Off, off, off,” she checked the ceramic stove, our main source of heat. “Locked, locked, locked,” she would check the front door, stabbing its frame with an assortment of bread knives. I never questioned Mom’s commitment to this ritual. She knew monsters were real.
In the bed my mom and I shared, I would squeeze her thin body with both my arms and legs, telling her I was not going to let her leave me. Yet, every morning when I woke up for school, cold, wrinkled sheets remained where her body had been.

Her work hours made it to where she had to leave the house around 4:00 A.M. Grandma would always get up and watch her walk the few feet from the front door to her car, making sure she had time to check the car and lock it up before driving off into the night. Grandma would keep watch until daybreak. Fear was generational.

But in the woods, I was fearless. I built forts and treehouses with discarded materials from trash heaps, carving out hidden spaces where I could be a kid, finding refuge in the majestic oaks that grew wild like I did. Vines hung all around me, encasing me in mythical wonder and delight. Perched on limbs above the trails and thickets, I dreamed and weaved tales. In the streets, I was exposed.

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Within minutes of me arriving at Grandma’s, through dirty tears and muffled animal sounds erupting from me, I managed to throw together my account of being accosted and deemed white trash by our fancy neighbor and her brood of vipers, leaving off my involvement in the altercation, of course.

“Get my shoes,” Grandma demanded as she grabbed the phone and began dialing numbers, summoning sisters and cousins our way. Several minutes later, my aunt and my mom, both left work without delay, and three of my heartiest cousins were on the scene. After recounting my experiences, adding lib where needed, the raucous posse loaded up in my aunt’s car and drove right to the fancy house.
By this time, other fancy neighbors and children had gathered, and Elektra was well into her story, her face and body splotchy with rage.

“Is that her?” my mom demanded.

I nodded, feeling like now might be a good time to tell the rest of the story, but before I could, Mom and my aunt Cecile jumped out of the car as soon as the brake was shifted. Even my cousins were clamoring to get on the scene, pushing me aside, tumbling out of the car. Grandma was cool with a cigarette, standing tall beside the car, just watching like a crime boss without a worry in the world.

“You the one called MY daughter trash?” Mom demanded, closing the space between her and the coven.

“Excuse me, but YOUR daughter hit my daughter and cussed us all out,” Elektra said, extending her entire arm my direction.

I looked around the car, feigning innocence, avoiding Aunt Cecile’s glare.

“Crystal, is this the woman who called you trash?” she ignored my wrongdoing and went right back to her initial line of questioning.

“I don’t know what I said. I was worried for my daughter,” Elektra’s tone shifted as she began backing away from an ever-confrontational Mom.

Mom was quite a bit smaller than this woman; size was not on her side. If bets were being placed, most would go with the big-mouthed, well-fed thoroughbred, the one who knows manicured lawns while feasting on alfalfa, but Mom would be the longshot nobody expected to own the win. She was scrappy, solid, and strong, but most important to this story, she actually knew how to fight because she had to. My dad told stories of her fighting off multiple girls when she was a teenager; Aunt Cecile often recounted bar
fights Mom always managed to win; and Grandma told stories about Mom having to physically fight off boys, including her own brothers.

“Well, how about this, you will never say another word to my daughter again, nor will your kids, because if I have to come down ever again, I’m gunna whoop your ass,”

Mom commanded the attention of everyone as her hand shoved into Elektra’s springy breasts, clearly taking the woman’s breath away.

By this time, mothers were hurriedly retreating, grabbing hands and shoulders of children, attempting to not make eye contact with the gang that had upended their discussions and afternoon pleasantries.

Elektra turned to get away, but Mom grabbed her hard and turned her around. Mom pointed her finger, deeply inserting into Elektra’s chest for extra measure with each enunciation of her syllables, “Do you understand me?”

Elektra began nodding and sobbing; her rage shifted to fear. Her children had already high-tailed it inside. I could see the curtains shifting as they attempted to witness their mother’s fate.

My forlorn cousins were already loading back up, realizing the fight has sizzled into confrontation. Grandma stood perched until Elektra retreated into her house, slamming the door behind her. Mom and Aunt Cecile remained rooted in the yard until that door slammed to ensure nobody said that they retreated.

In the car, the tension of the event acquiesced into laughing without breath on the part of my cousins and my aunt as my aunt began her storying and recapping of the event on the ride home. My mom and grandma did not laugh nor did I. Despite Mom’s
willingness to defend me from the meanness surrounding our status, she could not fight them all.

That night while wrapped in blankets in the bed Mom and I shared, I told her the rest of the story, recounting the event through real heartbreak. I was not afraid of my mom’s reaction. I knew she would forgive me. I was afraid of the generational prophesy that I kept being reminded of; that I kept living. How could my story be different?

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Story connected my family, and my family lived in and through their powerful renderings. For us, storytelling was humanizing, reminding us of our unique human experiences— to laugh, to cry, to connect, to learn. Storytelling is a “vital human strategy evoked in response to the melancholy generated through disempowerment where weavers find threads of connection and agency through their shared experiences and the construction of meaning (Adair et al., 2007, p. 141). Many an evening, I settled into the worn grooves of the fall patterned velour loveseat in my grandma’s living room- a most sacred of spaces- to hear her offerings. Between drags from her cigarette, puffs of smoke mystifying her features, her blue eyes narrowed, and stories she had held onto, deep within her bosom, would respiration and coalesce in the air, coming into my being, filling me with breath, inspiration, memory, and fear. She knew monsters too.
The Trenches

Never in my teaching journey have I been trained in the art of remaining calm and collected while facing a barrage of bullets, yet twenty-five years in, rattled and riddled, light and darkness ooze from the wounds delivered by the barrels of many. No formal training prepared me for this carnage. No book provided the necessary instruction to manage catastrophe after catastrophe.

My flesh is shredded, my tissues strewn and gaping. There are no hands left to stop the seepage. My words curdle and collect all around me as I begin swirling and scrubbing them with a mop that will never rinse out after this, a bloodbath, in the trenches I call teaching as a woman in the world. This lover has pillaged my plunder, shredding my clothing, shoving his words in the depths of my throat.

This blackbird has blood on her wings, but she still sings (Angelou, 1969).

This is my song from the depths.

My atonement.

Where healing meets hurting
Where I begin again.

Teaching in the trenches is a well-known colloquialism in the teaching profession- our way of saying teaching is a battlefield. Although this expression has its critics, as an experienced teacher who is a woman, enduring the myriad challenges women both personally and professionally encounter, I know the trenches all too well, yet it has taken years for me to acknowledge and accept this (McCran, 2015). The word stirs within me whenever I speak of teaching in any context. No matter where I teach, I
am always in the trenches, and never does a week go by without someone proclaiming and reminding everyone of our trench status. Images of working at the front line, serving the infantry, bandaging the wounded while submerged in dirt encased embankments, taking successive fire with no reinforcements in sight are just a few of the images that cross my mind when trench talk happens. The wounded attempt to heal the wounded.

There is something communal in our collective struggle as women teachers in the trenches- there is no evading this lingo. It is cultural. It is grievous. It is internalized. It is institutionalized. One school district I served took advantage of the trench mindset coining “Whatever it takes" as its yearly motto, littering this propaganda in the hallways, lounges, and workrooms- a reminder that we never leave the trenches and any attempt to do so is treasonous. Ideologies support the infrastructure, and it is the duty of those who serve to support and sacrifice, whatever it takes (Apple, 2008, 2019; Knopp, 2012; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Russom, 2012). How could we ever abandon our duty to educate children? No matter the sacrifice, our dedication is required to ensure no child is left waiting. If a child is struggling, do whatever it takes to ameliorate it, whatever it takes.

One superintendent I worked for took it a step further by calling out disappointed faculty who had been promised raises during a back-to-school convocation, saying “If you don’t remember anything at all I have said here today, remember this, we are they. Say it with me, we are they.” He went on to lead this chant for a few long minutes. Some teachers hugged their principals and central office administrators during the rally to see our oneness. His argument that, instead of teachers being disgruntled with administration because of dismal pay and intensified work, we needed to embrace that we are all in this
together, and technically when we talk about admin, they, we are talking about ourselves, we are they. We most certainly were not they whose salaries quadrupled that of the most experienced classroom teachers, yet some teachers scribbled these words on their whiteboards as daily reminders of their indoctrination into a system that severed their worth.

The university is no stranger to this pattern of indoctrination either as pay remains the same and class sizes and course loads increase, intensification at its best (Apple, 2008). Notions of doing whatever it takes, and we are they, ride on the backs of the professoriate, clinical instructors, and support staff as glutinous administrators continue to gut budgets and overburden the infrastructure (Bugeja, 2021).

The trench mindset is symptomatic of living and teaching in an oppressive system (Knopp, 2012). It is my own response to indoctrination that is rooted in patriarchy, capitalism, and even teacher professionalism (Apple, 2019; Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Goodman, 1988; Knopp, 2012). I was born to serve—a slave to man and machine—the cult of education.

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Telling secrets (Ellis, 2007)
I feel most protective of my stories,
These memories of mine
my own dragon eggs,
Exuberance, sublime
I and my dregs
nestled and nested
Incubating, waiting
Yet, they’re mine to share
My voice winged
Smoke, fire, and air
Charring their guises
Birthing a crisis
Burning the town
Its monuments
To the ground
Returning to the nest
Reminiscing what we like best.
Enlightened by the flame
Exposed in the game.
I have fire within me.

My life oscillates between the trenches of my past and present, a coalescing of blood and mud on the canvas. I gave birth to three daughters in four years, earning my bachelors in English with certification to teach, one of the only careers I knew about. The only professional women I knew who would ever share insights into their professions with me were teachers. As a first-generation college student, I had no assistance in maneuvering the paperwork for admissions and financial aid, let alone understanding how college worked. Never was I supposed to make it to the leafy-green campus (Jacks, 2019). I still feel my exclusion, most innately. My view was obstructed by my positionality; my path overgrown with obstacles. I never left the streets of my childhood.
Like many of the poor girls in my community, I married young, having my first baby at nineteen. When I did talk to an advisor at the university, they also encouraged me to consider teaching because of it being a caring profession, one that would allow me to be a mother at home and at work and would allow me to be off when my children were off.

Despite graduating from high school with honors and receiving scholarships for higher education, I found poverty again, seeking assistance as a Medicaid and WIC recipient while living off the charity of kinfolks. The past repeats itself.

My husband (now ex), a child himself, drank our dollars away and proved to be an abusive alcoholic who would riddle me with hollow point words, dousing me in gunpowder and lead within months of our union. This was my “narrative inheritance,” my generational reprisal of the battered and broken women before me, except this time, it was my turn on the carousel (Gartland et al., 2019; Goodall, 2005). In Arkansas, one out of every three women face physical and/or sexual abuse from their domestic partners (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2021). I was one of the three. I am reminded of Carter’s (2002) experiences of abuse at the hands of her husband and her subsequent unraveling, lost in a statistic, no voice in the number.

From hurtful words to mind games, he started as most abusers do when taming the wild. He was as predictable as every other man in the sordid past of the women before me (Carter, 2002; Gartland et al., 2019). After a year, his words became holes in the walls, shards of sheetrock and wallpaper dangling. The smell of stale alcohol seeped through his red, splotchy skin as his sweat poured over me in uninvited encounters with a baby at my side and a baby in my belly. His fingers often pinched into my skin for
emphasis when raging. Arriving home from the hospital after giving birth to my second child wrapped snugly in my arms, my two-year-old at my side as we unloaded the car, I made a comment about his absence from the hospital. Silence was always the best approach with him, but I was hurt, and I wanted him to feel as awful as I did. Why did I ever allow him to steal my voice?

“You fucking, fat bitch,” he ranted as he closed in behind me. My weight has always bothered me, and he knew it. I gave birth to my second child at 138 pounds, only gaining 8 pounds that pregnancy for fear of his cheating. Her low birth weight might have been the result of my spiraling depression and dismal self-esteem (Rhodes & McKenzie, 1988). To this day, I wonder how much of my grief during that pregnancy altered her brain chemistry in struggling with her self-loathing and subsequent methamphetamine addiction (Su et al., 2021; Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018). I carry that burden as I carried her, still pregnant with grief. I am her source of narrative inheritance, the trauma torch she now carries in her own trench, a trench beyond description, beyond comprehension (Goodall, 2005).

His steel toe boot jabbed my lower back, forcing my knees to buckle underneath me due to the extensive blow. My newborn daughter and I tumbled down the steps onto the concrete below. Somehow, she remained safely tucked in my arms, losing only her pink knitted cap as I miraculously landed on my side. At the time, thoughts of my toddler daughter bearing witness to my abuse was the last thing on my mind when it should have been the first. She began burrowing her own trench (Ronai, 1995).

For several years, my girls and I were on tour, retreating to the house of least resistance, my grandma’s. My family knew what was going on and lectured me
frequently on my decision to keep returning to the abuse and embarrassment; his cheating was no longer a secret. Those days of waiting and wondering were marred by secrets and silence- it is how I survived with the guilt and shame anchoring me to him (Carter, 2002; Goodall, 2005). My family knew only what I chose to tell. I had learned very early in my life that talking could result in government interference not assistance. Secret keeping was communal.

Within days of my leaving, he would call and apologize and somehow convince me that something I did set him off. I rationalized and even justified his abuse. I shouldn’t have asked him about that; I shouldn’t have called him that; I shouldn’t have gotten pregnant; I should be contributing more…there were no limits to my manipulation and provocation. I was the problem.

I detached and poured myself into raising babies, completing schoolwork, and earning wages- these were the only aspects of living in despair I could control even if I couldn’t control myself (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959). I had to finish school. Deep within me, I knew it was how to escape the newfound life I had imprisoned myself and my daughters within. Despite multiple pregnancies during those undergrad years, I diligently remained in coursework, fully dedicated to my studies. There were no excuses for absences or late work. I had to be there, and I had to keep producing. I remember giving birth on Thursday and being back in class on Monday, pumping in my car, never sleeping, always reading or writing, a fog of fear thickening around us. I was alone and felt that I did not belong, but I did not allow that to stop me. Despite the alienation, I kept showing up. The routine, the caregiving, the work, kept me distracted from the thickness enveloping me, the pillow on my face. Institutionally, there was no support. I carried my
burdens as my ancestors carried theirs. Bleeding out, I was caught in a trap without the
time to think through an escape, let alone, time to grieve.

From a sociocultural and materialistic perspective, I had the makings of a victim,
spiraling, powerless, unrecognizable (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Carter, 2002; Ronai,
1995). What of my daughters’ voices? They didn’t choose this life. I chose it for them.
They were victims too, and I am responsible for that. They were subjected and subjugated
to the trenches because this was the life I had known and unconsciously was preparing
them for.

Why did I remain, year after year, abuse after abuse, loss after loss? I was
conditioned for this life, pregnant with grief that would never be delivered. Leaving went
against the current. I would be chastised, labeled, and alienated even more so if I fled. No
longer did I walk the streets alone. I had three babies to carry with me and a lifetime of
burden burgeoning. Our poverty stripped us, exposed us while our gender exploited us
like roses in a landslide.

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My grandmother was a refuge and I her refugee. During those years of leaving
and returning, abuse and lies, suffering and hurting, she was the cup I supped. Her
strength flowed through her own stories of her beatings and trafficking by her abuser-
evening cautionary tales I had been nursed on as a child. Trauma transcends
generationally (Su et al., 2021; Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018). Grief begets grief.

My grandfather, Gerald, was described by his children and my grandma as the
epitome of evil. An alcoholic himself, he squandered his meager earnings on liquor,
going on benders that lasted for weeks. What he couldn’t earn, he demanded from my
grandma. A beauty despite the hard living, she was forced into the beds of friends and acquaintances so that Gerald could drown his humanity away. She was only fourteen when they wed. Dark, piercing blue eyes set within skin of alabaster and raven hair, a reader, a thinker, she was as intelligent as she was beautiful. He took her innocence, her blossom, a shot of Jack, gulping and burning his throat like a blaze through cotton.

On several occasions, Grandma described a beating that left such an impact on me, I still have nightmares about it. Her stories were life lessons, warnings to her daughters, her granddaughters, about the violence of men and the sordid victimhood we were born into as women. Gerald had been on a bender for a few weeks and, finally, reappeared much to the chagrin of his pack. He was livid, filled with a rage that grandma described as the worst she had ever seen, calling it demonic.

“Run as far as you can and hide,” she demanded to her children as Gerald began tearing up the house looking for money he was accusing Grandma of stealing. The tin coffee can rattled with pocket change but nothing to quench the thirst that only a bottle could bring. Any good looks Gerald might have had were corroded by sweat and dirt; his dark hair matted in the back as his soiled clothes hung on his diseased frame.

My mom and her twin took off to a spot where the dandelions grew. They often retreated there when Gerald was on a tear, waiting out his rage in the weeds. They hid not far from a burning barrel of trash that blazed a few yards from the shack their family called home. Within minutes of their leaving, my uncle Gene took a hard beating, sustaining kick after kick to his torso and face. He was only twelve at the time and tried to protect my grandma with everything his bony body had. He was no match for a raging
drunk. My grandma tried to pull Gerald off her son to no avail. The beating stopped when her baby stopped moving. Without his son’s offering, Grandma’s tithe was due.

Gerald threw her to the dirt and dragged her to the burn pit. After knocking her to the ground, she rose to her knees and began praying the Lord’s prayer.

“Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is…” she cried. My grandmother was a prayerful woman who studied scripture daily.

Gerald screamed, “There is no God, and if there was, He wouldn’t waste himself on a whore like you.”

She said she just kept praying through the blows which did nothing but ignite his primordial wrath. The final hit across her face knocked her and several teeth out. When she awoke, Gerald had hoisted an oil painting of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane atop the burning barrel, laughing and cursing God as my grandma lay bleeding, too frightened to move.

“Oh, what a name we have in Jesus,” he sang maniacally into the cold night as ash and dandelions flurried like snow against the dark night sky.

How could I ever dissever myself from my past and the past of my people? Teaching requires a separation, a leaving life at the door mantra, yet this door is screened with tears, letting the air out and the flies in.

My narrative inheritance continues to breed (Goodall, 2005). I was pregnant with generational grief.

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Under the trenches, stagnant waters, murky and deep, lie in stillness and silence. Visiting their shoreline requires taking leave, abandoning duty, going AWOL. These waters, albeit putrid and filled with unspeakable carnage, call me to the depths where my grief awaits.

With no awareness and no time to discern my experiences, I fought grief. Loss after loss, I fought the grief that showed up as the loss of my dreams, my voice, my choices, and my power. I battled the past, my grandmother’s tragic tale that birthed my own and my daughters’. Grief remained encased, caught in a web of fetal membranes, suspended in amniotic fluid.

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In my philosophy of teaching that I crafted during my final semester of undergrad, I wrote about teaching being a calling, a sacred space where teachers can change lives by making a difference. How did my indoctrination as a woman of poverty and patriarchy influence my “make a difference” mantra? Did I suffer from a hero complex, hoping to save kids like me? Did I choose to teach because inherently I wanted to remain in the trenches? Have all my choices been a succession of my compliance or need to be seen, or did I choose teaching to share the love of learning and the hope of education, a hope I still hold onto? What if I am all things, including the bad?

For me, teaching in the trenches is teaching in a community where raging gang wars and subsequent violence were normalized; where impacted children’s tattered clothes were colored according to affiliation; and learning was more about surviving the streets than engaging in a lesson or passing an exam. My first job landed me at a school nestled in the middle of the trenches- an active warzone. The building was in
condemnable condition, yet despite this, bars were on the windows, protecting this landmark from the community and its rage. The doors were always locked, and guards were always visible, a reminder of rules and those who uphold them. The bathroom was always so cold, and there was rarely any toilet paper or paper towels. I learned to bring my own, including reams of paper, markers, pencils, and snacks. The water, like the walls, flowed brown. The cafeteria’s offerings were hardly edible, yet my students and I scarfed every morsel. Breakfast and lunch, my students would eagerly partake. Like me, they knew hunger. Shots were fired, resulting in mass casualties that never made the news.

Educating my students was an undertaking that required resourcefulness beyond what I was prepared for. My classroom ceiling leaked a tarry brown substance that years later erupted atop my students’ heads and desks, flooding the entire classroom with what we discovered was pigeon feces. Despite media scrutiny, yes, this made the news, ceiling tiles in affected classrooms were replaced, but the leaks continued. Who really cared for a school filled with minorities? Band-aids for bullet wounds.

My bookshelves were filled with yard sale finds, hand-me-down books from past teachers, and dated magazines donated by parents. Blue, crusted, nylon carpet curled itself from the brown, cement walls. The room smelled old, stale, and moldy. There wasn’t a season where we weren’t coughing and hacking. I kept a supply of cough drops in my desk drawer that my students and I frequented throughout the day. It was during this time that I was diagnosed with asthma and complications from pleurisy. My lungs have never been the same. What happened to my students’ lungs? Who would advocate
for their medical care? Would their voices bubble from the depths or remain enveloped mumblings?

**********

My husband’s drinking increased as my independent strengthened. Within a few years of teaching, I divorced and became a single mother of three daughters, two in daycare and one in kindergarten. Living with my relatives initially, I somehow managed to save some of my meager earning to make a down payment on my first home, a yellow house with green shudders, in a neighborhood that had a small pond and a playground with a yellow slide. The house had grey berber carpet, two bedrooms, and enough space to feel like I could breathe for the first time in my life.

One bathroom with a working shower seemed a luxury at the time. I had a new washer and dryer that left our clothes feeling and smelling clean. The white walls were iridescent and gave the house a heavenly glow when the afternoon sun cut across the sky. Cool air flowed through vents in the floor.

In the tiny kitchen stood a small oak table with wide legs that looked like elephant toes. My middle daughter took a red crayon to its crevices in an attempt to “make it bootiful.” The elephant table was where my daughters and I read of adventures; reenacted our school days; colored masterpieces; played games; enjoyed our meals and somehow forgot the stories that we never told again.

The grass was soft, a lush Bermuda, that hugged our bare feet on warm afternoons when messy hair and dirty bodies were the result of hard playing not hard living. There was beauty in these fleeting moments.
Despite owning the house, I still did not feel like I belonged in this neighborhood. My interactions with neighbors were limited. I did not know how to act; how to maneuver this new world. I welcomed the independence, being freed from my captor, but I was most fearful, scared of being found out.

Living alone, I slept with a gun under my pillow; rigged chairs up to prevent doors being kicked in without notice; and slept in the floor of my daughters’ bedroom just in case someone tried to take them from me. Despite running and the hope freedom brings, I was still as scared as I was when I was a child.

Nightmares of driving my van off a bridge into a river, not being able to save my children and even students, sinking into the depths with them haunted me nightly; their tragic stories and realities comingled with my own. We were all fighting rushing water with no way to free ourselves. I felt the burden of the lives of many now, and the yellow house with shudders on the right street was simply a life preserver, not a life.

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Because of this school’s magnet status, it provided gifted and talented services for the district, meaning that parents with children who were gifted would need to send their children to this campus. Once the gifted children were accommodated, neighborhood kids would fill in. What this looked like in practice was segregation. Black kids were mostly in the regular classes. white kids were in the gifted classes. Interestingly, gifted classrooms were better manicured, resourced, and recognized. Teachers were aware of this division because we were likewise divided. Veteran, primarily white, teachers were assigned gifted classes whereas newer, Black and some white teachers, were assigned regular classes. I taught primarily regular English classes apart from a few gifted courses.
I was assigned during my final years at this school. I saw these disparities but did not have the words or full understanding of what I was witnessing and the role I played in its manifestations. I remained silent.

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Schools are not created equal, and I am beginning to believe it is by design. Having taught and supervised teachers on many campuses for many years, I saw and continue to see the disparities between the affluent and the impoverished, even within districts. In my experience, schools located on the right or white side of town are better maintained, manicured, and resourced than schools located elsewhere. This was most profoundly noted when I served as an ELL (English Language Learner) teacher in an urban school district, traveling from school to school to deliver services and support to ELL students. On one dilapidated campus, I delivered services in a broom closet only to commute to another school where I was stationed in a well-resourced parent center. Paint peeled from the walls of my closet whereas a fresh coat adorned the walls of the parent center. Roaches were frequent visitors in the closet whereas I never saw any uninvited guests at the parent center. Books lined the walls of the parent center whereas I bought what I brought to the closet. My brown children who learned English in the closet were getting well-acquainted being relegated to the wilderness, assuming their position in the system.

Love (2019) describes schools as sites where oppression is systemic and in the constant reproduction of poverty, a reflection of “political economy” (p. 17). Students from poverty will remain shackled in that taxes go where the money is, and that is not in poor America; therefore, “the system renders schools ineffective in providing poor
students any type of real social mobility” (Love, 2019, p. 17). From better-resourced schools to highly effective teachers, students from wealth receive better educations and have more opportunities to excel— to the victor goes the spoils (Love, 2019, p. 17). Schools are divided structurally, with those in more affluent areas receiving more resources than those schools from more impoverished areas (Love, 2019). Attempts to rezone are met with privatization, segregation by design (Love, 2019).

I believe in Love’s (2019) words because I witnessed it; I lived it.

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I loved my regular classes for many reasons, but I believe I found that I could relate to these kids more so than the gifted. I found my regular classes challenging, enlightening, humorous, and encouraging. They were curious, connecting literature to life. They were gifted with insights that only hard living could bring. They were creators, artists, comedians, and thinkers. These students ignited a fire within me- a fire that drove my own creativity. Lessons were built around projects of their choosing, their interests, their passions. From performances at Shakespeare festivals where we designed and made our own props and clothing, composing our own music as well as scripts to planning and orchestrating a multitude of seasonal performances, I loved watching the dreamers dream beyond these walls, beyond the streets.

My gifted classes were likewise inquisitive, but there were burdens and struggles that I had not anticipated. I have been incessantly teased for how I talk for most of my life. From my deep Southern drawl to the way I pronounce certain words (due mostly to dyslexia and lack of exposure), I have learned to take the heat. What I have found most bothersome in my encounters with self-proclaimed grammar police and intellectuals is
the public proclamation and even condemnation that often results from their acknowledgements. Correcting in private would do nothing to elevate their positioning; therefore, public ridicule is a must. The intent is not to help but to hinder, to condescend. I am reminded of Ellis’ (1998) experiences with fear and circumvention of sounds due to a lisp, contributing to self-consciousness and fear of judgment, and it comforts me now, but I started hating my voice when I started teaching.

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I recall Marvasti (2006) who investigates stigmatization, bringing awareness to “passing” where those stigmatized might try to fit into the critical cultures, assuming their look/behaviors/etc., in my case their tongue, to avoid detrimental treatment and alienation. Have I assumed the tongue to pass and if so, where does the tongue end and I begin? Whose words am I saying? Whose words am I writing? Am I just passing?

“Fake it till you make it,” a colleague with a similar background once told me. “You have to learn to play the game just like they do.”

I have learned to hold my tongue to not offend others or appear rude, especially around men and more impoverished family (those still in the mire). Instead of speaking up, I spoke down, scribbling my feelings and thoughts on lines, turning the pages before my words could be found. Leaving them in hiding to fend for themselves.

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My regular classes may have picked up on my struggles, but they never offered critique or ridicule. When I did have the misfortune of a mispronunciation in their presence, instead of sniggers or snide remarks, I would be approached later or during a
These early days of learning from my students helped shape my current understanding of teaching and learning as reciprocal and even transformative.

My first day of class with Blake, a student from one of my few gifted classes, included sniggers and teasing regarding my pronunciation of the word “lure.” From there, various words I spoke fell upon his scrutinious, discriminating ear with immediate questions and concerns. One day he added, “How did you ever become an English teacher when you can’t speak English?” Blake was large for an 8th grader; his body hung over his small, wooden desk that wrapped around him like a snake. He often placed his large feet upon the seat in front of him, tapping and kicking, jolting and tormenting whoever sat in front of him. He was a bully, and I had to do something about it but found myself in uncharted waters.

After several weeks of class, discussions, calls to his mom, and rapport-building, Blake began to settle into class and seemingly stopped his tirade against me and his peers. I did what I could to value his voice despite his lack of value for the voices of others. I encouraged his questioning, his wisdom, and his humor as long as it did not target or ridicule others. He shined during mock trials when he served as a defense attorney. He relished in his performance of Mercutio in Romeo and Juliet. His mom reached out and even thanked me for inspiring her son in literacy, his worst subject according to her. Yet, despite overcoming hurdles, I still did not feel at ease when in his presence, but I was pleased that we had made progress.

After Christmas break, Blake returned in a different state. Instead of his initial mean comments, he began making more sexualized comments. Oftentimes, these comments referred to celebrities or characters, but the comments were becoming more
intrusive and intimate. He began making comments about me. Most of which I tried to ignore, feigning that I did not hear anything. I had not been trained in how to manage bullying or sexual harassment by students directed at me.

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A mantra from my early days of teacher preparation remained ingrained within me. It’s not enough to teach a child, you must love them. The emotional labor of teachers is an ingrained, cultural expectation (Kariou et al., 2021). Our professional developments were likewise geared towards cultivating communities of learners where all children felt valued, loved, and included. We were instructed to see the good, to nurture and support, and keep in mind that students’ misbehaviors were often the result of parenting, peer issues, classroom constraints, or the teacher’s lack of care, communication, and management. Students needed love to learn.

I attempted to see the backstory of every child. I read their journals, listened to their hearts on display during discussions, and situated myself as a trusted adult in their lives. I had both compassion and empathy for my students. The more I learned about them, the more invested I became. They needed clothes; I found them. They needed food; I got it. They needed protection; I found it. They needed love; I gave it. I solved many problems that would continue to be problems for my students, a band-aid for a gaping wound. I carried their hurt home with me and worried about them every single night. I had students who faced mountains while I waited in the valley. Their stories still remain with me.

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Life never settled into a groove, at least not one I could find the rhythm. My melody was discordance, a slamming of hands on out of tune keys.

Between daycare and the expenses that come with raising children, my pitiful salary kept us hovering close to the poverty line. I had chosen a caring profession that did not care back. I did not have the luxury of wallowing or even thinking through my decisions or options professionally speaking. The ink barely dry on my divorce papers, I knew I would have to remarry to provide my daughters with an existence beyond what I had known.

And that is exactly what I did.

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To say that I loved every child I taught, however, would be a lie. There were students who I found unreachable. I understood the value of establishing rapport. I made valiant attempts to provide encouragement, ongoing feedback, and instructional support. This call to love every student, to be a caregiver first, had its implications, supporting the ideologies of the gendered nature of teaching (Apple, 2008). If I was not making a difference, I was defunct in my role as a teacher.

I doubted myself. When things went wrong with a student, I questioned my role in their undoing. What did I do to provoke them? What did I do to support them? Did I really care about this child? What would I be willing to sacrifice for them? Did I know about this child’s past? Guilt-ridden, I would soul search, trying to understand my malfunction. Why does love have to be present to learn? To listen? To be respectful of others? I felt ashamed. Could I ever be a good teacher if I did not love them all?
This began a long career in acting (Hochschild, 2003b). I felt an inauthenticity within me where my true self and the image of the good teacher blurred (Hochschild, 2003b).

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I went directly to my principal who I had already approached regarding Blake’s earlier behaviors. He was young, White, and going places, and I was clearly a nuisance. We were a mere blip on his ambitious climb. Up until this point, I handled my classroom misbehaviors. I knew this would please my administrators and keep me out of their direct line of fire, but I knew I needed help. He dismissed me and my concerns, telling me to toughen up and asked me to revisit my management plan. “Boys are going to find you attractive in middle school. They’re all hormones. Don’t wear tight clothes if you don’t want them to talk about your body. You will provoke them,” he advised as he sifted through his desk.

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Research in the bullying of teachers suggests that teachers are often subjected to bullying from not only upper administration but from students alike (Blase, 2009; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012; Terry, 1998). The effects of educator targeted bullying can be detrimental, including negatively impacting wellbeing, inducing stress, negatively impacting teaching and learning, and withdrawing from relationships and teaching, perpetuating a “vicious cycle” of continuation (Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012, p. 3438).

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This brief encounter deeply disturbed and impacted me more than I realized at the time. I talked with my colleagues about the incident with Blake and the principal,
something I was highly discouraged to do in both my teacher preparation and in professional developments. Being a professional required confidentiality, protecting students at all costs. A few of my colleagues told me to “Put my big girl panties on,” a frequent response when things got tough in the buildings I served. Some encouraged me to be positive, “See the good in Blake and do everything you can to encourage him.”

Fortunately, a few rogue colleagues encouraged me to join the union and seek representation. This would require a significant chunk of my waning paycheck, but I felt like I had no choice. Every one of these stellar educators had fought similar battles and were vested in the union because of the protection it offered teachers, seeing how our best interests were not considered by administrators. In this setting, these few peers were my lifeline, offering encouragement, resources, and stories of survival. I did become fearful that my membership might disappoint the principal, a harsh critic of union membership, but I joined despite my reservations.

One member became my mentor and eventual ally. An elderly Black woman, Ms. Hubbard had taught math for thirty years at this school and in her own words, “I have seen it all and got the scars to prove it.” She was tough but fair. Her insight and wisdom offered me much consolation during those challenging days. She also knew how the system worked and stood outside of it as a representative for the union. She offered to help me if I needed it, with or without union affiliation. She became to me what Boyd and Myers (1988) described as “seasoned guidance,” someone who has traveled the road and is able to discern, and ultimately, guide others in their journey (p. 282).

The comments got worse as did Blake’s actions. One day, he said loudly, “Are you cold? You’re nipping.” Although I knew I was fully covered, I found myself sinking
into embarrassment and even shame. A few students chuckled, but all I could say was, “That’s enough.” Once again, words failed me. How could this be happening? I was trained to take control of the class using management techniques. None worked.

This incident was followed by groping that happened when I was in the hallway on duty and a side hug that resulted in a breast graze after class one day. Once again, I reported it and was advised to toughen up, yet things continued to escalate, perpetuating my own consternation.

As I was teaching, I noticed Blake passing something around to some of his friends in our class. At first, I thought it was a note, but after a few more passes, I realized it was a photo. I stopped class and took the picture from him. The picture was of my breasts, covered, but mine. During this time, disposable cameras were used in my classroom for our yearbook. I was the sponsor. I suspected he had taken a camera from our supplies, took his secret shot, and had the photos developed. I asked him where the rest of the photos were, and, of course, he had a package in his backpack. Begrudgingly, he handed them over. Some pictures were of school club shots but several were pictures of me. He had the nerve to ask for the picture with my boobs back, saying, “That’s my artwork. I took that picture. It’s mine” I told him that I would be reaching out to his parents after class. He was not scared. He was smug. I have never felt more humiliation than teaching the remainder of that class, standing there, boobs on display.

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Sadly, women teachers are less likely to report bullying and harassment (Qiao & Patterson, 2021). When I remained silent, it was oddly in service to my students, myself, and my profession, or at least, that’s always been my line of thinking (Goodall, 2005;
Noted in the experiences of others, educator targeted bullying is culturally and legally sanctioned, perpetuated by notions of freedom of expression, individualism, and parental support (Qiao & Patterson, 2021).

Protecting students to the detriment of my own wellbeing, never wanting to tarnish their futures or destroy hard-earned respect, I withheld reprimands that should have been reported and succinctly documented, all in the name of whatever it takes. By the time things had escalated, it was often too late to change the trajectory of behaviors. Conversations with parents, administrators, and students, K-12 and higher education, I found myself dreading because I had been conditioned to accept that somehow I was the problem. During my teacher education program, I was nursed on reflective investigation, stringent self-assessment, examining strengths and weaknesses of lessons, management, interactions, and professionalism where I was in a constant state of needing improvement. Self-doubt and incessant questioning became my normal. What could I have done differently to prevent such occurrences? A flaw in my management plan? Confusing instructions? Lacking explicit criteria? Ambiguous expectations? Lack of love? At the stake, I learned to pacify, admitting guilt to crimes I never committed.

Protecting my reputation, I kept things in house because I never wanted to be seen as weak or needy. I wanted to please the principal. Teachers who were frequent whistleblowers, question posers, or parent-stalkers, were chastised and overlooked despite their efforts to be seen and heard. Teachers who lacked management were not only ridiculed by administrators but by colleagues and even students (Blase, 2009). Lepers without salve. I never wanted to sully my image, to be viewed as incompetent, disorganized, disengaging, or not in control. These are hallmarks of teacher excellence to
which I aspired (Danielson, 2007). My ability to control my classes represents several
evaluative criteria in which I am assessed or judged. Desperately, I needed to be valued,
liked, and approved by all stakeholders, but my job required me to have control of myself
and my students. These early years, above all, image, whether a true representation or
not, mattered.

Taking one for the team allowed me to not only protect students but pleased
administrators and parents alike. Hit after hit, mark after mark, riddled and bruised, I
played first string. However, this came with a price. Despite the training, rule-following,
team-playing, and dedication to the game, I could no longer discern a win from a loss,
cycling through the same play, game after game.

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Armed with evidence and Ms. Hubbard, who insisted on attending any other
meetings with the principal or parents, I went to the principal and requested a conference.
I told my side of the story through tears, unaware of the impact these months of
harassment had on me until I sat there with those photos. Ms. Hubbard bravely stood by
me and insisted on the immediate removal of Blake from my class. “This boy has been
allowed too much power in this classroom and should have been dealt with long before
now. His removal will be immediate, and he is to have no more contact with this
teacher!” she demanded. My principal riffled through the photos dumbfoundedly, “Well,
things sure have escalated fast. You should have come to me sooner.” I did not argue
with him. He agreed to Blake’s removal and a conference, not that Ms. Hubbard would
have been swayed otherwise.
Blake was pulled from my class, and a meeting was scheduled for the next morning. I walked into the conference room, the only room in the building that no expense had been spared, where my principal, Blake’s dad and mom, and Ms. Hubbard sat. Interrupting what appeared to be some hearty laughing between my principal and Blake’s dad, the room fell eerily silent. Aggressively, Blake’s dad immediately sprang to his son’s defense, taking an offensive stance, countering, claiming I had taken the photos myself and given them to Blake. Further, he claimed I had been pursuing his child in a most devious manner. He said that Blake was too embarrassed to come forward with the photos, choosing to give them back to me worried I might get in trouble. Blake liked me too much. He was appalled that I would turn this all against Blake and that the only reason I did was because some of my students witnessed my actions. I was just trying to cover myself with all these theatrics. I had been after Blake all year.

My principal reassured him that there would be a full investigation into MY actions and that to support Blake, they would move him to another class. Interestingly, this did not go well with his dad who said Blake was being punished for my actions. “How is this fair? This punishes the victim,” he cried.

I was flabbergasted, silent, but thankful. Ms. Hubbard stepped in and said, “Would you really want Blake to remain with a predator if what you are saying is true?” Her support unyielding, she made direct eye contact with the father whose eyes darted between her and me.

“She is the problem. She has targeted Blake from the beginning of the school year, but he loves her class,” his tone changed and his finger wagged. “It just seems like she could be reprimanded and offer Blake an apology.” He looked to his wife, “My wife
and I would be satisfied with an apology.” He burrowed in on me, his eyes penetrating. I couldn’t maintain my gaze. Not that I was guilty. I was shocked and disheartened.

I could now understand minutely how the witches in Salem felt. I was being crucified based on lies and expected to acknowledge my guilt, the role I played in Blake’s accusations. My oblivious principal looked at me as if he expected me to apologize as well. His look said, “Let’s just make this all go away. Be a team player.”

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Santoro’s (2018) research comes to mind. Conducting numerous interviews, she divulges teachers’ experiences with being accused of misconduct and the demoralizing effect these types of accusations can have on teacher overall wellbeing (Santoro, 2018). However, most of my career, I found little solace in the research not knowing how to access it, nor did any of my teacher training prepare me for this. I thought I was an anomaly.

Since I began teaching, I have felt scrutinized and sexualized. My body became property, a commodity, the first day I stood in front of students (hooks, 1994). There have always been glances, comments, and innuendos that I just ignore so that I can teach. Early into my career, I began altering my speech; dressing more masculine; stopped wearing make-up; diminished myself to protect myself. I have since told other teachers who have experienced similar experiences to do the same. We don’t want to provoke. Once again, I have played into the cycle of justifying and placating abuse.

I am reminded of hooks’ (1994) discussion on the embodied experience of teaching. She divulges her awareness of her body “at odds with the existing structure,” challenging power by her mere presence, taking space (p. 135). Standing in front of
classes, year after year, I never once considered that my body is viewed, processed, judged, accepted or denied, and that my womanhood carries an automatic penalty as does my poverty. Yes, there is power in the presence of the teacher, power I have subsequently exercised over the years, but there is no denying the veil that shrouds the nakedness of every woman in this profession.

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A former colleague of mine received an offer for a teaching position in her hometown. She was thrilled to be accepted into the fold of her alma mater. Within days of acceptance, however, her principal reached out to me as a courtesy, according to him. After some social media searches, the principal, Mr. Tyler, was shocked to find his new hire posing in a bikini on the beach. He said that the picture was not acceptable and would need to be removed. “There is no way this teacher could teach high school boys with this floating around. They would never view her as a teacher. She has to take it down if she plans on teaching here,” he demanded.

As her reference I found this call awkward and disturbing, but I relayed his message, letting her know what had transpired. She was embarrassed but angered. “How can he do that?” she questioned. These were family photos she had been tagged in by friends on social media.

“Legally, I don’t think he can, but if you want this job, you know what you have to do,” I caved. I played my part in her disenfranchisement.

“Take the picture down,” she responded.

Within minutes, her social media had been deleted. Any trace of her vacation, her womanhood of display, wiped away like words sketched in the sand.
Looking at my interlocked fingers atop my lap, I tapped into the silence. I still have no recollection of where the courage came from; I suspect Ms. Hubbard, but I spoke with a voice not my own. Speaking up did not come easy.

“I think it would be best if Blake moves to Mr. Jeffries’ class,” I said shakily, voice cracking, through tears. Blake’s mom was also crying but remained silent throughout this inquisition. His dad was fuming, “Who are you to kick Blake out? Who? Does this girl not know her place?”

Who was I? At the time, I was worth less than eighteen thousand a year. I was nobody by design and the salary schedule reflected that. I knew my place well.

“We would like a full investigation to occur immediately, and Blake is to be warned not to reach out to this teacher EVER again,” Ms. Hubbard chimed in. Her countenance changed from astute to angered. I felt a pang of guilt and sadness for Blake despite all that had happened.

Blake’s dad began accusing my representative of being hostile and taking my side without proof I was telling the truth. He was flustered and ranting, his words stringing a harsh melody. My principal just sat there with a dumb expression on his face, offering nothing but his useless platitudes. Ms. Hubbard rose from her seat, grabbing my arm and lifting me up.

“This meeting is over. We are DONE here,” Ms. Hubbard said in a voice that still rings within me. She ended it. Nobody said another word. For the first time since this scandal began, I felt a tiny sense of vindication and relief. We walked out of the door, not looking back, Blake’s dad’s rage stalking our exit.
Like Punxsutawney Phil, my principal left his burrow to visit my class for the first time that school year. He asked my students to write about the photos. What happened? What did they know about them? Every single student wrote what Blake had done, including stealing the camera, and even added their witness to other encounters. He was still bragging about his conquests and getting me fired. Despite their friendships, however, they told the truth.

That night and many that followed it, I mourned without awareness of what I was experiencing. I felt that somehow, I was really to blame, that I was an irresponsible teacher; that I should have been more assertive; that I should have documented better; that I should have been more tuned in; that I was too meek in my encounters; that I should have supported students more; that I was not smart enough. How did I not know he was taking pictures? How did I allow this to happen? Shock became despair as I spiraled into a dark place of acknowledgement.

I wanted to quit teaching.

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We left the yellow house with the green shudders for a yellow house with brown shudders. Packing up our lives again, I remarried and adding a husband and two sons to my fold. My husband was encouraging, but he had traditional values regarding a woman’s role in the home. I did all the shopping, cleaning, cooking, laundry, and running with children. He saw his role as primary breadwinner and mine as primary caregiver, despite my daily pilgrimage to work. By the time I prepared clothes, breakfast, lunches, dropped kids off, commuted, taught, commuted, picked kids up, ran errands, did activities, helped with homework, cooked, and got kids ready for bed, graded papers,
there was no time to process what was happening at work nor was there no time at work to process what was happening at home. Weekends were likewise packed with activities, chores, and church. I poured myself into caring, accommodating, and compensating, having to be both mother and father to my girls.

My daughters struggled as we drifted from place to place in those early, formative years. Whereas my youngest daughter seemed to mostly adjust to our new life, my middle and eldest were helping me paste remnants of their shattered childhoods back together, finding the pieces never fit. My eldest daughter was four before she talked. My middle daughter had such violent nightmares, I had to sleep with them most nights. I connect deeply to Zibricky’s (2014) experiences of raising a disabled child within the stronghold of patriarchy and the oppression of mothers patriarchy perpetuates, the ensuing expectations and judgements mothers face to simply mother.

I cleaned incessantly. I still do. I am still trying to remove the dirt (Fox, 2019). The work was always mounting and never done. Overwhelmed and exhausted, I couldn’t sleep either. Nightmares and even ruminating replaced my slumber. Fears of falling back into a world I never wanted to return simmered within me. I lost weight to the point I looked sick. Clogging the drains, my long, dark hair fell out in clumps. My head and stomach ached. My breasts leaked and even bled. I have since learned that when I grieve, my body responds by losing pieces of itself. Slowly, I disappear.

The disenfranchisement I experienced as a teacher who lost her voice due to systemically supported bullying and disacknowledgement paired well with the grieving child within. With a house full of kids, there was never a moment to be present to the pain of what I was experiencing. I was too busy to grieve and grieving things that I did
not understand would elicit a grief response. From my voice to my reputation, along with my perception of how I dreamed I would be treated in the profession and in my home, I had only associated grief with death, never with the loss of living and working as a woman in this world.

I had been smuggled into the middle class, but this came with a different level of dedication and servitude. It came with grief. I felt separated, alienated, from myself. Appearances matter here. Keeping my husband pleased, reassuring him of my worth; pretending I could do it all; I became someone else. I splintered to survive within the security of the middle, entangled in the chords of the puppeteer.

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I went to my principal a few days later to thank him for taking care of the situation. I needed his approval so desperately. I apologized for what all had happened and asked him if it was normal to feel such deep sadness after encounters such as this. He said, “Teaching is tough, and it’s why you must just learn to let stuff go. Dwelling on it won’t help.”

Talking with my colleagues, I realized that facing sadness, unraveling the knots, was not something anyone encouraged. Visiting our school counselor, she offered, “You have a lot going on at home and then add this school to your worries. You really have to push through it. Forget it and move on.”

Turning to my journals, I began writing about my experiences, unleashing myself on the pages, becoming someone different, someone who spoke up. Sifting through the rage, the hurt, the grief, I thought critically about why this demoralizing event made me
want to quit teaching (Santoro, 2018). I suffered losses before, but these losses were relentless. From childhood to womanhood, I was in a constant state of loss.

I knew that the only way to cope was for me was to do what I loved more, creating lessons that sparked creativity, my students and mine. Making my classroom a healing place is what I attempted to do.

At the time, I could teach whatever I wanted to without much regard to standards or regulations. I had a list of skills I had to target, but the way I taught them was completely up to me. Stories moved me and had since childhood. Even in college, I found myself moved by stories, words, and strong characters. I chose stories and books that featured characters facing hardships who were forced to perish or persevere. These stories served to inspire our own stories. We wrote of our experiences with adversity. We voiced our hopes, fears, and triumphs. The literature challenged us all to think differently about our roles in our world.

We read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, a stage adaptation, performing the play in our classroom. Each day brought questions about survival, betrayal, perseverance, and hope. We conducted investigations into World War II and the Holocaust, questioning and thinking critically about genocide. We examined and shared our own views on human rights and our responsibility to act. Contemplating the literature through dramatic readings and meditative writings, we connected to a child who wrote of peace, hope, and forgiveness. We practiced empathy and compassion for the plight and struggles of others.

We went on field trips to plays, movies, and museums. I attempted to immerse my students in experiences that would enlighten and inspire them to continue their learning. I
advocated for resources that would provide enrichment and accessibility and, somehow, managed to secure them despite the destitution that surrounded us. I transformed into an advocate without even realizing it.

Teaching was the impetus for my continuing and higher education journey. I began seeking development opportunities to expand my knowledge and pedagogical practice to support my students. From professional workshops in reading and writing instruction to historical professional developments, I began my walk as a lifelong learner. Responding to the needs of my English language learners, I sought certification during my summer break that year.

A student may have broken my heart. The system that encouraged him, his advances, his power, may have broken my heart. The school may have broken my heart, but teaching began slowly putting it back together even if it was still a mangled mess, a trend that has continued to cycle throughout my stories. What began as the ending of my career, reignited it.

Literature has a way of opening our eyes, our hearts, but it is the connecting, the contemplating, the community and lovers of learning, where I began again and again and again. Healing in the trenches may seem an impossibility, but I needed, still need, to believe it possible to remain. Interestingly, I was named Teacher of the Year at the conclusion of what was one of the worst years of my teaching career. Cards and letters from students in support of my impact and influence that year still occupy a cherished portfolio that rests beside me as I reflect.

One letter came years later, finding me in a different school, crediting our mock trial that fated school year as the impetus for choosing a career in law. Additionally, he
wanted to thank me for believing in him and opening his eyes to a world he wanted to change. Another letter thanked me for igniting a love of literature. Many more years later, I received a message through social media from Blake. Offering apologies for his misconduct and maltreatment, he wanted me to know that I did make a difference in his life, and he regretted his words and actions.

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When I originally began memory mining this story, this field site, and those years of hurting and healing, I fixated on the bullying by a student because it might have been my first encounter with such, but it would not be my last (Poulos, 2021). The loss I experienced as the result of the ensuing harassment adversely affected my sense of self, my worth, and my professional identity. But, when I began discerning my choice to include this story, it captured disenfranchisement and its complexities, institutionally sanctioned. The school was in deplorable conditions, but monies were poured into administration and spaces where GT kids were served. Where most of my students were recipients of free meals, they were still hungry. Some were homeless, drifting from family member to family member. Many had incarcerated parents. Their backgrounds were nothing like their GT peers. Along with teachers, many of my students were disenfranchised by the school itself. The opportunities accessible to GT kids and their families were varied and plentiful whereas the regular students were not provided such resources or accessibility. This splitting of bourgeois and proletariat, GT and regular students; administrator and teachers, breeds classism notions found within Marxist feminism (Knopp, 2012).
I never considered how not rendering our stories is a perpetuation of division, a systematic attempt to silence and control (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). When I began talking to other teachers about my stories, exposing my vulnerabilities with each rendering, time after time, they slowly began telling their own.

A former colleague, Ms. James, had repeatedly talked with the principal about escalating verbal abuse she was facing daily from one of her students to no avail. A slap on her back by the student, so hard it took her breath, resulted in Ms. James receiving a reprimand for allowing the student to be out of his seat. Within a week, the boy hit her with such force, she fell to the ground, tearing muscles in her back. Instead of support, Ms. James faced scrutiny by the principal who insisted she not press charges and ruin this boy’s life. According to her, grief eventually gave her the courage she needed to take legal action, eventually seeking a teaching position elsewhere.

There was no support, no recognition, no awareness of what I was going through following this incredibly challenging experience, and, culturally-speaking, the code of silence that has enveloped many grievous encounters I have experienced since this episode have been numerous. Remaining silent, I saw, as an act of love or compassion for my students and my profession. In my experiences, protecting students; investigating my role in provocation; downplaying; and moving on occurred most often. Speaking up is not always popular, and I feared, especially with my encounters in higher education, that I would be perceived as weak, incompetent, and not a team player. To remain, I have sold pieces of my soul to keep up an appearance that is not truly me.
Although I never really processed, I was grieving throughout this all, I had accumulated losses that left me defenseless in the trenches, seeking reinforcements, needing proof of my own life. I lost my identity, the teacher I thought I wanted to be.

I grieved unknowingly, burrowing a trench into the depths. I grieved for the child who dreamed of living in a brick house, wearing clean clothes, and playing with the discarded toys. I grieved the fire that blazed within her. I grieved her gumption despite the ghetto she roamed.

Without awareness, however, I dipped my toes in the healing waters of teaching and learning. I look back and remember the passion that filled my being when planning for lessons that engaged and inspired my students to live beyond the walls. My students and their inquiries, their needs, their battles, their inquisitiveness kept challenging me to learn. I had students who knew an even darker side of living than I did, requiring me to check my privilege and do better.

They were my teachers, and their lessons inspired my daily walk in and out of a building filled with despair. Seeing disparities in their opportunities and communities, I sought continuing education to give me the knowledge to do better, to be better. Engaging in emancipatory texts, we questioned, we learned, and we grew. In the truest sense of the reciprocity of teaching, in teaching them, I taught myself. In attempting to heal them, I began the work of healing myself.
**Good Old Boys**

Developing more street wisdom than book knowledge, I learned too early in life about good old boys. My first experience of several with sexual abuse were at the aging hands of one, a neighbor named Mr. Wallace. He was a funny man who had various farm animals that I often would visit on my walks into the forest that bordered his land. Never a mean word, he was always kind, asking me about my day or if I needed anything, offering his fresh eggs on several occasions. My grandmother told me to stay away from him and his eggs, but she elicited warnings such as this about all men.

Coming in and out of his house through a side screened door, I noticed some poor neighborhood girls frequenting his place. Deidre, a tall lanky blonde, dirt poor too, told me they do chores for him, and he pays well for work inside the house. “I can get you in if you want,” she offered. I had no doubt if Deidre was in that house, she was robbing him blind.

Within days, I was in his house. Our conversations over the course of several weeks were limited, but he was always very complimentary. From praises about how I stacked dishes to sweet remarks about what a pretty girl I was, he said all the right things. Up until then, my visits included helping clean dishes, take out trash, and even sitting with his invalid, obese wife who was stuffed with cords, strapped to a gurney. Moans replaced words, her mouth hung open as her eyes stared blankly at the wall. Typically, I earned pocket change for my services.

I was nine years-old when he asked me to sit atop his lap; his wife’s bed in view of us; he in his brown upholstered easy chair facing the television and a wall full of awards and mementos from a life that had left him behind. Adjusting me to his straddle,
he began bouncing. “Be still,” he huffed. Clueless but fearful, my eyes darted from his helpless wife to a soap opera, his breathing became heavier and the bouncing more rhythmic. One hand remained on my hip as the other snaked its way through the opening of my cotton shorts and into my Strawberry Shortcake panties. I gasped loudly as his fingers pressed tightly into my flesh; his other hand securing me tightly to his groin. He released himself and, finally, released me. Pulling a dollar and fifty cents from his pocket, his flushed face huffed, “You need to go on home.” Warm, the money burned in my tiny hands as tears streamed down my dirt-streaked face.

Shrouding this encounter was silence and a determination to never return, I made my way through the woods using different routes. I knew what he had done to me and to many others. Not long after my encounter, Deidre claimed he forced her into the bedroom, out of his wife’s view, raping her repeatedly. When I asked why she returned and encouraged others to go, she said it was all about the money. He paid her well for her loyalty and silence. When I asked why she didn’t tell, she said, “Who would believe us over him?”

I packed my grief into a worn, pastel Easter basket, taking my revenge slowly and methodically, stealing his hens’ eggs as soon as they were laid.

Was I groomed by him, yes, but more importantly, I was groomed by the system.

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Several years into my career, I made a move that placed me teaching in rural Arkansas. Unlike my former school district, this district took great pride in its facilities, including a state-of-the-art gymnasium that served as the pride of the community. The schools were in excellent condition. The buildings smelled new, impeccably cleaned.
Classrooms were pristine, white walls with plenty of space and resources, including windows that opened. My classroom had a working air conditioning unit and a window that faced a striking countryside where the pines grew tall.

I was hired to teach high school English. Mr. Adams, the high school principal, sat on the hiring committee, praising my experiences in urban education, my various trainings, and accolades. Without a doubt, he was to credit for my hiring. Up until this point, my experiences with high school included a brief two-month internship in urban education. Not that I wasn’t qualified, but I had little doubt that there were better equipped candidates for this position.

My two eldest daughters were allowed to transfer schools. I would drop them off at school in the mornings, their character backpacks strapped to their tiny frames, and a shuttle bus would deliver them to my campus across town. Snacks and cartoons in my classroom as I finished up the day became a comfortable new normal for us after so many years of commuting and hustling. Meanwhile, my youngest daughter attended daycare across the hall from my classroom. I was most excited about having my children closer to me and felt this move would be good for us all. It was almost too good to be true. Mr. Adams was most accommodating and compassionate, assisting me throughout my transition to this new school.

Having been able to run my own curriculum and lessons since I began teaching, things were heavy-handed here. Administrators had their eyes in the classrooms unlike my last school where they never darkened my door. Every week, English teachers were required to attend long, arduous pacing meetings alongside two elementary, know-it-all, literacy specialists, Ms. Fritz and Ms. Strange, and a suit-cladded central office
administrator, Ms. Baskin, who reminded me of Delores Umbridge from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. These meetings involved reporting everything we were planning on teaching and how we were going to do it. Taking only about ten minutes to debrief our weekly lessons, we were treated to a litany of literacy jargon and tricks that worked well for elementary kids. Questions were frequently posed by this inquisitive posse whenever we shared our lesson plans and chosen approaches. As if on cue, all three overseers’ faces would contort, and their glossed lips would purse. Responses often were in harmony, “Hmmm.” “How is that supposed to work?” “Are you sure that’s the best way to teach that?” “I’ve never heard of that before. Take us through it.” “Try this instead.” “That’s not best practice.”

Mr. Adams attended a few of these meetings and was quick to the defense of his teachers unlike my previous principal. “Ms. Voegele, tell them about that generative paragraph you have been teaching the kids about,” he nodded my way reassuringly. I told them, but they weren’t impressed or interested, moving on to another one of their great ideas. I appreciated his vote of confidence, however.

Some of the suggestions offered by the coven would have gotten us duct taped to the wall by our high schoolers. This macabre bunch was incredibly condescending, disregarding the years of experience, education, and talent they had in the room. Instead of collaborations of inspiration, I found these meetings dreadful and demeaning. Maybe because it was my first year, they were not as aggressive with me, but my colleagues were subjected to weekly thrashings. It was painful to witness and wait. I knew I would be targeted eventually; it was just a matter of time.

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My stomach would churn hours before these meetings were set to begin. Always feeling like an imposter in a secondhand dress throughout these conference proceedings, and many others since then, I would listen and attempt to mimic pronunciations and styles of talking. Maniacally taking notes, something I still do, I would investigate words, concepts, and strategies that were foreign to me. Despite practice, there were words that I circumvented because I could never form them properly. This list accumulates as my tenure in higher education continues.

Undoubtedly, the English department was under scrutiny and micromanagement based on discussions and positioning that was occurring during these meetings. Accountability was all the rage with No Child Left Behind legislation, and I knew that I could no longer teach off the grid, but none of the trio possessed the credentials nor had the experiences of the other women in the room, including myself. Pacing our work, both horizontally and vertically, was the goal, yet these meetings failed to accomplish anything other than dressing us down. More than that, these weekly strippings were just grueling and time-consuming. Like many curriculum committees I have since served on, these gatherings disemboweled teachers, stripping them of their worth and skills, later instructing them on how to earn it back through their devotion to canned curriculums and scripting.

Despite my ingrained “whatever it takes” mantra, I felt a great sense of loss stirring within me. For a while, I thought I was depressed, and, at times, I was, but this was more internalized. I missed my former school and the teacher I had become there. Despite the struggles I had faced, I felt a sense of belonging and purpose there that this
rural school failed to cultivate within me. My skills, my creativity, my passion would atrophy if I remained locked in this school. I began feeling a cage closing in around me.

This was no burnout or stress, this was grief brought on by deskilling, a concerted, systematic effort to separate teachers from their skills and the fruits of their labors through canning curriculums and standardized assessment (Apple, 2008, 2012; 2019; Runte & Runte, 2007). Did the deskilling bother me, or did I want to be in charge? Was I more concerned about the students or myself? Why did I feel such guilt because of the grief? I filed it away as best I could, her edges disheveling from the folder.

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Grandma died of cancer around this time. She did not receive her diagnosis until after her death; her concerns and symptoms passed off as those of an aging woman. Despite requiring an oxygen tank to support her breathing and skin sagging from her frame, the necessary tests and treatment were denied her. We never questioned her lack of treatment.

Within months of her passing, her home burned to the ground. The cause of the fire was accredited to a lightning strike. Within minutes of the flash, memories blazed, and ashes remained. What home I had known was gone.

Her passing like a breeze, a pause, my grief suspended in time. Another loss that would have to wait in the vault. Her death happened on a Thursday, and I was back in class on Monday. Having to push through, I had no more sick days. With three babies recovering from a small lifetime of trauma, who would have?

I was given two days to grieve and other than some polite, “You’re in my prayers,” Grandma’s loss was unacknowledged. Out of sight, out of mind.
But I continued to see her in dreams where she walked through burial grounds and overgrown gardens.

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Again, I had the fortune of falling under the wing of a mentor, a Veteran teacher, Ms. Booth, who was deeply regarded and incredibly knowledgeable. I would have never survived the year without her guidance and encouragement. She sat on my right in every single literacy committee showdown. However, her demeanor in these meetings were reminiscent of my own when I found myself at the stake of the earlier witch hunt where I was the crucified. She was stoic and silent, sharing only when asked, offering nothing more. We all knew her to be a beloved teacher who most ardently loved her subject and her students, but she appeared distant, almost despondent during these weekly meetings of the minds. Where a few would chime in resonantly simply to appease the coven with their incorporation of something they had brewed, Ms. Booth remained resolute.

Days following one such meeting, I sought her help with locating some books I was mandated to teach. I knocked on her classroom door, entering when a student greeted me. If ever a classroom space could attain Sainthood, this one would have risen to the challenge. Students were in groups discussing characterization, conducting a character autopsy using a character, or tale, from Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales. Music of the time set the tone, but this space was sacred. Students were engrossed in their discussions and subsequent representations. Rubrics were posted as well as exemplars. These autopsies would be presented along with a culminating Socratic discussion. There was no question as to rigor, engagement, and accountability. This class was running itself. Her students were empowered, efficacious. After scanning the room, I spotted Ms. Booth
working with a group of students, clearly scaffolding the experience as needed. Captivating them with her explanations and questions, she had them thinking critically. Awkwardly, I apologized for my intrusion and asked her about the books. I wanted nothing more than to remain in this moment of sanctity.

When the school day ended, I went back to her room. Autopsied characters, colorful, many drawn to perfection, hung all over the walls. A stack of graded rubrics sat on her desk. “The students graded themselves and designed these themselves. I was just finishing up entering them into my gradebook,” she confessed. If ever there were such a thing as best practice, she knew it. My desk looked like an episode of Hoarders. I would be taking another stack home tonight.

Once again, I apologized for intruding. She laughed and invited me to interrupt anytime. That was her way. I asked her why she did not speak up in the meetings given that her classroom was the epitome of excellence in teaching and learning. I wanted to understand her silence, but more than that, I wanted to learn her ways. She became my “seasoned guidance” for this season of my life (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 282).

“When I close that door, I do what I know is best. I stopped a long time ago trying to prove myself to administrators,” she smiled wryly and winked. Ms. Booth was petite with a salt-and-pepper bob that accented her tiny features. Her pale blue eyes were kind but danced when she taught or discussed the people and things she loved. At the time, I could not understand not attempting to please my administrators. I wanted to please them and to be seen as worthy and not fraudulent.

“You will never make everybody happy in this profession. At some point, you will have to choose who gets your energy. You will never be able to do enough if it’s
their approval you are seeking,” she added. That year, she was my guidepost. No matter what book or skill I taught, I sponged her wisdom up. I also remained silent in our weekly meetings, my small attempt at solidarity with a Saint. But there was more to it. I was afraid to speak.

My final semester, I found myself spiraling.

This beautiful school held dirty secrets (Fox, 2019).

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Before Christmas break, several teachers invited me to go have dinner at a nightclub as a celebration of finishing the semester. I had been invited to have drinks many times but always had my daughters and didn’t feel right about leaving them. My party years were filled with breastfeeding, so drinks with friends was not something I had a habit of doing. Not to mention, my husband, their stepdad, assumed the role of father of five with hesitancy but a willingness to support and do his part. I did not want to burden him with my kids, so I would make arrangements for my mom to help if ever I had to be away. Even with our grandkids, I still treat his time with reverence, seeking assistance for what is ours. Call it my raising, I did not fully trust any man, including him.

This nightclub was an old-fashioned country bar. I was still wearing my dress from day, a long, blue maternity dress with clogs. It was one of my favorites and although I was not pregnant, I struggled parting with clothes. Most of our campus was there. Although we were small, we were well represented here. Pitchers of beer were being passed around as sidebar conversations and laughter were happening. I was warmly welcomed and was offered a seat between our principal, Mr. Adams, and a math teacher,
Ms. Moix, who I greatly respected. I wasn’t much of a drinker, but there was no way I would get away with ordering a Coke with this crew. A margarita would have to do.

One drink in, and I was feeling good. Ms. Moix and I laughed heartily as we listened to stories from other hallways. For the first time since leaving my other school, I felt my spirit lift. Mr. Adams had been telling his stories, pulling everyone in with gossip and insights about future plans. If you want teachers’ attention, spill the tea, and we’re all yours.

Another drink had been delivered. I thanked the waitress and told her I hadn’t ordered it. She whispered, “He got it for you,” pointing to Mr. Adams. Ms. Moix raised her eyebrows then her glass, “Thank you, Mr. Adams,” she mouthed silently.

I knew a second drink would not harm me, but I worried about the long drive home. I nursed it sparingly and ordered food. A slow song began playing, and several teachers partnered off and began dancing. I felt Mr. Adams’ hand on my arm, “Let’s join them.”

Feeling a sense of dread flood over me, I agreed to the dance. This was the polite thing to do. I was conditioned to be hospitable. Despite my apprehension, I went along, as I had with other encounters, because I did not want to be perceived as anything but cooperative. Holding my hand, leading me to the darkened floor, I attempted to push my arms out straight to ensure an acceptable distance suspended our bodies from touching. He pulled me into his large frame, holding me closely.

There was little denying Mr. Adams was handsome; he was tall, dark, and stout like a Guinness. A good old country boy, his sandy brown hair was disheveled most of the time as he was always working on something that was broken at the school. Well-
liked and esteemed throughout the community, he had a long record of leading his school with heart. I had no reason to question his intentions or to feel put off, but I did.

As we swayed to the music, my head erect, his leaning in, he spoke of how proud he was of me. “You are doing such good work here. I hope you know how valued you really are,” he breathed into me. I felt myself loosen some with his kind words and began feeling a sense of guilt about suspecting his intentions were dishonorable. Begging the question, “Why did I accept the dance?”

“Thank you,” I said sheepishly, following his lead.

“It seems like your children are happy,” he said with a how’s-the-weather tone.

Thinking of my white-headed four-year old’s daily after school prance into my classroom, her daily artwork in hand and my outfitted-in-leggings, boots, and backpacks elementary babies filled my heart. We were safe, finally.

“If you need a break in the afternoons, I have an office helper who is wonderful with kids. She can take them if you need to get anything done,” he offered kindly.

I responded, “Yeah, they might like a break from me!” We both laughed.

“I doubt that,” he humored.

We continued dancing in a silent comfort as teachers sang the words to the song, swaying along drunkenly.

“I shouldn’t say this, but you are a beautiful woman, and I’d be lying if I said I don’t think about you,” he whispered. There it was. His tone was reminiscent of Mr. Wallace’s. I shuddered but remained locked in his hold. I was overreacting. Complimenting me wasn’t wrong. He had done nothing but support me.
“I feel anything but,” I laughed, but could have been perceived as digging for more compliments. Thinking through this encounter over the years, I might have been encouraging his advances. I keep finding myself dancing this same dance but with different partners (Ronai, 1995).

“You have no idea what you do to me. I am wanting you right now,” he pulled me closer to him. “This is for you,” he gestured, pulling me close enough to feel his groin against me. “I came here tonight to be with you.”

Panic, like a rush of water, filled my lungs, scorching me from within. I prayed the song would end. I felt myself flushing but not from hidden desire, from embarrassment, from a mounting anxiety that had me questioning everything I had ever said or did that might have provoked him and his advances. How did I keep finding myself in these situations, and why couldn’t I speak up? My inaction, my silence, only seemed to emblazon him.

“I have a place not far from here. Let’s go,” he spoke with exuberance. Throughout this dance, I looked around, wondering what the others thought, hoping nobody noticed what he was doing. Nobody seemed to care. Even though we were both married, the pack ignored his behavior and my acquiescence. I felt the child within bubbling up.

As soon as the song was over, I found an excuse to leave the bar, telling Ms. Moix that one of my children was sick. Hurriedly paying my tab, fighting back tears, I made a quick escape to avoid being alone with Mr. Adams.

The days following the dance involved me avoiding any places where Mr. Adams might be. I had students run errands that I previously did myself. In the mornings, I
waited until the last minute to enter the building and left school as soon as my kids arrived in the afternoons. Despite my efforts to disappear, Mr. Adams’ morning and afternoon duty changed to supervising my hallway, making him a daily presence in hallways that never had much traffic. Other than brief cordialities, I maintained my distance.

One afternoon after the hallways cleared, he came into my classroom, closing the door behind him. I knew my toddler would be bouncing over momentarily, but there was a lull between the bell and her arrival of about five minutes, something he had to notice during his afternoon meanderings. He looked around my room, scanning my bulletin board and various student work postings. “You really are a good teacher,” he said as if it were a shock to himself as well.

I wanted to believe him and needed his approval. Despite what had occurred, I needed him to acknowledge and value my work as a teacher. I was desperate for his acceptance, but within me I knew I would never have it. Pleasing the administrator, staying in their good graces, always saying yes, in my experience, is cultural, ingrained in the work we do as teachers. In a sense, we are their students, a microcosm of the classroom. However, an awareness began to take root. He did not hire me because of my teaching abilities. Doubts about myself, my worth as a teacher, began festering.

His dress shoes clacked as he rounded my room, finally, silencing at the desk closest to mine. Resting atop the desk, he straddled his legs, placing his hands upon them, looking me in the eyes with a solemn stare as if trying to read my aura. “You need to share with others the great things you’re doing. There is a conference that I thought might be good for you to attend and maybe even present,” he stated nonchalantly, shooting off
dates and instructions for how to submit my travel request. “There will be a small group of us going. We get our own rooms and just party and relax. You will love it,” his sale was interrupted by my white-headed baby who was exuberant about a pea that had sprouted into a plant. She ran to my window and placed it on the sill. “Well, that’s my cue,” he said, waving bye to my child. Packing up my things that afternoon, I knew I would have to come up with a hell of a lie to get out of the conference, and I fully realized that my decline would seal my fate in this district.

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It took years before I told my husband about these encounters because I knew what his reply would be. Did I stay silent because of his anticipated reaction or because I too questioned my role in provoking such feelings and advances? Ronai (1995) divulges her own struggles with frequent sexual victimization at the hands of men, finding solace in the research that sexual abuse perpetuates further sexual abuse. It is a cycle of victimization, one that I kept reprising.

My husband’s voice as a critical observer has been my voice. Although I doubt that he intended to disenfranchise me and the grief that followed this event, he recycled the words of a culture, the ways of a class, and the tongue that privileged it, splintering me from the truth of the experience. I needed a tour guide, an interpreter, to maneuver through the middle class, through womanhood, in these new lands with new lords. I learned to take the blame and assess my role in provocations. I was conditioned to remain in a constant state of self-doubt and silence.

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“My husband will not be able to help with my children,” I said after the multitude of inquiries into my conference attendance and several uninvited touches. “He works so hard and is such a wonderful provider,” I was piling it on. “We have a good marriage, and I love him so much,” I added for emphasis as if I was selling him instead of myself. This conversation was held while classes were changing. Not sure if it was the noise, the distraction, but the students being present empowered my will to speak.

Mr. Adams’ entire approach changed after this. No longer was he encouraging; there would be no shoutouts about my generative paragraph again. He was livid. His power became his hallway sidekick. “Ms. Voegele, I noticed you arrived five minutes late this morning. Make sure it doesn’t happen again,” he demanded. He knew I dropped my kids off when the doors opened at their elementary school and arrived on campus as soon as I could, but he was no longer in the generous mood. “Ms. Voegele, you left your light on.” “Ms. Voegele, be sure to lock the door in the afternoon. You will get us robbed.” “Ms. Voegele, you need to be in the hallway at all times in between classes.” For every comment, every dig, I could have argued, but I chose to not provoke him any further. Again, I found myself wanting to leave the profession.

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I began to spiral into a place I knew well but did not have the words for at the time to name this space of struggle. True to form, my body revealed herself. I lost weight; my clothes hung from my frame. My hair released her hold, clumps on the floor, in the drains, on my brush. A visit to the doctor for excessive stomach pains, jaundiced skin and eyes and, eventually, resulted in emergency gallbladder removal.
Keeping these experiences at work a secret was more than I could hold (Goodall, 2005; Poulos, 2013). I was taking successive fire and bleeding out with no reinforcements in sight. Drives home in the afternoon were often filled with children’s chatter and laughter, but I retreated somewhere during those short commutes home, the only time I could release the emotions of the day’s struggle, the hurt that resulted from being dismissed, disparaged, and disenfranchised. My girls witnessed my struggle momentarily; I desperately tried to protect them, but how could I protect them from me? I kept falling into a vicious cycle of victimization, and they witnessed it all (Carter, 2002; Ronai, 1995).

Slowly, I felt myself losing control. From tracking everything I said and did in the classroom to laying myself bare to committee scrutiny, I feared my passion for my profession and creativity were beginning to atrophy. Dealing with Mr. Adams' growing discontent and harassment, I became alienated from others and myself.

“Did you sleep with Mr. Adams,” Ms. Moix asked. “There is a rumor going around.”

“No, I did not,” I said fearfully as panic ran through me.

I knew exactly where she heard it. This school, like many other schools I have served, had a clique. Where better than school for teachers to rekindle the social hierarchies of days gone by? The clique consisted of four middle-aged women who appeared to rule the school, our very own Pink Ladies. They were close to Mr. Adams and messengers of knowledge. If anything significant happened to anybody, they knew it, and they told it. But on a more sinister note, they also targeted and undermined teachers who they viewed as outsiders or threats.
One of their nemeses approached me, making sure the halls were empty before speaking, “You better watch yourself. Mr. Adams will not stop until he ruins you. I would be looking for another job if I were you.” I wanted to ask about her experience and why she remained, but she slinked into her classroom before I could muster the words and went to great lengths to avoid me after that one encounter.

One afternoon following these conversations, I went to the lounge, a gathering place to eat lunch and visit. Filled with comfy couches, vending machines, and the community coffee pot, this space was designed with unloading in mind. I had listened and even participated in discussions regarding wayward students, helicopter parents, overbearing central office planning meetings, sporting events and funding, and personal matters.

The lounge was a place to unleash our homelives as well. Many a spouse (and sometimes their mothers) were offered up as lunchtime entertainment, and we all had stories to tell, feasting upon their follies. Despite the multitude of warnings I had received from administrators and from my teacher preparatory program regarding the lounge, I made a daily pilgrimage, mainly, to belong, and occasionally banter.

But on that particular day, conversations ceased when I entered the room. The normal lunch bunch was there, but I was ignored with little attempt on their part at basic civility. One of the Pink Ladies was hovering over the shoulders of two teachers I had considered friends and commiserated with often. Whispers and laughs filled the tiny space with occasional glances my way. I stood at the microwave, watching each rotation of my lunch to avoid them.
The Pink Lady, Ms. H spoke, “You don’t play well with others, do you? Poor Mr. Adams!”

“I guess not,” I replied, clutching my still frozen lunch. I hurried to my room where I fell apart.

Days later, I returned to the lounge only to find it empty. Out of curiosity, I walked the hallway and found that the teachers had uprooted and were eating their lunch in Ms. H’s room. I felt their exclusion deeply.

From then on, I avoided hallways, spaces, and events, resulting in further alienation. I had been neutralized, ostracized, and disenfranchised. I grieved in silence, embarrassment, and shame.

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I poured what was left of myself into my teaching, having been given permission by the literacy committee to perform and take my students to the Shakespeare festival held at a university in central Arkansas. Of course, each day I taught would need to include certain minilessons approved by the committee, and a full report of my impact on student learning would need to be tracked. None of my students had performed in a play before, and when I asked them their thoughts about performing at a festival, they were beyond excited to showcase their talents and visit a university. I knew better than to ask Mr. Adams for support with this venture. Fortunately, donations of fabric, wood, lights, and various props began littering my classroom. After school, we stayed and made costumes, props, and rehearsed. Even my own children were eager to assist. Despite the drama and disillusionment, I was still able to find joy in my teaching.
“Ms. Voegele, you have a fire hazard in your room,” Mr. Adams pointed out during this time of endless preparation. “I would have never approved this trip with baseball season coming up. You’re taking several of our good players from practice,” he emphasized. My students witnessed these brutal encounters, but they too remained diligent to the process. At times, they compensated for him, helping me clean, offering assistance with my kids, and even lingering in my classroom before and after school.

My students were rural kids. The play, traveling to a university to perform, was beyond what most of them had experienced during their school years. Some grew up like I did. They knew struggle. Arkansas rates top in the nation for childhood trauma with our children enduring multiple adverse experiences (Montgomery, 2019). I was one of them.

Some of my students grew up with privilege, but they were respectful, kind, to those of us who didn’t. Again, literature awakened them and their explorations of themselves and others. Contemplating characters, their decisions, their motivations and their stories became springboards for our own writings and introspection. Following the play and an award from the university for our efforts, we began reading a book that challenged my students and many of their deeply held belief systems.

Angelou’s, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, was next on the approved list of books I was asked to teach that year. Having read it before, it struck a chord with me and my own dark experiences of growing up poor. Contemplating this book opened the floor of my classroom to discussions about abuse, race, and growing up as a girl in poverty. We laughed and cried, experiencing an array of emotions as we shared in recitations, inspiring our own stories to speak.
“Ms. Voegele, I am getting complaints from several parents about your book selection. We have a meeting tomorrow with Ms. Jenkins,” Mr. Adams said almost jokingly.

I felt flushed, assaulted. I talked back this time. “That selection was made by the literacy committee, and this book is on the district’s AP list as well,” I responded.

His eyes fell upon me. “We will discuss it tomorrow, but I advise you to quit reading it,” he said dismissively.

I spent the night in knots. Another parent meeting, but this time, there would be no Ms. Hubbard to support me. Other than elusive Ms. Booth, I had failed to connect to the teachers here, many close friends of Mr. Adams. At the time, I was oblivious to his influence and how it had relegated me to an outsider. Other than minor cordialities, his harem ensured my exclusion.

Ms. Jenkins and her daughter, Ellie, along with Mr. Adams were already seated in the office when I arrived. “Have a seat, Ms. Voegele,” Mr. Adams said in an authoritative voice, pointing to a chair in the corner. Moving the chair by my student, Ellie, I sat down smiling and greeting both despite the anxiety scorching through me; there was little doubt I was acting.

“We are here because you have assigned a book that has caused quite a stir. Ms. Jenkins said that Ellie told her you read aloud a part that compares a man’s penis to a stalk of corn. She doesn’t want Ellie reading this book, and I have serious concerns about any student at this school reading it as well. Isn’t this about black people?” he interrogated.
“I am happy to allow Ellie to read another book, but this book is on our list for the district. Any issues you have with its selection should be taken up with the school board,” I countered, continuing my charade.

He stammered, “When you read this out loud, did you and your class laugh?”

“I believe there was some laughter. This moment in the book was intense, and my students were regulating their emotions, not being disrespectful. We have read the entire book out loud so far, not just this selection and followed every serious shift and conflict with explanations and discussions,” I retorted my lines with my professional voice.

“I am good with Ellie having a choice,” Ms. Jenkins chimed in. “She is a good Christian girl. She didn’t even know what a man’s part was,” her mom concluded dumbfoundedly. Ellie sunk into her chair, saying nothing.

Before Mr. Adams could retaliate, I stood up and thanked everyone for their time and agreed to change assignments as needed for Ellie, one of several students pregnant by the end of the semester, and I’m sure the stalk of corn is still getting blamed.

A few days later, I was summoned to Mr. Adams’ office. He said he had gone to the board to challenge the book being on the reading list, and I might be called to testify, or give an account, or rationale as to its presence on the list. The board meeting just happened to be the next night, and the teaching of this book was on the agenda. It was a witch hunt.

“Will go and offer support for the book,” I did not linger but questions filled my mind. What did I just agree to do? Was I going to defend the book or battle Mr. Adams? I had never been to a school board meeting, and I had no words to justify this book’s inclusion in the curriculum. Was I really a proponent here? Was I really an ally? I
abandoned my post in urban ed, my kids of all colors, to take up residency in rural ed with kids of one color. Although I wanted to be closer to home and bring my kids with me, I had to unlearn years of conditioning when working with students from urban ed.

I was not raised as a racist, but I was surrounded by them growing up. They were family and neighbors who told stories that still scare me. Many of my school’s families, my students, were raised similarly. Was the issue with this book the stalk of corn or a Black woman’s experience, and did I really have any business standing in its defense?

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Most of my teaching career and even in my early years in higher education, I stood on the principle that all kids were equal and needed to be treated equally. I claimed I was colorblind, encouraging students in K-12 and even in higher education to do the same. This practice, despite my intentions, is inherently racist (Love, 2019). To deny a child their race, their heritage, so that I could preach equality was harmful. How many children grieved because of my dismissal of their race?

Over the years, this was one of many practices I had to unlearn. I credit my willingness to transform through critical reflection and my subsequent exposure to critical literature such as bell hooks (1994) and Paulo Freire (1970) for my becoming more critically conscious (Mezirow, 1990). But I credit growing in age, learning, experience, and grief work for transforming my heart (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Beyond that, I credit relationships with women of color who loved me, challenged me, and mentored me, transforming my spirit (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1997, 1998; Love, 2019).

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With much consternation, I sought out Ms. Booth. I did not tell her about Mr. Adams’ ensuing harassment, but I did divulge the book quandary and my own struggles with its defense. She too had been brought before the board and made to defend a book selection. With her help, I crafted a letter that would stand as my witness and support. She offered to come to the meeting as well, putting herself at great risk.

Standing before the board that night, I questioned my presence and persistence over a book that could have easily been replaced. I could have acquiesced to Mr. Adams’ request to stop teaching the book. Why I took such an issue with silencing this book was the same issue I took with silencing myself. Without stories, without models, without examples, we never will know that survival, healing, is possible.

Mr. Adams shared that parents were complaining about a book that I had selected to teach. He did discover that it was on our curriculum and felt that it needed to be removed.

“Do you have statements from these parents?” a skeptical board member asked. I was taken aback.

“Yes, I have notes from a meeting with Ms. Jenkins,” he countered.

“That’s one parent, Joe,” the board member replied.

“I had other calls,” Mr. Adams said nervously.

“So, one statement, thank you. Ms. Voegele, please share your concern,” the board member said.

Alone, I stood there in defense of a story, in defense of truth, in defense of myself, I read my statement to a packed room, concluding, “It’s in your curriculum and on the reading list for the AP exam.”
A different board member said, “We need to allow students choices, especially, if a book goes against their religious principles and family values. We have always done this.” Looking directly at Mr. Adams, he said, “I’m not fully understanding why this teacher has been asked to defend the district’s decision to have the book on the reading list. What am I missing?”

“We were just getting complaints. Didn’t want it to snowball,” Mr. Adams said, but the board had already moved onto another more exciting issue.

Ms. Booth walked out with me. After a hug, I told her that I was done there. She told me that she figured I was but reassured me of the good work I had done with the students and how proud she was of me. She complimented my creativity, my passion, and my willingness to work under such tough conditions. She said, “You are fierce! Don’t forget that.”

Her words have remained with me, a reminder of a year that took me to the depths, dragged me below, leaving me entangled in the brush. When I resigned, Mr. Adams pleaded with me to reconsider. He apologized and offered to make things right. I felt guilty, but that did not stop me from resigning. More importantly, I felt liberated.

Years later, I found out from Ms. Booth that Mr. Adams had passed away due to a long battle with cancer. It was at that time that many of his secret affairs and harassments began floating to the surface, chained remnants exposed. It brought me little peace to know that he had done to others what he had done to me, and I had chosen to remain silent about it all until now.

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That year under the pines, I panicked, I protested, and despaired after months of discernment (Boyd & Myers, 1988). My reintegration came in the form of my exodus, subsequent graduate school, and illumination (Boyd & Myers, 1988). For several years, I had soldiered through, teaching kids about literature that a significant portion of my students couldn’t even read. From middle school through high school, this was a trend that I had never been prepared to address by my teacher preparation program. Scaffolding, accommodating, and modifying became a vital part of my classroom practice, yet I had no real understanding of how to help kids read. Afterall, I struggled with reading; my dad struggled with reading; and, sadly, my oldest daughter was in the midst of struggling with reading. Her diagnosis of learning disabled the next year, along with my mounting classroom experiences, became the impetus for my seeking higher learning (Zibricky, 2014). But there was more to it; I knew that my students did not need to depend on interpreters, they needed to do the interpreting themselves. I wanted to remove barriers of dependency, the same barriers that I found myself still encased.

Continuing my education birthed a renaissance for me. I began connecting to scholars and scholarship, unlearning years of conditioning, and reassessing my role and responsibility as an educator.
Cronies

I have taught in schools, face-to-face, online, K-12, higher education, nonformally through organizations and churches, and informally through my support and guidance of family and friends. Cronies transcend location but congregate and mutate in education.

Serving as an ELL (English Language Learner) and reading specialist, I worked tirelessly for several years in a large district in central Arkansas. Several years in, another swing in the pendulum heralded another new curriculum. Consequently, teachers in my district were forced to participate in mandatory curriculum mapping that would be in effect the following school year. The heat was on.

In our day-to-day teaching experiences, we were separated and so weighted down with work that time to meet would require staying later and arriving earlier. I never considered how this intensification resulted in division, keeping most of us oblivious as to one another’s struggles. There was no time to connect, plan, let alone align curriculum with one another. Attempts to meet during our prep periods were limited due to our many obligations that kept increasing with cries for accountability.

Most of us had children who required before and after-school transportation. My pay had increased with my experience and education but was still not sufficient to support my family. Marriage ensured our survival and stability. Most of us had second jobs, including bus driving, extra duties, team sponsorship, and, in my case, yearbook advising, pep squad coach, and additional duties just to make ends meet. Most of us used what lunch breaks we had to tutor students in need of extra instruction.

Despite our many duties and classroom obligations, the district decided to pull all teachers into alignment meetings. As a result, I missed over twenty days of school that
one year for training and subsequent unit design as part of Common Core alignment, and these missed days meant spending time writing sub plans, communicating with frustrated parents, and grading the infinite work my students produced during my absences. Night after night, I found myself with a stack of endless papers and a to-do list that never got done. I felt more like a machine and less like a teacher. As necessary as these training sessions were supposed to be, my students were falling behind, and those in desperate need of support were left to fend for themselves.

Yet, here we were, all denim and t-shirts, offering nothing more than our presence. Most of these trainings were conducted by former teachers who were now administrators, in addition to literacy and math instructional coaches who fled the classroom as soon as the asses they kissed assumed rank. All pressed and fresh, here they were, ready to right the wrongs of what the teachers were doing. We were not encouraged to offer anything other than obedience and adoration.

Despite the appearances of freedom to plan, reins were girdled around our creativity as we were often separated into smaller, more controllable groupings. Teacher troublemakers were neutralized by the upper echelons of central office administration, who were already well-versed in plans that were shared, not truly co-constructed. We had to adhere to the units the Gates Foundation had prepared; these were exemplars for planning according to the Cronies (those with power). These many days away from the classroom were not provided so that I could share in the creation of a dynamic curriculum; they were designed to condition me to teach without question a curriculum that lacked the luster and interconnectedness it promoted. We were only invited to join in these professional developments to give the illusion of shared, participatory curriculum
construction conducted by women whose salaries more than doubled ours, held all the power, and made sure we knew it. The questioning was met with apathy to the point we stopped asking them. We were just supposed to sit and bask in the wisdom of the Cronies.

Most days were filled with the Cronies ridiculing our current teaching practices and previous curriculums we had once been indoctrinated in. “The research no longer supports this particular method,” one of the coaches I called ZZ Top due to the fact she wore sunglasses all the time, nasally proclaimed. We had even developed nicknames for this most educated lot, our own secret rebellion. From Kitty Kat, who loved to talk trash about everybody and gossiped whenever given the chance and Cruella, who looked like Glen Close’s characterization of Cruella De’ Vil and fully acted the part, to Joplin, the peacekeeper who transitioned to hippie stylings when she assumed her new literacy role and Annie who looked and acted the part of the antagonist in Misery; the Cronies were despised. Awkward, witch-like laughter would always ensue between the Cronies as they demeaned a response or experience or shared inside jokes. Zoning out became a defense mechanism for me. I would detach as they deconstructed years of passion and vision, ripping fruits and their roots.

After a long day, Cruella, who was always correcting our grammar, went on a tirade, declaring that we would need to relearn our grammar to do our part to save the children from continued failure. She was becoming dismayed by the clear lack of grammatical understanding the incoming junior high students possessed, and this resulted in her summation that middle-level English teachers were failing miserably at instruction or simply forgetting the grammar themselves.
“These grammatical deficiencies disgust me. You are inflicting harm,” her voice rose as her hair had a life of its own, zigzagging to a different tune.

She offered a quick mini-lesson where she declared, “For example, girls, let’s take the sentence: Running is my favorite sport.” She scribbled these words on a white board, her long red nails scraping throughout her conscription. “Students should be able to diagram this sentence most effectively without hesitancy. Running is a verb. Is is a verb. My is an adjective. Favorite is an adjective. Sport is a noun.” She underlined each word, emphasizing their parts of speech with a stab. “Do you all really understand how I did this? Let’s talk about your struggles with this,” she asked most condescendingly, getting nods of approval from her brood. ZZ Top laughed like a hyena while Kitty Kat’s lips curled into a full Cheshire smile. Misery remained in the corner, daring us to speak while Joplin’s eyes darted nervously between Cruella and the spotted dogs (us in this case). She knew what Cruella had done.

After some stifled silence, I responded, “Yes, I understand, but you actually made a common error in your diagramming, one that our 7th graders often miss as well.” I could hear the sniggering of one of my studious colleagues.

Cruella scoffed as the Cronies readjusted themselves, rearing like cobras, “Excuse me.” Her coiffed hair animated as her face reddened and forehead creased as she used her Expo for emphasis. I would be on her hit list with this act of treason.

I responded, “Running happens to be a gerund.”

Protest burned within my breasts as I realized I did not want to teach by numbers, nor could the years of learning and teaching I had accumulated be dismissed. I felt an undoing within me that didn’t begin with a gerund. It was a noun- resistance.
At the time, I did not understand the deskilling that was systematically taking place over several years of my career in K-12 (Apple, 2008; Runte & Runte, 2007). I realized that the state was taking more and more control as test scores remained dismal and teacher accountability was becoming more prevalent, yet my awareness was limited to what the administration chose to tell us. I relied heavily on their interpretation of state and federal mandates. I relied heavily on their interpretation of research and evidence-based practices. I violated my own code of ethics. Why did I accept their words without question? I had a bachelor's degree in English, a masters in reading, multiple certifications and extended training, and years of teaching experience, yet I never questioned the insights from ZZ Top and Misery, both math specialists, about best practices in teaching reading. Like a frog soaking in the warm waters of a pot on a flame, I did not realize I was boiling until my flesh began to peel.

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A few months later, I would begin teaching Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* to seventh graders. Little did I know how the teaching of this text and subsequent compilations and connections would transform not only the minds of my students but myself. I was no longer a teacher. I was a tribute and had been since childhood. Silenced by separation, compartmentalized by districts, I had been playing these games my whole life. I was in the arena at the mercy of the game maker.
Mission impossible

I traveled to various schools to assist and support ELLs (English Language Learner), teachers, and support staff. Pulling kids from classrooms, I would provide instruction, clarification, and even basic interpretation as needed. Helping teachers scaffold and accommodate, I offered assistance to ensure our ELLs were included and encouraged. Story after story, trauma surfaced, yet support for these students was minimal. Language barriers often became service barriers where the district excused itself from its duty of care.

Rosio was a fourth grader who had been in the US for most of her life, attending kindergarten through fourth grade at one of the many schools I served. Her scores suggested she lacked English language proficiency but after months of intensive therapy, I began suspecting that Rosio had a learning disability. Speaking with her primary teacher, Ms. Johnson, who also had the same suspicions, we requested a meeting to begin the arduous task of having her tested.

Normally a detailed but smooth process, we were met with questions and stipulations. The district was seeing a large number of ELL referrals and limiting testing to prevent overrepresentation. We had an initial meeting with Ms. Pratt, the assistant principal and special education designee, where we shared documentation and response to intervention to no avail. Without substantial deficits, Rosio would continue until she was too far behind to ever catch up. Signing a document presented by Ms. Pratt, we agreed to continue our efforts.

But a few more months passed, and Rosio failed to make any progress. I requested another meeting, knowing Rosio needed special education services to be
successful. I also reached out to the ELL coordinator, Ms. Rawls, to get her insights. She had worked with Rosio before and would be her ELL teacher the following year, but I felt that ELL was not what Rosio really needed. Throughout my years of working with ELLs, Ms. Rawls mentored and supported me, a lifeline when lost in the trenches.

This next meeting included the classroom teacher, Ms. Johnson, the ELL coordinator, Ms. Rawls, and Ms. Pratt who looked dumbfounded, asking why we had not bothered reporting this before now. “Why am I just seeing this?” she questioned, feigning to have no recollection of our previous conversations and meeting.

“We did report this and had a meeting with you a few months ago,” Ms. Johnson said respectfully.

“That’s a lie,” Ms. Pratt countered. “I have no documentation that a meeting ever occurred. I wasn’t there.”

I was so confused and shocked by her response. After a few awkward moments and glances from Ms. Johnson, I chimed in, “We all signed a form after our last meeting. You took that document with you when the meeting was over. We all got copies.” As I was speaking, Ms. Pratt’s face contorted.

“Where exactly are these copies? I have no recollection of this meeting or this document, and I remember everything I sign,” she huffed as her lips pursed in aggravation.

Having kept a file, I knew my copy was in my office at home. I did not think this meeting would be one of accusations, but it was. Somehow, we were being reprimanded, and Rosio’s services were still taking a backseat.
Ms. Johnson went to her disheveled files in the back of her classroom, frantically searching for the document that she never found. Despite her efforts to fit in on this campus, she found herself on the outside looking in. She wore her most colorful 80s wear and continued to spray and tease her bangs unlike the trendsetters she taught alongside whose blonde bobs were always salon fresh, no strand out of place. I actually had to think through my clothing selections on days I visited this campus because the hallways were a catwalk where whatever designs you selected would go through an assembly of commentators. My hair never would meet the muster of these critics, so I began sleeking my long hair into a bun. Ms. Johnson liked to accentuate her fashions with long, feather earrings and expertly applied make-up. Her eyes were always covered in bright blues, lined out with purple rain. “She’s a Maniac,” teachers would tease her, and she took it as a compliment, laughing right along with them, never understanding their cruelty.

I knew she had a target on her back, and Ms. Pratt was using this situation to zone in.

“Ms. Johnson, you need to clean this mess of a classroom and get organized. Parents are complaining that you have yet to issue progress reports and are not returning their calls, and I can most certainly see why,” Ms. Pratt said in a high-pitched soprano tone. She turned to Ms. Rawls, “She won’t last here.”

“We need to begin testing to ensure Rosio has services, if needed, going into middle school next year,” Ms. Rawls encouraged, returning the focus to where it needed to be.

Once again, Ms. Johnson and I shared our evidence and observations and a new document was signed. Ms. Johnson made copies, and soon Rosio would get her testing.
In the days following, a report to the principal was made by Ms. Pratt regarding the lie Ms. Johnson told at this meeting. I was also in the line of fire for offering Ms. Johnson support. When I came to the school for my weekly rounds, I was shocked by the series of events that had transpired.

Ms. Johnson, who still failed to produce proof, had been reprimanded and made to apologize to Ms. Pratt. The principal said that due to district policy, Rosio would need to be on the radar for needing assistance for several months, and since we failed to report it in a timely manner, she would be forced to wait until the next year to go through testing. Without that document, it looked like our concerns were too recent to merit a referral.

Devastated by this roadblock, Ms. Johnson decided to take matters into her own hands. Late in the afternoon as the darkness began to roll in, she stealthily made her way to the main office. As part of her premeditated efforts, she wore all black that day to avoid detection. Checking to see that all personnel had left, she scanned both the parking lot and hallways. The only person left in the building was the janitor who was on his break in the lounge. After ensuring the offices were vacant, she broke into Ms. Pratt’s office.

There, she pilfered through her desk, her shelves, finally finding her files. Buried in manilla was Rosio’s folder, and, finally, Ms. Johnson felt vindication. There in the folder was the form, signed and dated by Ms. Johnson and myself along with Ms. Pratt. Taking the entire folder to the principal the next day, Ms. Johnson’s mission was foiled. She was reprimanded for stealing the folder and asked to resign her position because of her intrusion.
Armed with the original form, I too shared it with the principal. He compared the forms, the one Ms. Johnson stole and the one I had been issued as if we had conspired in forgery. Begrudgingly, he said that he would move ahead with requesting testing for Rosio since we had documentation, but he did not agree with an ELL student getting special education services. “I don’t understand why she should be entitled to so many services,” he said skeptically. “Don’t they get enough?” he ended, placing the file on a mounting stack behind his desk.

“Ms. Johnson was just trying to help Rosio,” I pleaded, knowing his decision had already been made.

Ignoring my plea, he asked, “Why did you go to Ms. Rawls before coming to me?”

“As my coordinator, I sought her advice about SPED testing for Rosio. She has insights into the entire district and advocates for our students,” I replied defensively.

“That was not your place. There is a pecking order here that you clearly ignored. You better not ever go above my head again,” he threatened. “I cannot have someone unethical working here.” I didn’t know if he was referring to Ms. Johnson or myself. I knew the hierarchy well, emblematic of every school I had ever served. I had never challenged it before.

At the end of the year, I requested to move to middle school where I remained until my last day in K-12, but the impact this year had on me professionally was profound, a confirmation of a cultural code that I no longer could simply ignore.

The lie and subsequent cover up of Ms. Pratt was never addressed. In fact, Ms. Pratt went on to become a principal and a central office administrator in spite of
numerous complaints and her targeted campaigns against teachers. To the victor goes the spoils. Eventually, however, she was demoted over a scandal that she couldn't lie her way out of, and she slithered right into retirement.

The principal, who covered Ms. Pratt at the expense of his teachers, had ethical challenges of his own. He was rumored to have had multiple affairs with those he controlled, finally marrying one of them, a scandal that rocked the district, especially when his chosen received a principalship of her own.

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When contemplating disenfranchised grief, this story surfaced from the depths. Was Ms. Johnson right to rummage through Ms. Pratt’s office in search of a document that would get services for a child she cared most fiercely for, a child she saw suffering, just waiting to learn? Was I wrong to circumvent a principal by sharing my concerns with my coordinator? Had the oppression of teaching in a cage finally broke us both? Were we simply scorned women? Why couldn’t I just keep playing the game? This line of questioning recycled through my mind for the remainder of that fated school year, but I found myself beginning to answer back in ways I had not been conditioned to reply. This year actually marked a change in me, one that I am only now realizing as I reflect.

From the control of communication to the control of the teachers, disenfranchisement was rampant within the hierarchy. Not only did the principal discourage talking to anyone beyond the school about struggles, he tried to shut down conversations among his faculty, clogging the arteries and atrophying the heart, silencing teachers. “If you are struggling, you come to me. I don’t need to hear about issues from a parent or another teacher,” he commanded in meetings. “Your job is to teach the kids. I
get paid to deal with the big stuff,” he would feign encouragement of the troops. Controlling voices, our ability to share our struggles, I finally saw it.

This tactic had been most effective in other districts where I worked. The argument being that by talking you put yourself, your students, and our school at great risk, and that the administrative team had ears everywhere. The message I received was clear. You do not have the right or ability to speak anything that does not support the school and its leadership, the gatekeepers to knowledge. I remember frequent reminders about remaining positive, remembering our whys, and loving all kids in all circumstances. These messages perpetuated a culture where toxic positivity was the norm. You either loved your job, and spoke nothing to the contrary, or you were not a good teacher. I felt caught in this binary that was institutional ingrained and internalized. My words were a commodity, now being controlled by administrators (Knopp, 2012).

Scoldings for perceived wrongdoings were frequent occurrences for some teachers who did not fit the mold, and interestingly, everyone knew because most administrators told it. Systematically, teachers were targeted who didn’t fall in line. And, just like every other school I served, the favorites were exempt from the thrashings, reaped hierarchical rewards, and privy to the constant flow of tea, sharing information with the upper echelon to remain in good graces then spilling their cups with the outsiders to remain relevant.

Most shocking in my encounters were the ethical violations of numerous administrators and their willingness to cover for those whom they coveted. Whether it was parents, students, other administrators, or even themselves, the lies, the coverups, that were manufactured to keep control, to maintain their vision of order, came at any
cost. I realized another epiphany. Maintaining the hierarchy requires adherence to ideologies and maintaining the status quo in the school ensures administrators remain in control of the people within its walls (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Knopp, 2012).

Notions of shared governance were comical. Every school I visited had committees filled with well-meaning faculty hoping to make some kind of difference, but these committees managed to keep teachers busy with menial tasks that failed to warrant any kind of change. Oftentimes, recommendations made by committees never made it beyond the conference rooms, deeming the service and the sacrifice worthless (Brooks et al., 2008). There it was. My contribution was worthless because decisions that failed to benefit the patriarchal system to which my schools were ensnared would never be heard; my voice would never lift beyond that of the committee (Apple, 2008). As if by design, in my experience, teachers are placed in these robes only to be stripped down because administrators covet and hold all the power. There is no sharing.

Curriculum mandates made deskilling teachers more and more prevalent (Apple, 2019; Russom, 2012). What freedom to teach I may have begun my career enjoying was soon replaced with restrictions and very few choices. Classroom walkthroughs became the norm, ensuring our adherence. Administrators would come into the classroom all stately with palm pilots, unannounced, to ensure teachers were on the right page of the script. Walking the room in their shiny shoes, they would even go so far as to ask students what exactly we had been doing prior to their arrival just in case we were putting on a production. It seemed like they wanted to catch us doing something wrong or not on script. The classroom was losing its sacredness. This type of policing, lording over the
ladies, at the hands of administrators was intimidating and, at times, harassing (Blase, 2009).

We had even been warned that if any teacher wanted to go off grid, or rogue, they would do so at the expense of their jobs. Adherence to the pacing guides were a must to remain, limiting how responsive and inclusive a teacher could be with a one size fits all approach. For those of us working with students with struggles or special needs, we were expected to be on the same page as those teachers who had gifted and talented, a disparity that still angers me.

What really perplexes and still bothers me is that curricula were often hailed as superior without any evidence that they were effective. Money was spent indiscriminately on texts and programs that would be replaced only after a few years of implementation. Subsequently, this has caused my state to champion HQIM (Highly Qualified Instructional Materials) where the state is seeking more control in how instructional monies are spent because of the debacles of districts.

We were in constant flux, learning one approach only to dismiss it as bad practice in a few years. I found that my reliance on administrators to interpret research and make informed decisions based upon evidence was misguided and misplaced. In my experience, administrators controlled both teaching and learning, and I knew I had to do something about the role I was playing in the implementation and delivery of ineffective curricula. Was I not participating in the disenfranchisement of my students by implementing bad curricula?

Most of the hallways where I served were filled with hardworking, women teachers who wore many different hats- mothers, caregivers, wives, bus drivers, club
sponsors, coaches, cashiers, waitresses, tutors, and students themselves. They had the same burdens I had at home. Many pushed through additional certifications and training in an effort to constantly improve their practice and remain relevant. “You must have a servant’s heart to do this work,” a constant reminder that there was always more we could do to save the children.

While I was in a state of constant improvement because enough was never enough, the losses for me and my colleagues continued to accumulate. Some lost loved ones, divorced, suffered illnesses or had to provide care for family members who suffered, had financial difficulties, in addition to many other woes that often plague women. Yet, these teachers, like me, had to hide our humanity, leave ourselves at the door, become someone else to simply survive. We labored in a system that did not understand or acknowledge us as human (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). Despite the hallways being filled with women, the offices were filled with men and women who supported patriarchal power, and they were the ones calling the shots.

My budding awareness brought on grief that was cumulative and expansive, but this time, I knew what it was. I grieved for my own identity as a teacher, knowing I could never be the teacher I envisioned myself being. Disillusioned, I found that no matter my passion, dedication, and service to the profession, I was at the mercy of administrators who perpetuated disenfranchisement and devalued my grief experiences and those of my colleagues (Apple, 2008; Knopp, 2012).

Most importantly, I had disenfranchised myself and others to remain relevant and be seen as the good teacher. I played my hand in a losing game. I allowed myself to be dissected, parts of myself taken for display and some forever thrown away. I am not
victim blaming; there are parts of my story that were beyond my control entirely; however, I am owning that I remained silent in circumstances where I should have spoken up. I allowed louder voices to drown mine out. I remained fearful, permitting my fear to stymie my growth, never wanting to be perceived as a threat. I remained complacent. I allowed abusive treatment to go too far in hopes of changes that never happened. I remained stagnant. There were years when I did not learn. I closed myself off, taught my classes, raised my kids, cared for my home, and failed to investigate the questions and concerns that were mounting within me about myself, profession, and pedagogy. I had a responsibility to professional learning that I ignored, choosing to go with the flow and remain a team player. I realized that I would remain locked in a system, teaching their lessons, lying to their children, and fracture my spirit even further for the rest of my professional life if I did not do something.

After years in the trenches, for the first time in my life, I sat with grief. I went to the shoreline, stripped myself down, and dove into her depths. From childhood through my adult experiences, I allowed myself to drown in unquenchable sorrow, but I did not remain in the abyss. I knew I needed to leave K-12 to fully understand my experience, knowing that I was not alone. I needed to break myself free. I needed to feel that sense of liberation that I had experienced when reading revolutionary texts with my students, walking away from rural education, leaving an abusive marriage, walking across the stage with a degree. Surfacing, I decided to return to school to seek my doctorate in higher and adult education and took a position as an instructor in higher education. I was awakened.
I had left cages before, but this time was different. The cage that held me from within was beginning to rattle as, one by one, the bars holding my spirit and mind captive began to crumble.

Blackbirds and Redbirds

Teaching college, for some teachers, epitomizes the dream— a soft place to land after years of migration, instability, and storms. Often in lounge talk, teachers would fantasize about moving on up to the ivory castle. I was one of them. Also known was that teachers who flew the coop couldn’t take the heat in the classroom. “You are going to miss those babies,” a friend said to me, and there was no denying that I would, but not enough to remain. It was not the classroom heat I was needing to escape. It was the system as a whole, the one that had broken me long ago.

I could not contain the joy I felt that summer I got the position to be a clinical instructor at the university level. This position would entail field placement coordination and teacher education, and although my experiences in both areas were limited, I relished the opportunity to serve in such a dynamic capacity. The challenges that stood before me were most welcome; I wanted to live again. I needed this to survive my career in education.

Within months, however, a darkness settled over me. I was no longer teacher of the year with a reputation of excellence and service. I was a clinical instructor whose classroom experiences amounted to nothing. Meeting after meeting, I attempted to convey experiences and insights but found my insertions awkward and falling on deaf ears. There was no regard for what I had to offer which seemed obsolete. I wasn’t welcome at the table. I wasn’t invited to lunch. I wasn’t included in the group texts. This
table would never have room for me, and even if it did, I would not know which fork to use. I was nobody. Not ranked, not tenure track, nobody. A Blackbird in a forest of Redbirds. I did not belong.

Since recounting my earlier experiences of transitioning, I am reminded of others who joined our ranks, only to disappear from flight, never surfacing again. I was fortunate to follow up with a few, discovering that they too felt a lack of belonging. They too felt devalued and disconnected. Blackbirds in the night.

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I was given the name of Blackbird in elementary due to a misunderstood reading disability, a disability I have since come to know as dyslexia. The Blackbirds were the nonreaders, students who were relegated to the hallway so that the other birds could receive nourishment in the classroom without the Blackbirds slowing them down. Top readers earned a position in the coveted Redbird group. They were able to pick their own books, choose their own learning pathways, held closely in the nest whereas the Blackbirds were pushed out, given the predictable text sets with pictures, and expected to figure it out. We were castaways in darkened hallways. What’s worse is that because of my grouping, and I suspect my poverty, several Redbirds began calling me “dirty” Blackbird.

I often get asked about the title of my dissertation. Why did I choose a name that is rooted in negative connotations, and is this how I want my work, myself, to be remembered? This name is a reminder of where I have been, who I am, and the work I do. It is a reminder of my struggle to remain relevant. It is a reminder of overcoming. The Blackbird embodies my personal, professional, and pedagogical selves.
Struggling to read by traditional measures, I sought solace and illumination in my grandmother’s yard sale romances and tales of adventure, teaching myself how to read in middle school with the support of encouraging instructors. This personal struggle of reading failure served as the impetus for my career in teaching others how to read and doing so in ways that were inclusive and responsive to the birds of many colors, shapes, and types in my classroom. Blackbird is my poverty. It is my disenfranchisement. It is my grief, winged and beautiful, caged and clipped. It is my transformation.

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I connected to Palmer (2017) who explored why teachers lose heart, posing the possibility, “We lose heart, in part, because teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability” (p. 17). I lived from this positionality, always vulnerable, always passing. Higher education was no different. Hierarchies and those who supported them are here too.

I considered my deeply held insecurities, my lack of insights into the world I had entered and the people who were positioned as the experts. Not only did I have to learn a new job and workplace culture, but I had to adjust to living in a new cage.

Similarities between my experiences in K-12 and college were beginning to accumulate. There were still bullies. A colleague, Ms. Dashwood, who worked in a different department agreed to mentor me but found herself overwhelmed and began undermining my efforts. Within a month of my hiring, she attacked, writing a letter to my supervisor, listing the plethora of mistakes I had made since assuming the position. She was overwhelmed, given too much to do with too little time to do it.

Ms. Dashwood’s face always was red, scrunched, and everywhere all at once. Her dark hair contrasted profusely against her pasty white skin; her blue eyes piercing within
the hollows of the cave in which she stood guard. Standing around five feet tall and portly, she canvassed the offices and hallways, wreaking havoc with her insertions and inquiries, like a bulldog in search of a treat. Her head tilted as her nose squinched when scrutinizing responses, a look I was often entreated to.

Every meeting and encounter with Ms. Dashwood would morph into an inquisition where I was subsequently schooled on my shortcomings for my position in addition to frequent corrections to my language and thought processes, but her ridicule did not stop there. She would cackle at my responses. Tease my naivete. Question my credentials and experiences. Accosting often occurred in front of other colleagues and even students. She had been a celebrated teacher and found herself with a pupil to dress down. Her words and opinions spread through the college.

Workplace bullying is nothing new, and policies are in place to deter employees from perpetuating a hostile environment, including mandatory annual training, but I did not fully understand the complexities of these assaults (Nauman et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018). I did not know that Ms. Dashwood particularly perpetuated a hostile work environment. I had become desensitized to being dehumanized (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017).

“You are just a peon,” she would state matter-of-factly. She knew how to fly mostly unnoticed, but her words and actions seared and even scarred me. I slipped into a shell for some time, hoping to not get found out. I was a peon posing as faculty.

Years later, a colleague divulged her horrific experience with Ms. Dashwood. Similar to my own, she suffered greatly from a targeted attack that could have had a major impact on her credentials to conduct a part of her job. Another colleague told me of
her battle with Ms. Dashwood after successive strikes against her reputation and work, saying that Ms. Dashwood made her work life Hell. She eventually sought employment elsewhere but advised me to keep my distance and restrict my encounters. There were many others, each lifting my own experience out of obscurity. Sharing my experiences connected me to the grief of others. I wrote extensively throughout this experience. One to document. Two to grieve.

I knew that harassment in the workplace at the hands of administrators and their handmaidens, or bulldogs, might be a major source of my cumulative grief, but digging into the stories of others, I began to see a connection with my experiences (Blase, 2009; Bussie, 2017; Yamada, 2017). I knew that losses, personal, professional, and pedagogical, could result in grief, but my focus was sharpening on this phenomenon as it continued to play out in my life and the lives of women teachers around me (Doka, 1989, 2001, 2002, 2016).

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Mean girls do exist, and some go to college to become teachers.

“Ms. Voegele, I heard that Luna is on meth,” Mitzi inserted abruptly, feigning concern, as I fumbled with cords, attempting to repair the sound on my computer, during class one day. She was a few years behind my daughter Luna in school. They were friends on social media where Luna, despite her addiction and subsequent spiral, continued to post. Mitzi was a bully. When she wasn’t questioning me, she was patronizing me. “Are you sure about that? I’m so confused. This class is so confusing.” “What are you wearing?” “You said that wrong.” “You have some grays coming in.” “I’ll make more money than you will as a first-year teacher.”
Her foulness did not end there. She did not hide her disdain for the reading course she was forced to take, and although the state required her to have it for licensure, she blamed me, often saying, “Why are you making us take this course? It’s irrelevant to teaching math.”

Her words took my breath. Whispering loudly to her coven of buzzards, using her bleached hair to curtain her spew, “I heard she is selling her body for drugs too. She looks awful.” Her wake widened their eyes as their beaks mouthed inaudible mews. “Ms. Voegele is savage. I heard she kicked her out and doesn’t help her anymore,” Mitzi finished.

I counted down the days until the semester would end. She knew nothing of my grief, this anticipatory waiting game (Sweeting & Gilhooly, 1990). The emotional upheaval that resulted in those early days of Luna’s addiction I could not understand. I have never felt more powerless, more disheartened, angrier. I screamed. I cried. I tried to help her. I chased her; pulled her from drug houses; made countless threats against drug dealers; threatened her. I kept her addiction secret to protect her from scrutiny, pregnant with burden and indescribable fear. I have recurring nightmares, and physically have worn her addiction like a heavy coat in the heat of summer, like nakedness in a blizzard. What was gossip for the buzzards, a carcass to feast upon, was my grief that they disenfranchised.

For years, I was too scared, too ashamed to talk about Luna’s struggles, this disease that has taken her from our lives. It seemed easier to detach. I blamed myself, and it seemed that when the truth finally came out, others blamed me as well.
I remember confiding in a friend and her saying emphatically, “How does a teacher raise a drug addict?” Another encounter, “She had the best life. You overindulged her. You should not have given her so much.” A family member, “You have to make her get help. You can’t just keep doing nothing. You could ruin her.” “Cut her off,” I received so much unsolicited advice and judgment in those initial years of her addiction.

Incessantly, I question my role in her disease; what I did; what I could have done differently; what I am currently doing or not doing; it never ends. Nowhere in my discussions with others or myself did we explore her likelihood at facing addiction. From a genetic perspective, her father and his mother both abused substances, leading to his mother’s demise, and my family likewise is cluttered with substance abusers (Ducci & Goldman, 2012). My grandfather drank himself to death. Addiction can be hardwired into our molecular makeup, and even then, I blamed myself (Ducci & Goldman, 2012).

Generationally, she is the heir to misfortune. Multiple members of my family have died as a result of alcohol and drug abuse.

Of all the losses I have faced that have disenfranchised, this is the loss where I have felt disenfranchisement most keenly. How could I give myself to a classroom and students, guiding and nurturing them, even the mean girls, and ignore my daughter? How can I ever be a good teacher if I am inherently a bad mom? In teaching, we are called to leave no child behind, yet I abandoned Luna. Nothing I offered made a difference.

A family member said to me one time, “You seem to care more for strangers, these students, than you do your own family. At least you’ll be known as a great teacher, I guess.” There is great guilt in this grief, and prayer has yet to remove it.
My daughter is the story I cannot write, the grief I have mostly hidden (Berry, 2022).

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“My Daughter is Dying”

My daughter is dying. Her death, much like her life over the past few years, has escaped notice- it is much easier to look away. She avoids public places she used to love, things she used to enjoy. Pasta, my God, how much she loved pasta. As a toddler and even a teenager, she would relish in our spaghetti nights, sauce smeared all over her dimpled face and stubby fingers. Of all my babies, she nursed the longest. Born about six weeks too early, she came into this world a survivor, suckling and sleeping until her small frame plumped, her ashen skin blushed. Her blue eyes aflame. Her soft blonde curls thickened, darted, and danced.

A life restored.

My daughter is dying. Her skin is sallow, her body dehydrated. A return to ash. Her hair, once thick, long, radiant now appears piece by piece in drains, in brushes, and in the garbage. Her smile that once ignited roses on her cheeks and a roaring foxtrot in her eyes is replaced with vacant expressions, her hand, her bony fingers, covering her mouth that used to curl and crinkle as she laughed. Her hand, her bony fingers, covering her teeth that have long forgotten their shine. Once a great lover of fashion, cosmetology, her tattered clothes hang- a scarecrow long forgotten in a garden where the wild is never harvested.

My daughter is dying. She has decided to be buried instead of cremated. Burning is unimaginable to her- rotting seems more humane.
My daughter is dying. We have been silent on her illness. We have remained in the shadows alongside her. There are no visitors to console the family. There are no cards to commemorate her eventual passing. No casseroles or cards at our threshold. Hospice will not be joining me on this journey. Like my daughter, I have remained in the shadows as well, the shadow of death itself. Hidden in the valley. Somewhere in the in-between- the thin place- I die too.

My daughter is dying. Would it be more acceptable if she were dying of cancer like Dad? Would I feel a little less disenfranchised? For now, I wait with grief as addiction ravages her, taking her, taking me peace by peace. She, like Dad, has decided to not seek treatment.


Classes need teaching. Papers need grading. Students are struggling, in need of tending...but, somewhere, my daughter is dying.

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I frequently question my silence when confronted by bullies, especially when they are other women. I want to pass without notice (Marvasti, 2006). My response to the sidebar conversations about Luna, after fully composing myself, went something like this.

“My daughter struggles with addiction. She has a disease, and every day she battles it while I do what I can to support her. It has broken my heart to watch my child suffer in such a horrific way. I would not wish this kind of witnessing on anyone. Compassion may be difficult to show for addicts and their families, but, hopefully, we can all find some. You will have students coming from different backgrounds, but there is
no doubt that some will have families going through the same thing as mine is. You may even find yourself dealing with it,” I confessed for the first time.

The room fell silent.

“Ms. Voegele, I have a family member going through this. I am so sorry,” one kind student encouraged.

“My dad is an alcoholic. We never stop worrying. Sorry to hear this, Ms. Voegele,” another student added. Even one of the mean girls absconded and contributed her own story about a beloved cousin who was in treatment for overdosing.

The class did not go as expected, but I found that when I responded to the bullying through compassionate confrontation, it ended (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Most of the class joined in solidarity, sharing their own vulnerabilities, smothering the meanness with community kindness.

Of course, I carried guilt in speaking up about my daughter, but I realized that the silence I swore myself to was more harmful than beneficial. Word traveled apparently because, semester after semester, students come to me seeking wisdom about addiction or addiction-related issues- my own attempt at seasoned guidance (Boyd & Myers, 1988). What the buzzards saw as a way to disturb me and maybe even hurt me may have backfired, but that did not change the reality I faced and continue to face.

My disenfranchisement, the totality of my poverty, my walk as a woman in this world governed by patriarchy and capitalism, and my inability to fully assimilate to the culture codes of middle class, had posed me, like a pig on a sacrificial altar, ready for slaughter (Apple, 2008; Knopp, 2012). My grief, a stream of constant sorrow, bubbles
from disenfranchisement, a spring sourcing the disenfranchised grief of daughters under my wings.

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My work never ended. At home, I was revising documents and handbooks; following up on daily issues in the field; trying to learn a new job; while caring for my sick father who lived with me, my husband, children, and home. I enrolled at the University of Memphis as a doctoral student, knowing there was no way I could really do it. Was I trying to elevate myself, once again, through education, or did I really want to learn so that I could be a better person and teacher? Was seeking an education just another place to pour myself to avoid the life that grew wild around me? Between my work, family, and eventually school, my wings were clipped. I began sinking into the same alienation I had experienced in K-12. I felt powerless, at the mercy of life’s twists and turns, ups and downs.

Yet, coursework was an escape from it all. Those first few years in my doctoral program were challenging, but I began finding bits of myself, my experiences, in the literature. Each discovery was an awakening. No longer an anomaly, I began understanding myself differently, through multi-faceted lenses. I began viewing the work I had dedicated my life to, both in home and in school, from a different perspective. The world as I knew it had shifted off its axis. I was enthralled despite my myriad obligations. I got up earlier, stayed up later. Disorientations were supplanted with illuminations. I began writing authentically, the mask I had worn for decades was cracking. I was determined to see this work through, but within two years, I had to choose school or family, and I chose family.
My dad was dyslexic, but that never stopped him from learning. He was determined, fierce—a fighter. He inspired me to become a teacher, to help kids like him, like me. Absent for most of my life, my dad served in the ARMY and was stationed wherever they chose to send him. Stricken with bone marrow cancer in his early forties, he returned home, discharged and physically disabled. Dad’s return marked a period in my life of renewal and possibilities. The inspiration I had missed as a child filled me as an adult. Dad made me believe that I could do anything. Eventually, he and my stepmom, who had cared for him most tirelessly, divorced, leaving me to assume his care, a duty I was most humbled to perform.

My dad was youthful, tall, dark, and handsome. He looked like a young John Travolta and could sing and dance like him too. Dad loved life, but cancer loved him in an unrequited affair that lasted decades. To see the world, for free, he took months of dance lessons, landing a gig aboard a world cruise. He taught lessons in waltz, tango, and swing for a year, traveling through Norway, Europe, Russia, Japan, Hong Kong, China, and Australia. When he wanted to improve his cake decorating skills, he took outreach courses, creating professional confectionaries. When he wanted to learn how to improve his public speaking skills, he joined Toastmasters, competing and ranking. Dad was a natural teacher, teaching sign language, taekwondo, and food preparation throughout his lifetime. Of my dad’s most cherished skills, he was a chef. Many happy nights were spent in my kitchen, designing and preparing the most unique, delicious meals with bursts of happy dances. “Crissy, taste this! Oh my Lord! It’s slap your mama good!” he would holler. I have never prepared another dish quite the same since.
Periods of wellness meant supping from the cup of life and all it had to offer. Healing in the face of a death sentence. Dad survived five bouts of cancer, including bone marrow and lung along with various intensive, death-looming surgeries, three that almost claimed his leg. These times of great sickness involved administering extensive in-home care. From IVs to meals, my family nursed my dad most vigilantly.

My dad was humorous; I suspect a mechanism he too learned to deflect notice of deficiencies (Marvasti, 2006). Even at his sickest, his laughter filled the room and the hearts of all he encountered. My dad was encouraging. My doctorate was his dream for me, believing that I was so much smarter than I ever will be. Before my dad died, I assisted him in writing his story, a self-published book about his battles with cancer, *Combating Cancer: A Warrior’s Tale*, and how in his darkest days, he transformed (Blankenship, 2011).

I wrote these words in the forward of that book:

> There are people who exist, go through the motions of life, and there are those who live with every cell of their beings, taking in every moment. That is my dad. We have all met them before- those people who make us rethink our own purpose, our own design” (Blankenship, 2011, p. 6).

I never realized that while I was assisting him in telling his story that I was writing my own. He epitomized transformational grief work long before I knew what it was (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Little did either of us know how valuable his lesson in grieving would be.

But after months of unexplained weight loss and extreme changes in his behavior, Dad spiraled into a dark place, a place I knew well. My dad had never attempted suicide
and was a major proponent of mental health, but one evening, a friend of his alerted us that Dad was having some kind of breakdown and thought we might could help. My daughters tracked him to an old, abandoned airstrip where he sat, his neon yellow shirt covered in black ants, his skin welting from bites, a loaded revolver in his hand. Later, we found out that he was waiting on a plane to take off to drown out the sound of his firing the gun. He was completely catatonic. The police came and handled him with such violence that his bony chest bruised from their treatment. Always a supporter of the police, this moment reshaped my thinking.

Those weeks following this crisis were filled with fear, questions, and mounting concerns for not only Dad but my family. I am reminded of Berry’s (2022) experiences with losing his own father who had struggled with addiction, struggling himself with writing through his emotions and experiences, choosing to write around them. These are the pieces that I choose to release. Maybe in their flight, they will inspire others to take to the sky (Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

Despite mental support, medications, and medical interventions, Dad deteriorated, slowly vanishing without any clue as to what was happening. Visits to the VA (hospital for veterans) yielded little results, but, finally after a month of repeat visits and declining health, we were able to advocate for Dad to receive testing to see if his cancer had returned. Sadly, it had, and there would be no victory in this battle. The warrior was ready to rest.

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I, however, was depleted and felt like I too was dying. I was finishing up coursework while preparing to teach my own courses. I had to also render care to my
own family. My daughters were struggling and in need of constant support. They had never experienced the loss of a close relative, and Dad had been a second father to them. I tried to bandage them up when I could, but they were bleeding out, as was I. Laundry was a constant and maintaining a clean space was a must to ensure Dad’s wellness. Managing medications, meals, and appointments, I felt out of control, powerless in the valley. Even though Dad was dying, I still had a job to do. I cared for everyone without caring for myself (Sullivan & Miller, 2015).

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That summer of caring for one of the greatest loves of my life was the toughest job I had ever performed and the greatest personal loss I had ever experienced. Dad and I went for long drives in the mountains, watched sunsets, held hands and cried, and laid in his deathbed watching the food network as well as storms pass through, throwing their brilliance in the darkness of the night. “You are stronger than you think, and you will get through this,” he shared with me one night as one of the storms of summer raged. I knew better than to argue, but I couldn’t contain the tears and the small sounds that betrayed me. I felt anything but strong.

I still struggle walking downstairs to where my dad lived.

In the early mornings during that last month of his life, I would take those stairs, one by one praying Dad survived the night, knowing I had more to tell him and was never going to be ready to let him go. Opening his door, I would turn on his lamp, and go to his bedside, placing my hands on him to find signs of life. When he moved, I felt a sense of elation rush through me, thanking God for one more day.
One time, I performed this same ritual, and his movements were slow to my touch. In a state, I walked over to turn on the overhead light, but before I could flip the switch, he said, “Dammit, Crissy, I’m still alive.” I never told him what I was doing every morning, but, of course, he knew.

Dad would have wanted me to speak his story into life, yet I have struggled with its rendering. Ellis (2001) shared her own caregiving experience where she performed acts of love for her mother in “With Mother/with Child: A True Story.” She admitted facing an ethical dilemma when deciding to publish her experience, not wanting to injure her mother’s dignity. Dad wanted his story told to help others. He wrote a book to prove it. My struggle with telling our story is that it has been very painful to revisit this season of life.

Providing end of life care was traumatic, not just for me, but I believe it was disheartening for Dad as well. This was why he chose a gun on an airstrip to chemo, “I did not want to put you through this,” he loathed. I always reassured him that caring for him was an honor, but we both knew that the honor would come with years of great grief and unspeakable trauma. Hospice provided a guide, but no death education prepared me to walk with the dying in this valley, especially, someone I loved so much.

Before Dad lost his ability to speak and walk, we were able to get him into our bathtub. He wanted to submerge himself, to be immersed in the warm suds, to feel clean after days of sponges. To be a man again. His long silver hair swayed around the bones of his face as a peace enveloped him. My husband sat at one end, stabilizing Dad with his strong legs, as I helped wash Dad’s body or what was left of it. Tears just fell from my face. I could not contain the beauty and sadness of this moment within me.
Covered with scars from his battles, his skin sagging on his frame, we lingered in that tub, listening to Johnny Cash. “This definitely is not my idea of a threesome,” he joked. I shook my head as usual but could not contain my laughter. After some time, we managed to maneuver Dad from the tub. He stood there, the afternoon sun illuminating his frailty, using my shoulders to steady himself, my husband drying and dressing him. He kissed my head, “I love you, Crissy.”

I lost my dad on a Wednesday. I taught class that day and said goodbye that night. How could I not bring this pain with me to the classroom?

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Popli (2022) detailed her experiences with losing her father, writing vignettes that brought her insights into the patriarchal systems that controlled how she was allowed to grieve him. There were rules for grieving, upheld by administration, colleagues, students, family, and myself (Harris, 2010). Despite the spiraling sadness I was experiencing, I still had a job to do. It mattered little that my heart had stopped beating right along with his.

To do the work of being a woman, wife, mother, and teacher, I had to fully detach myself from my grief. I sought medical intervention those early months when the loss overcame me, to remain active at home and work. I had to medicate to continue the work, to remain efficient.

Even though I recognized her, when grief arrived at my doorstep, I hid in the house hoping she would go away. I did not want what she was selling. Medication helped me block out the incessant knocking, but it did not remove her from my porch. Her presence lingered.
My efforts to avoid and repress grief were well-supported by patriarchy (Harris, 2010). “You would not believe how many teachers I prescribe meds for,” my physician reassured me when I first sought help. Every building, every school, I taught alongside teachers who took pills to cope with depression and anxiety. It is how I first learned about their magical qualities to forget while continuing to work.

Mourners, like myself, are often prescribed a multitude of medications to control grief, suppress emotion, encourage efficiency, and continue production in keeping with patriarchal expectations (Harris, 2010). Alienating the worker from her pain and silencing her struggles are ways to control her (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). If avoided, grief, for some, including myself and one of my daughters, may manifest in abusing medications and substances, mental and emotional disorders, and alienation (Devine, 2017). Ultimately, avoidance prolongs grief, but the implications of medical intervention may be more adverse than healing (Neimeyer, 2016; Rando, 1993). At the time, seeking help was what I had to do, but the limbo I found myself encased within only further alienated me.

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I detached myself from home, the chair Dad had died in, the remaining Hospice memorabilia. I walked the halls like a ghost. I detached myself from grief, modeling avoidance for my daughters who lost their Pawpa, one of the few reliable men in their lives, feigning that I was strong by returning to work, encouraging them to do the same. I disenfranchised their grief as well as my own during those days, modeling how to avoid grief instead of acknowledging it.

My detachment came in many forms, but, mainly through obsessive caregiving of my home. I mopped multiple times a day, each sway collecting dirt that allowed me to
justify my efforts when questioned about it. I sorted and moved things around, never really cleaning clutter, just relocating it, much like my grief. Bleaching everything, I cleaned until my hands dried out, cracking and bleeding. Again, I lost weight and hair to the point a colleague asked if I had cancer too.

The compulsivity did not end there. The act of going to work, remaining professional, getting up and getting dressed each day, was more an escape into another reality. I craved routine, needing to be a machine, something I had been trained to do. I showed up but I was not there. Like driving for several minutes and realizing that you have made it somewhere without recognition, I went through the motions, traveling familiar roads without arriving at any notable destination nor understanding how I arrived there.

I sent emails to all the important people and made sure my students knew that I would be preoccupied with preparations in the days following Dad’s passing. I ensured that lectures and assignments were posted. I canceled one class so that I could attend Dad’s memorial.

I continued to check emails, detaching my grieving self from my teacher self. Nobody stops for death, except the dead, and I could not afford to be seen as faltering on my job. Having survived the Dashwood battles, I could not afford to lose it now. I duct taped what was left of me and continued my performance.

Within days of Dad's passing, I was dealing with issues. Several of my graduate students had struggles, questions, and needs, lacking patience and much needed empathy. I was overwhelmed with several who were on a mission.
“I know your dad just died, sorry, but I don’t understand this assignment and don’t see where the description is…can you meet with me to explain it?” aggravated student. Despite instructions being linked, a video explanation of the assignment, and even an exemplar being posted, I met with the student to offer assistance and guidance as to where hidden materials could be found.

“Listen, I know this may seem inappropriate since your dad just died, but I really need some advice about a situation that just happened at school. I need to meet before a meeting on Monday,” desperate student.

“Sorry about your dad, but I am having issues. I am not going to be a reading teacher. I am teaching math. I am shocked that I have to learn all this. I would like to meet with you. I’m available tomorrow…” angry student. With new legislation in the state, all teachers must have an awareness of the science of reading. I agreed to meet to explain the legislation that was discussed in detail in class on our first day.

“Sorry about your dad, but can you read over my work and let me know if I’m on the right track, preferably before the assignment is due?” needy student.

“I am a reading interventionist, and we do not teach reading this way at my school. We are using Reading Recovery. I have read about Barton training, and it does not sound like it would work at my school. I would like to talk to you about skipping your training. Hope your dad is okay,” concerned student. We met. I was able to reassure her that her efforts would not be in vain.

“I saw that our paper is due the week of tournaments. Can I get an extension?” proactive student.
Panic filled me. There were definitely improvements to my course outlines, explanations of assignments, and pedagogical approaches I needed to make to ensure full transparency. I began, once again, the process of self-assessment, attempting to clean up my courses, my approach, and my feedback. I fixated on my faults, my compulsivity transcended boundaries of personal, profession, and pedagogy.

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There are both spoken and unspoken expectations by students (Knepp & Knepp, 2022). They pay for their education. For graduate students, especially, these payments are hefty and often involve significant loans with limited options for scholarships. However, these lifeblood payments fill some students with a sense of entitlement (Knepp & Knepp, 2022). Most of my students have been polite, respectful, in their ponderings, and most thankful for time and attention, but I have encountered privileged students who were not mindful of courtesy and basic civility. They could be condescending, critical, and cruel, and in a twist of fate, poetic justice, at the end of every semester, they get to evaluate their instructors. A final FU to the professor that did them wrong. Feedback from students can offer a wealth of insights into our practice as teachers; however, they can also be used as a tool to scorn and further disenfranchise, especially when hostile (Chtena, 2014; Knepp & Knepp, 2022).

Despite the research, the multitude of articles I have read about teacher disenfranchised grief, nowhere did I read that students could be the cause, our own personal kryptonite. Nowhere did I read about teachers’ personal grief and how this grief might manifest professionally. We were disenfranchised in the literature too. Never did I sit through a professional development or coursework that alluded to the possibility of
disenfranchisement and the grief it might bring with a lens on the teacher. How could I recognize what I did not know anything about?

From abuse to bullying at the hands of many perpetrators, men and women, administrators and students, professionally and personally, I had been indoctrinated in a system that not only disenfranchised me but continuously disenfranchised my grief (Doka, 1989, 2001, 2002, 2016). Inadvertently, this treatment forced me to think of my grief as abnormal and in need of remedying. I picked up the shovel and continued digging where the others left off, disenfranchising my own grief, burying my sorrow, filling my mouth with dirt (Doka, 2002; Rowling, 1995).

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During those foggy days, I taught an afternoon undergraduate course in reading that was held on site at a middle school. I had approximately fourteen students, and each of them was assigned a middle school child who struggled with reading and writing. My students performed assessments, analyzed data, and devised interventions for their chosen child. Because of my partnership with the school and our assignment schedule, we met on schedule, despite Dad’s recent passing. The first month of Dad’s passing, I was stoic. Class was conducted and interventions were performed mechanically. I went through the motions, part by part, generating.

One day, I lost it. It was Dad’s birthday week. Much to my surprise, my students offered compassion, empathy, and connection. One of my students was a grief researcher, conducting her thesis on the grief of children; another student had recently lost his dad; another lost a sister; another spoke of her mindful practices for grieving; we spent time
sharing in our losses and healing. Never had I cried in front of my students, but that day, we all did.

A part of our lesson for that day included contemplating our reflections that we had written regarding the children we had been working with. After some mindfulness practice, we considered each child, their backgrounds, their interests, their struggles, and their joys. We were introspective, thinking deeply about how each child had been passed through, year after year, coming into middle school with significant discrepancies in their reading skills. We had students who had been bullied, ridiculed, and chastised because of their deficits. This began contemplations into equity and advocacy. “How could schools just keep ignoring this?” one of my more inquisitive students inquired. “It seems unjust,” he ended.

A rush of emotion and acknowledgement came over me. Many years ago, I witnessed a teacher who dared to grieve, and after decades of teaching, I finally dared myself. My students likewise needed spaces to speak about grief, to express their emotions in a tough field, in a supportive community. They needed this as much as I did. They also needed to discover their own voices in advocacy not only for their students but for themselves. I did not hold the power to empower them, only they did. Every week, we spent time with our hearts and our minds, contemplating our work in the world and even in our homes. For the first time since coming to higher education, I felt humanized again. I felt at home. I had hope that I would heal.

Although I worried that I would be slaughtered on my evaluations because I turned the course into a mental wellness escape, I found the opposite was true. Several wrote of feeling enriched, inspired, and loved by the community and instructor. They felt
like this course was one of the most important courses they had had. One student wrote how grateful he was that I shared in my grief because he felt supported in sharing his own finally. He said it was one of the first experiences where he felt supported in his mental health in the classroom. This began my growing understanding that my healing is tied to my students' healing and the healing of my family. This began my attempt to lift the curtain and remove the mask.

That semester, I felt I had birthed Blackbirds, beautiful, untamed, unclipped, Blackbirds.

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With the help of my physician, I stopped the medication, finding grief peeping through my window, asking to be let in, needing an audience with me. I made a commitment to seek help. I needed seasoned guidance to walk alongside grief and me.

I also began writing again, allowing my grief to speak and myself to be “undone” in the renderings (Adams et al., 2015, p. 41). Throughout my teaching experiences, I wrote alongside my students. I have collection after collection of stories, poems, and songs, but within these collections, my journals speak of grief and growth, teaching and learning. Looking back, I can now see that my writings were the only place I could stand unmasked, untamed, wild. I became the child of the streets again, and I needed her strength, her gumption, to heal.

At times, I chose to stand in the pain of the past and let the cars run me over, tires thumping and crushing my frame, gnashing my skin from the bone. Hurting reminds me I survived. I need to feel this pain. Unmedicated, untethered feeling. Summoning the words of memories, the asphalt burns blisters, but these festerings eventually burst from the
tincture of time and telling. The blood, the tears, the ooze, on my dirty, cracked skin acquiesces into story. New skin emerges. Wyatt (2020) illustrates how stories, when pieced together, can become fragments, much akin to shards, that despite their brokenness can frame artistry, but taken deeper, “the fragments' sharp edges” can “draw blood” (p. 60). This lifeblood becomes the sacrificial work of the weaver of story—her very offspring offered at the loom (Wyatt, 2020).

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As I write about my experiences with disenfranchised grief as a teacher, I am reminded that the professional is personal, and the personal is political (Adams et al., 2015; Doka, 2002; Rowling, 1995). Attempting to be one person in one space and another in a different space fragments not only our stories but our selfhoods—this splitting perpetuates alienation and subsequent grief (Carter, 2002; Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959).

I returned to my doctoral studies and found a new rhythm with my grief. There were days that she roared, a solitary lioness. There were days she rested, a river at peace. Most days, she hustled right alongside me.

Returning to higher learning, again, challenged me to discern, something I had only recently begun to understand. I began seeing problems more dialectically instead of binary. I began reading Marxist feminist and contemplative literature as well as renderings from reformers such as bell hooks, Myles Horton, and Paulo Freire. Years of experience, age, and education began to cultivate a renaissance within me. Disorienting dilemmas in the form of tired thinking, skewed awareness, and implicit biases began unraveling as I began perceiving my world from diverse perspectives.
A decade in, my pay is as dismal as the day I began. My value, my worth, amounts to barely a livable wage. I bleed out. Each dollar accounted for, an hour for a penny, my experience, my education, my wisdom, a ghost in the meetings, the Blackbird sitting in a rolling chair.

I have lived and taught through concerted intensification, both K-12 and higher education (Apple, 2008). Class sizes increase, course loads increase, workload expectations increase, yet pay remains stagnant, hallmarks of efforts at intensification (Apple, 2008). My pay has increased, with promotion, from thirty-eight thousand a year to forty-two thousand a year in ten years despite my growth in experience and education. Like the frog basking in the warmth of the boiling waters, institutions are well-versed in perpetuating such measures disguised as war efforts, whatever it takes, and assuming a team approach with “We’re all in this together.” Yet, we’re not. Examining pay increases over the decades for faculty in addition to the disparities between administrators and faculty, we are not in this together (Campos, 2021).

Deskillng continues as the state assumes more and more control over curricula. RISE (Reading Initiative for Student Excellence) is the latest initiative to ensure all children in the state can read and that all teachers join the effort through a systematic approach to teaching reading (ADE, 2023).

Higher education, especially my courses, came under fire, marking the first time in my educational experiences that outsiders requested information regarding my courses through the Freedom of Information Act. Often, I would have only hours to gather the requested information. This process filled me with fear. I was not alone. Other teachers
and their carefully designed courses were being scrutinized on social media as well as in the halls of the legislature. Without even realizing it, I began discerning the debacle, the latest grief experience, I found myself teaching within.

The state had made valid points in outlining the need for the shift to scripted reading programs that are evidence-based, but their approaches were wanting as misinterpretations manifested into skill, drill, and kill. I began questioning. I investigated and found that the major researcher my state was crediting for our structured literacy approach promoted connected text as a critical piece of intervention. Without it, he said interventions would not be effective (Kilpatrick, 2015). Yet, this information was being disregarded. I returned to reading motivation and considered ways to get creative with structured literacy, mustering the joy I found in teaching reading while staying rooted in the research of what works best.

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For most of my career, I worked throughout the summer. From course preparations to continuing education, I served without pay. This was also my experience in K-12. Although teachers are often called out for having extended summer leave, it must be noted that teachers, for the most part, are not paid during the summer; most of us are on nine-month contracts. Slowly, I have watched as “contract time” extends. From mandatory professional developments and curricula updating to advising needs, time begins to accumulate while compensation remains stagnant, based on antiquated salary schedules that fail to capture the totality of a teacher’s contribution (Hansen & Quintero, 2017). Questioning the pay, advocating for compensation of time, in my experience, is
futile and fails to support the servant ideology that accompanies the cult of education (Apple, 1988, 2008, 2019; Knopp, 2012).

A colleague often quips, “Think of us clinicals as rowers on a boat, hidden below while everyone else is enjoying margaritas above deck.” Hidden below deck seemed a better gig than digging trenches, or at least that is how ideologies are perpetuated with intensification (Apple, 2008). This type of justification keeps me rowing. Systemic disenfranchisement manifests into metaphors whether below deck or in the trenches, a way of making light of our subjugations (Marvasti, 2006). We connect on a submersible level in the depths of the deck with each heave, expelling our woes with each ho.

Once again, the Redbirds and Blackbirds of my childhood come to mind. Were the Redbirds to blame for their positionality, their gifts, their skills, their cunning, and their abilities to maneuver the migratory patterns that had been systematically in place long before assuming their tenure? I don’t blame the birds for their instinct; I blame the system that made it instinctual.

A Redbird may find themselves basking in the praises of their performances above deck, but these performances are often bestowed opportunities that the Blackbirds never were given. How can one soar if never given a chance to fly? It would be hard to distinguish between the song of the bird, their most prized offerings, if opportunities were equitable and the songs given equitable airtime. The institutional instinct of perpetuating inequity by silencing and neutralizing does not cage the song (Angelou, 1969). We pick up the harmony of our sister in shackles and sing alongside her, lifting her voice with our own, a most sacred, treasonous cacophony. Awareness breeds liberation of flight, a murder of black ink across the sky (Freire, 1970).
When discussing this conundrum with a colleague, she told me a story of two birds of equal abilities traveling from point A to point B. Although the two were journeying to the exact same location, their arrivals were anything but similar. One arrived extremely early while the other arrived significantly later, sparking much debate and debacle amongst the birdwatchers. Why were their times so varied if they both started at point A and both ended at point B? If the start and finish lines were no different, why was the journey itself a point of divergence? The answer lies in the wind. The answer lies in opportunities and obstacles.

Opportunity. Wind can be an opportunity for some birds. I have heard impassioned cries of how we are all given the same opportunities to succeed, but that it is our choices that separate us. It all boils down to choice. Simple as that. This is the battle cry of education, a false ideology that is vehemently defended and justified (Knopp, 2012; Russom, 2012). For one bird, the wind was at his back, ushering him forward to his destination. Like a plane flying with the jet stream, this bird was able to reduce his time by harnessing the power of the wind whereas the other bird was traveling against the wind, each move weighted. What we sometimes fail to acknowledge is the other O in the room.

Obstacles. Not all birds have the favor of the wind, the location of its streams, the insider details that would usher them into their destination with ease. I have flown against the wind my entire life, but most noteworthy in the arenas of education. The wind has not been at my back, fluttering my wings to soar but instead enveloping my wingspan, each flap an invitation to quit.
Despite the alienation I have experienced below deck, I must acknowledge that seasoned guidance continues to lift my song (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Most trusted mentors, women warriors, usher me through these uncharted skies where I remain the first in my family to ever do so. Connecting spiritually to their toil, their sacrifice, their wit, their intelligence, their strength becomes my perseverance. Their flights across the skies, wind pushing instead of ushering their migration, have inspired my own which I hope will inspire others.

Closing

In dreams, I talk to Dad (Prend, 1997). He is fully restored and always wearing his long-sleeved Harley Davidson t-shirt, one of his most prized possessions. He is handsome and healed. Mostly, we talk about the struggles I am facing with work, school, home, and Luna. He listens compassionately, his arms resting on his long, strong legs, his eyes never leaving mine. His presence reinforces my value. After I unload my worries, releasing years of tears all around me, he steadies me, offers words of encouragement, or just hugs me. “Crissy, I love you,” he always says. His approach to my grief is not to fix it or remove it but to be present to it, to sit on the edge with me, our legs dangling above the fray below, to be my witness, to encourage the warrior within me.

I carry grief, patriarchal, professional, generational, personal, always will, but I carry her differently as my awareness grows and gives birth to illumination, transformation, and enlightenment. Each vignette represents my grief experiences, my
body’s response, to disenfranchisement and loss. From the streets to the trenches to the skies, I lost and grieved, but I also transformed.

I am not who I was when I began this work, and I will not be who I am now when I finish it. Marxist feminism gave me lenses to see what was not visible nor comprehensible before critical learning and consciousness (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). It has taken years to marinate in this fragrant concoction. My grief is my gift to my daughters, their daughters, and teachers who dare to grieve.

When I began writing this dissertation, from conducting the literature review and my own research to reading through the heaps of writings I had scribbled over the years, I began transforming. Similar to the illuminations birthed in the grief work I inadvertently experienced throughout the later portion of my teaching career, I have been deconstructed and reconstructed by this process. I had no understanding that when I crafted my research questions, designed long before my research began, that each question represents an aspect of grief work. RQ1 required digging into receptivity through discernment (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Followed by RQ2 that required recognition through discernment (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Ending with RQ3 that required grief work through the healing process of remembering and writing (Boyd & Myers, 1988). The renderings offered have birthed illumination through discernment and, ultimately, grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Writing these renderings has been healing (Brewster & Zimmerman, 2022; Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker & Evans, 2014).

As I reread, revise, reflect, and become more reflexive, I know these snapshots are incomplete (Berry, 2022). There are more stories I could render. There were my experiences during COVID, when retooling as a professional, reprising my caregiving
role as primary caregiver to my mother-in-law and grandchildren while teaching, managing mayhem in my home, and facing unspeakable losses and subsequent disenfranchised grief. I did not voice these stories here. There is the disenfranchised grief from losing student after student to car accidents, overdoses, and illnesses. I did not lift them out of the mire. The stories that stand here are snapshots from a long journey, mementos from a lifetime of grief.

Grief comes with a price, however, whether acknowledged or disavowed, and the debt owed will eventually be collected. After years of repression, I unleashed my words, key after key, fire blazing from my fingertips as stories rose within me. Reflexively, I realize my interpretation of events, people, and concepts may be skewed through my interpretation (Adams et al., 2015). The people in my lifeworld are not offering their versions. This privileges my account (Adams et al., 2014). Although I made extensive efforts to obscure characters, intimate witnesses may be able to recognize or scrutinize my accounts. I have accepted these possible outcomes as part of the risk of doing autoethnography and daring to grieve (Adams et al., 2015).

This work has come with hurting and healing, a much-needed unveiling. Looking back, I can see both the disenfranchisement I endured and the disenfranchisement I perpetuated. When I visit my married daughters’ homes, they seldom sit, rarely allowing themselves to be present in conversations, to rest. They are chasing children, picking up, mopping, scrubbing tables, busying themselves with caregiving, repeating the same motions, over and over.

“Mom, don’t judge us. We know this isn’t your standard of clean,” they always jest with an air of uncertainty. This is a part of my dark legacy bestowed upon my
daughters and eventually their daughters. Despite my efforts to conceal my compulsivity, my detachment through caregiving, they picked up the mopping where I left off, leaving streaks that will never rinse.

My oldest is a high school teacher; her stories were my stories. The cycle repeats itself despite the distance between her experiences and mine. Rendering an encounter with me about a classroom incident, she said, “I just need to put my big girl panties on and toughen up.”

I think of women I have worked with over the years who viewed me as a role model. “When do you have time to do everything you do, Ms. Voegele?” they asked, needing to know how they too could figure it all out. My encouragement of waking hours before the family and staying up past bedtime to ensure it all got done seems so wrong now. Offering advice of self-care rituals now seems another pacification. My advice was actually: Be compulsive and detach.

I sit with this realization and the grief this knowing brings.

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Somehow, this work connected me back the child within, the long-lost voice that needed reclaiming (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). I have sensed her gradual return over the last few years, felt her questioning; delighted in her humor; mourned in her acknowledgment; heard her in voice my spirit; and met her the depths of being where our worlds collided. Labeled white trash, and according to most accounts, expected to do nothing with my life, this child finally dared to grieve, allowing the years of trauma and pain to acquiesce into recognition and restitution.
As I become more attuned to my lifeworld, I hope to continuously turn upon my experiences and learn from them (Adams et al., 2015; Poulos, 2021). Grief work allows me to sit with discomfort and learn (Devine, 2017). Grief work is a conduit for healing and coming into wholeness (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Brown, 2015; Cranton, 2001; Dirkx, 1997; Doyle, 2020; Scott, 1997). I am not healed, but I am healing. This work is my commitment to continuously learn and transform on my journey to healing, one that may inspire the legacies of mine and other daughters.
Chapter Five

Introduction

In this chapter, I will share findings and implications of my study, resulting from utilizing autoethnography as a methodology and iterative reflexive analysis, a framework for data analysis designed to spark meaning and insight (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). I sought data analysis that preserved and uplifted my chosen methodology instead of deconstructing it, leading me to iterative reflexivity (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

Autoethnography is both holistic and analytical (Poulos, 2021). This methodology fosters sense-making through storytelling, allowing inquiry into research questions and theoretical underpinnings to be embedded within the process of discovery through renderings located in Chapter Four of this dissertation (Adams et al., 2015; Poulos, 2013, 2021). These renderings, or vignettes, are representations of my experiences with disenfranchised grief as a woman teacher. Analysis through sociological reflexivity started when I began composing the renderings, which is a process of positioning and questioning the data throughout their construction and reconstruction through autoethnographic renderings (Poulos, 2021).

I utilized Iterative Reflexive Framework, which allowed for a deeper reflexive dive into the renderings I crafted (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Important to note regarding this framework is that it allows the researcher to engage in a “process of continuous meaning-making and progressive focusing inherent to analysis processes” (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009, p. 77). Patterns simply do not emerge from the data; on the contrary, they are embedded within and derived from the researcher’s questions, theoretical framework, subjectivity, positionality, and intuition (Srivastava & Hopwood,
2009). Iteration provides an opportunity for continued reflexivity with the data, seeing links and connections, dialectically (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

This chapter begins with how I made sense of the data utilizing significant, emerging iterations. For representation purposes, I created an illustration that encompasses my dialectical examination (see illustration 2). From there, I address my research questions utilizing Dirkx’s four lenses of transformation (1998). Connecting iterations dialectically, I will apply significant iterations to my research questions, theoretical framework, and the literature I reviewed for this study.

Concluding this chapter, I will discuss theoretical and practical implications as well considerations for future research.
Findings

Sense-making through autoethnography

Figure 2: Disenfranchised grief of a woman teacher iterative reflexivity cycle

Making sense of experiences is one of the main reasons I chose to do autoethnography- it is writing as inquiry (Adams et al., 2015; Poulos, 2021). Throughout data collection, attunement, and sociological reflexivity, I realized that my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief have been cyclic, often recurring, and cumulative, but storying my experiences brought these realizations to light (Doka, 2002; Ellis, 1991; Neimeyer, 2016; Poulos, 2021; Rando, 1993). Interestingly, what appeared as causes of
grief morphed into results of grief and vice versa when pondering disenfranchised grief with a dialectical lens with multiple intersectionalities (Allman, 2001; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Haug, 2015). The cycle repeats itself throughout many of my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief.

Surfacing as both causes and effects of my disenfranchised grief as a woman teacher were several recurring, significant iterative patterns: generational disenfranchisement; patriarchal disenfranchisement; women and teachers as a commodity; loss and recurring grief; perpetuating harm and cultivating healing. Grief work runs simultaneously and undercurrent with attunement (receptivity); awareness (recognition); alienation (powerlessness, detachment, and compulsive caregiving); awakening (grief work), and acceptance throughout my renderings (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Poulos, 2013; 2021). Illustration 2 offers an overall cyclical representation of significant iterations and subiterations that emerged through the narratives I rendered.

Once I completed the Iterative Reflexive Framework, I was able to dialectically address each of my research questions, finally, making sense of my experiences with disenfranchised grief (Poulos, 2013; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).
Research questions

This study addressed three research questions. As a process, (RQ1) how can an experienced teacher recognize her disenfranchised grief? As a purpose, (RQ2) how can disenfranchised grief perpetuate harm professionally, personally, and pedagogically? Finally, as a product, (RQ3) how can an experienced teacher heal through disenfranchised grief?

Addressing each of these questions, I applied significant iterations through the lenses of transformative learning, and, ultimately, transformation through grief work.

RQ1: How can an experienced teacher recognize her disenfranchised grief?

Cultivating awareness through transformative learning

Addressing this question required a dialectical examination of disenfranchisement and grief as these constructs intersect within the lifeworld of an experienced woman teacher (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Doka, 2002; Rowling, 1995). Awareness is complex, and in the case of the recognition of disenfranchised grief, involved a multiplicity of variables.

Utilizing Dirkx’s four lenses to address each of my three research questions, this particular question required the assistance of transformation as critical reflection; transformation as critical consciousness; transformation as development; and aspects of transformation as individuation (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Daloz, 1999; Dirkx, 1998; Freire, 1970; Illeris, 2017; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1997, 2000). Lifting the veil of the oppressed requires revolutionary learning and transformation (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Freire, 1970, hooks, 1994). It took autoethnography to give life to my awareness and subsequent recognition.
Adding an additional lens, Marxist feminism, I began unpacking this question with the data from my renderings, data analysis, dialectical iterations, and literature review (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Developing my awareness began with interrogating my experiences with both disenfranchisement and grief and investigating their sources through dialectical examination (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

Transformation as critical reflection

Early in my career, I primarily utilized critical thinking, reflecting upon my actions, behaviors, words, and thoughts in the context of impact on student learning (Dirkx, 1998; Illeris, 2017; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1997, 2000). Disorienting dilemmas were many in my first few years of teaching, but I did not fully possess the skills or capacity to unpack these experiences, and I never put myself as the focus (Mezirow, 1990). I was in a cycle of pleasing administrators and doing whatever it took to reach and teach my students—ego driven (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Evidence of pleasing and pushing myself beyond my personal limits were conveyed throughout my renderings.

Despite ego being at the wheel, later in my tenure, I began utilizing critical reflection to understand my experiences with harassment. This was foundational to my development as a teacher, and I credit this type of thinking as an impetus for continuing learning and higher education. Without critical reflection, I would have remained caged in my thinking and teaching.

Turning to my journals, I began writing about my experiences, unleashing myself on the pages, becoming someone different, someone who spoke up. Sifting through the rage, the hurt, the grief, I thought critically about why this demoralizing event made me want to quit teaching (Santoro, 2018).
Critical reflection cultivated attunement where I listened and observed, paying attention to discordance and disorientation, noticing my losses and subsequent responses (Mezirow, 1990; Poulos, 2021). Although this did not always result in major transformations, these experiences fueled my advocacy for students, and on a few occasions, myself as noted throughout my renderings.

Critical reflection, becoming a reflective practitioner, was the first step in recognizing my disenfranchised grief and making efforts to heal (Mezirow, 1990). Writing provided a conduit for this type of transformation to occur, and mentors provided the seasoned guidance needed to sustain and support me in undoing and becoming (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Pennebaker & Evans, 2014; Poulos, 2013). This process of self-examination and discourse with others paved the way for introspection, discernment, and change (Boyd & Myers 1998; Poulos, 2013).

**Transformation as critical consciousness**

Next, recognizing disenfranchised grief required knowing what disenfranchised grief actually is and identifying the sources (Doka, 2002). This took revolutionary learning (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). Emerging from indoctrination requires the development of critical consciousness, an “awakening of critical awareness” that grows from “critical educational effort” (Freire, 1973, p. 19). I realized it was not enough to observe and remain silent, but I did not have the language to verbalize my experiences or dis-ease. I did not have the theories to make sense of my losses (hook, 1994).

Reading critical literature began a journey into transforming my consciousness, and this type of learning was vital to naming and interrogating oppressive experiences (Freire, 1970, 1973). Before seeking higher education for my doctorate, I spent years
reading emancipatory literature with adolescents, serving as their seasoned guidance in interpreting and interrogating their experiences; building compassion and empathy; and a zeal for social justice (Boyd & Myers, 1988).

_They were my teachers, and their lessons inspired my daily walk in and out of a building filled with despair. Seeing disparities in their opportunities and communities, I sought continuing education to give me the knowledge to do better, to be better. Engaging in emancipatory texts, we questioned, we learned, and we grew. In the truest sense of the reciprocity of teaching, in teaching them, I taught myself. In attempting to heal them, I began the work of healing myself._

Vital to recognizing my disenfranchised grief was higher, revolutionary learning (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). It is in this space where I learned about Marxist feminists and other revolutionaries, daring to challenge the status quo and indoctrination (Allman, 2001; Bannerji, 1995; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Folbre, 2021; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). My critical awareness was birthed from my immersion in the words of revolutionaries, beginning an uncaging that happened when I left K-12. Most importantly, it is through these readings that I began seeing the sources of my disenfranchisement and grief, something I never associated with my experiences before critical learning.

_Naming my disenfranchised grief_

Critical consciousness birthed my awareness of how generational disenfranchisement, patriarchal disenfranchisement, and recurring loss perpetuate a perpetual grief cycle where alienation and powerlessness are in constant motion (Doka, 2002; Freire, 1970, 1973). Ultimately, these constructs are both the sources and the results of my disenfranchisement and grief.
Generational disenfranchisement is comprised of my narrative inheritance, undeveloped class consciousness, and experiences with subcontracts of trauma, including poverty, abuse, addiction whereas patriarchal disenfranchisement consists of my experiences with institutional indoctrination, feminization, and hierarchies. Critical conscientization birthed my awareness of these strongholds in my renderings (Freire, 1970).

Recognizing my disenfranchised grief was the result of unlearning and new learning, critical consciousness, but naming my disenfranchised grief, its sources and implications, was the result of autoethnography.

**Generational disenfranchisement**

Taking a reflexive stance with my renderings, theoretical framework, and research questions, generational disenfranchisement surfaced as a significant source of my disenfranchised grief (Doka, 2002; Kempson et al., 2008). Because of my generational disenfranchisement in addition to the multitude losses I have experienced, disenfranchised grief is cumulative and ongoing, the result of living as a woman from poverty (Doka, 2002; Rando, 1993; Rowling, 1995). My generational disenfranchisement consists of narrative inheritance, undeveloped class consciousness, and trauma in the form of poverty, abuse, and addiction.
Narrative inheritance

Utilizing a Marxist feminist lens, generational disenfranchisement, in the case of my ancestors and descendants, is classed, gendered, and ingrained. Witnessing my grandmother, my mother, and other women in my family struggle through living in the shadows of poverty, trauma, and grief, subjugated by our class and gender, instilled our migratory pattern (Jacks, 2019). This is my narrative inheritance (Goodall, 2005).

_Tapping into my childhood, my past, has resulted in an awakening, an undoing, in my adulthood. I am my grandmother, her mother, my mother, her sister, my cousins, white trash that kept showing up, exploited and discarded._

Goodall describes narrative inheritance as the stories we inherit from our ancestors, “a framework for understanding our identity” (p. 497). My identity is rooted, entangled, in generational and patriarchal disenfranchisement (Hextrum, 2014; Kempson et al., 2008). My story is a continuation of the women who came before me, their struggles, their grief, alive within me, and now, my daughters (Goodall, 2005; Kempson et al., 2008). Our stories are written by the curators of capitalism, the story makers of superstructure. Deviations from the norm are rare as we continue in our migration through subjugation. When writing about my disenfranchisement, I reflexively considered how my narrative inheritance perpetuated generational disenfranchisement through alienation and powerlessness within my daughters, but this experience is not an anomaly; it is cultural (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959). Our domestication is our servitude. I utilized two metaphors to capture this perpetuation: pregnancy and trench warfare.
My narrative inheritance continues to breed (Goodall, 2005). I was pregnant with generational grief.

At the time, thoughts of my toddler daughter bearing witness to my abuse was the last thing on my mind when it should have been the first. She began burrowing her own trench (Ronai, 1995).

Another aspect of our narrative inheritance was division (Gimenez, 2005; Love, 2019). From where we lived to how we were treated in institutions and in the community, we were divided, systematically alienated (Allman, 2001). I felt this most keenly in school where I was labeled a Blackbird because of my inability to read, being relegated to the hallways because of this disability. My father and other relatives experienced similar exclusions, all struggling to read. Additionally, I felt this division in my neighborhood where my kind were clustered, hidden away, an eyesore for the elite (Love, 2019). This division rendered us blind; we did not know what we did not know, believing in ideological falsehoods that kept us producing and reproducing.

Reading failure is noted throughout my renderings, my own, my father’s, my daughter’s, and my students’, but it is vital to note who is failing. I have been in schools most of my life, and, throughout my experiences, there is a class line drawn where illiteracy is concerned. Any student of developmental theory understands that children who lack basic needs, who are hungry, may struggle to learn and may lack the necessary vocabulary to be as successful as their peers, repeating cycles of failure (Knighton et al., 2017). For many children in my state, they are passed through the system, despite notable failure in reading; their place in the economy solidified in solidarity of servitude and dependency.
I was given the name of Blackbird in elementary due to a misunderstood reading disability, a disability I have since come to know as dyslexia. The Blackbirds were the nonreaders, students who were relegated to the hallway so that the other birds could receive nourishment in the classroom without the Blackbirds slowing them down.

Undeveloped class consciousness

Our narrative inheritance perpetuates as undeveloped class consciousness which continues to contribute to our lineage of powerlessness and alienation as women from poverty (Apple, 2012; Lambirth, 2010; Seeman, 1959). It is important to note that when we fail to see ourselves in a class or when we develop a false sense of class identity, this can have detrimental impacts on our lives as women from poverty (Apple, 2012; Lambirth, 2010; Seeman, 1969). Capitalism subjugates women, limiting our wages and prospects, while keeping us siloed and silent (Apple, 2012; Lambirth, 2010; Manstead, 2008; Wong, 2009). We fail to ever develop class consciousness and remain shackled to our subjugation (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Freire, 1970). My iterations support Manstead’s (2018) findings that “the material conditions in which people grow up and live have a lasting impact on their personal and social identities and that this influences both the way they think and feel about their social environment,” impacting their behaviors (p. 267). We reproduce what we know.

I had been smuggled into the middle class, but this came with a different level of dedication and servitude. It came with grief. I felt separated, alienated, from myself.
I needed a tour guide, an interpreter, to maneuver through the middle class, through womanhood, in these new lands with new lords.

According to Lambirth (2010), people from lower class may lack the cultural and social currency to navigate middle class norms, finding themselves in a state of nonpossession when it comes to class location, perpetuating a sense of not ever belonging. Our continued subjugation is our inheritance. We feel privileged to be in the spaces where nobody from our lineage has been. Yet, in this space where poverty meets privilege, we lack voice; we lack belonging; we lack agency. We may have emerged from the chrysalis, but we remain entombed through epigenetic alignment to superstructure mentality and our role within it (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Mitchell, 1971; Tong & Botts, 2018).

This table would never have room for me, and even if it did, I would not know which fork to use. I was nobody. Not ranked, not tenure track, nobody. A Blackbird in a forest of Redbirds. I did not belong.

Trauma (Poverty, Abuse, Addiction)

Poverty

When I began reviewing the literature for this dissertation, I did not anticipate that multiple traumatic experiences would weave themselves into my writings as sources of disenfranchised grief. Generationally speaking, trauma is a recurring motif in mine and my daughters’ narrative inheritance (Najman et al., 2018). Being born in Arkansas, ranked highest in the nation for multiple adverse childhood traumatic experiences, trauma is ingrained, and in my family’s case, a natural extension of living in poverty (Montgomery, 2019).
Our poverty stripped us, exposed us while our gender exploited us like roses in a landslide.

Our wages failed to support our survival, perpetuating dependency on others. Having limited resources, we lived with my grandmother who was fortunate to have housing, but the house itself became emblematic of our poverty.

My mother and I were fallen leaves at the mercy of feet and wind. I was at the mercy of a bird with broken wings, a child with a child, whose nest was in shambles (Ronai, 1996).

Requesting government assistance for food, my family cycled through the welfare system. Food scarcity and hunger were generational. Oftentimes, I stood in long lines of women, seeking the government’s support. We were powerless in our waiting, stripped of our dignity, subjugated by our poverty (Freire, 1970). Waiting was work.

Memories of waiting in line for necessities such as butter, lard, cheese, and beans still haunt and, sadly, embarrass me. Rain, heat, winter’s cold, we stood with empty hands.

Government assistance for medical interventions were likewise traumatic and dehumanizing (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Najman et al., 2018).

My first pregnancy on assistance resulted in a visit with a physician whose exam was so painful and violent, I feared he was attempting to remove my baby from my womb with his large red face and chubby bare hands.

We were labeled, divided, and dehumanized, in our poverty. Relegated to an area of town where others like us lived, we were known as white trash. The dehumanization of women is birthed in patriarchal codes and beliefs; consequently, this is central to
understanding alienation from a Marxist feminist perspective (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017).

\[
\text{I was ten the first time I was called White trash, and I have desperately been cleaning up my act ever since (Isenberg, 2016).}
\]

Abuse

Suffering physical abuse was not uncommon for the women in my family circle; each one had stories of survival.

\[
\text{In Arkansas, one out of every three women face physical and/or sexual abuse from their domestic partners (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2021). I was one of the three.}
\]

My grandmother’s story, however, is one that continues to be rendered by our family (Carter, 2002; Gartland et al., 2019; Goodall, 2005). Her trauma is my trauma, my generational grief. At eighteen, I would begin my journey into the darkness with an abusive spouse (Carter, 2002).

\[
\text{This was my “narrative inheritance,” my generational role reprisal of the battered and broken women before me, except this time, it was my turn on the carousel (Gartland et al., 2019; Goodall, 2005).}
\]

Although I knew abuse was wrong, I, like the women before me, remained locked in a cycle which often involved assessing my role in provocation, similar to my quandaries in teaching when faced with abuse and bullying. I took responsibility for the abusive practices.

Addiction
Addiction is generational, epigenetic, and has had traumatic impacts on my family (Ducci & Goldman, 2012). Addiction recurs throughout my renderings, from my grandfather to cousins to my daughter. From prescription medications to alcohol and illicit drugs, my narrative inheritance is ripe with stories and experiences featuring family members, including myself, using substances to suppress emotions to remain efficient, continue production, subsequently, furthering alienation from ourselves and others (Harris, 2010). When writing through the grief of my daughter’s methamphetamine addiction, I drew upon our family history—our narrative inheritance (Goodall, 2005).

My daughter, Luna’s story, is incomplete. There are horrific aspects I chose to omit (Berry, 2022). Her addiction is a great source of grief, and I carry it as I did her (Su et al., 2021; Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018).

Addiction can be hardwired into our molecular makeup, and even then, I blamed myself (Ducci & Goldman, 2012). Generationally, she is the heir to misfortune.

Generational disenfranchisement is closely linked to patriarchal disenfranchisement, and utilizing a Marxist feminist, class and gender do intersect; however, they are not the same. It is important, however, to understand that they overlap throughout my renderings.
Patriarchal disenfranchisement

Goodman (1988) asserts that there is no solitary definition of patriarchy, yet this definition epitomizes patriarchy as it emerges throughout my renderings:

a system of thought and subsequent actions that sanction male authority over women reproducing “economic, cultural, and psychological relationships among men of all classes, races, and ethnic groups that formally and informally oppress women (and men) who do not conform to and reflect a masculine rationality, physical appearance, style of behavior, and set of values (pp. 208-209).

Patriarchy reigns, representing the rules, both spoken and hidden, of the schools I served and the cultures to which I ascribe under capitalism (Johnson, 2005). From my appearance to my behaviors, these rules perpetuate standards that I live my life by implicitly and explicitly, and these standards are not only reproduced by the men in my renderings but by the women as well, including myself (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Johnson, 2005). Noted in my renderings, the oppressed remain oppressed or become oppressors themselves in a cycle of disenfranchisement and alienation (Freire, 1970).

Patriarchal rule is evident throughout my renderings with the emergence of the subiterations of feminization, gender roles, and hierarchies. Recognizing their influence in disenfranchising my grief was made possible through autoethnography and dialectical examination.
Feminization

I chose teaching because it was the only profession I knew anything about. As a child from poverty, my exposure to other professions and professional women was limited. In sync with the literature that promotes teaching as idyllic for mothers and women, the profession is viewed as an extension of our culturally relegated roles (Boyle, 2004; Folbre, 2001; Isomöttönen, 2018; Lortie, 1975; Skelton, 2009). I found this to be true when choosing teaching as a profession. I knew the care of my children would be my responsibility as it had been for the mothers before me. Little did I know that teaching would further subjugate my agency, perpetuating further powerlessness and alienation (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959).

I did exactly as my mother, her mother, and mothers from my community did. Marrying and mothering young were culturally ingrained, fueling ideologies of the superstructure (Uecker & Stokes, 2008). The work of women in my community was to reproduce proletariats, more chains in the gang. Our bodies, commodities, doing our part to support capitalism, pawns of patriarchy.

Like many of the poor girls in my community, I married young, having my first baby at nineteen. When I did talk to an advisor at the university, they also encouraged me to consider teaching because of it being a caring profession, one that would allow me to be a mother at home and at work and would allow me to be off when my children were off.

Apple (1988) describes teachers as not only “classed actors” but “gendered actors” who are subject to more control professionally than men (p. 100). Labeled as women’s work, this professional gendering has devalued the work rendered by women
teachers because the work is viewed as a natural extension of womanhood not a paid commodity (Chun et al., 2020). A teacher’s value is reduced in the market, a “fixed ceiling,” her contribution a patriarchal expectation, an honorable sacrifice (Apple, 1988, 2008; Boyle, 2004; Gimenez, 2005; Hextrum, 2014; Kreuzfeld & Seibt, 2022; Lortie, 1975; Quintero et al., 2023).

As women proliferate any profession, wages for their labor and value for that labor decrease (Miller, 2016). Twenty-five years in and my pay is a dismal reflection of my worth.

*My value, my worth, amounts to barely a livable wage. I bleed out. Each dollar accounted for, an hour for a penny, my experience, my education, my wisdom, a ghost in the meetings, the Blackbird sitting in a rolling chair.*

**Gender Roles**

Generationally, the women in my family were under patriarchal rule and supported the patriarchy with their acts and services inside and outside of the home (Folbre, 2001; Hochschild, 2003a, 2003b; Jianling, 2000; Lussier & Backer, 2020). These women cared for our family, home, and took jobs, locking them into a “double day,” further perpetuating inequalities not only at home but in the workplace (Cobble, 2004). All were in service or caring professions or “pink collar jobs” that exploit women by requiring emotional labor (Chun et al., 2020; Folbre, 2001, p. 44).

The women who raised me remained in service to masters, even invisible ones. Patriarchy is known for its ghost-like presence, and it haunted the women of the house, including me (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). I never realized until this work that I likewise
perpetuated this superwoman image with my own daughters and the sense of loss this perpetuated (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Sumra & Schillaci, 2015).

Gender roles were reinforced throughout my renderings, in the home and the classroom, and I, too, have contributed to their perpetuations within myself, through my daughters, and even in my role as a teacher educator. Hierarchies, both in the home and in the schools, have ensured adherence to playing the part.

**Hierarchy**

Evident throughout my renderings are my lived experiences with hierarchies within K-12 and higher education settings. Noted in the literature, hierarchies in schools tend to replicate societal hierarchies, perpetuating ideologies of patriarchy and hegemony where middle class culture is currency (Apple, 2019). My renderings divulged the difficulties of maneuvering through the complex entanglements that hierarchies perpetuate. For the most part, control originated from the top, central office administration; to the middle, principal, the parent, some students; to the bottom, teachers and some students.

The hierarchy controls the body, emotions, competence, words, behaviors, emotions, skills, and time of teachers. Commodification solidified my place, my silence, my dedication, and my servitude. As a woman teacher, I am a commodity within the hierarchy of education (Parkison, 2016). False ideologies perpetuate harm systematically and internally, ensuring the commodification of the woman teacher (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). These are significant to RQ2, how can my experiences with disenfranchised grief perpetuate harm. I never questioned my place and putting others in theirs until my awareness shifted.
In the hierarchies where I traverse, there are spoken and unspoken rules that maintain the status quo, ensuring adherence to dominant class ideologies under patriarchal rule (Apple, 2008; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Knopp, 2012). In my experience, these rules are an extension of patriarchal rule and pervasive ideologies that govern our patriarchal society and the profession of teaching (Harris, 2010). Becoming “attuned” to the hierarchal strongholds in my life elucidated my awareness of their perpetuation of my disenfranchised grief (Poulos, 2021).

Generational and patriarchal disenfranchisement have been pervasive sources of my disenfranchised grief, and coming into this awareness has been the impetus of my transformative learning journey. Gilligan & Snider’s discussion about patriarchal loss and how it is a perpetual outcome of living under patriarchal rule resonated throughout my renderings (2018). Constant losses resulted in grief responses that recurred without acknowledgement.

**Loss and recurring grief**

Rowling (1995) discussed recurring grief in her findings about teacher disenfranchised grief, purporting that when teachers failed to acknowledge their previous grief experiences, both personal and professional, grief accumulated. Hidden, cumulative, and complicated grief affect many, yet the systematic silencing that plagues the teaching profession forces grief underground (Doka, 2002; Harris, 2010; Knopp, 2012; Kumar, 2005; Neimeyer, 2006, 2016; Rowling, 1995). Teachers who grieve must do so out of the spotlight, and for most female teachers, few places exist to hide, further alienating these teachers in the trenches. Losses continue to amass, but work must go on (Harris, 2010; Knopp, 2012; Kumar, 2005; Neimeyer, 2006).
I did not understand that my disenfranchisement as a woman and a teacher perpetuated a sense of loss and that every loss I would experience would trigger recurring grief (Rando, 1993; Rowling, 1995). Failure to recognize these losses perpetuated accumulation and alienation (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Rando, 1993; Seeman, 1959).

There is a hierarchy of loss, and most of my experiences failed to meet the qualifications of losses worthy of mourning and social recognition (Robson & Walter, 2013). Throughout my renderings, losses such as loss of voice, reputation, skills, creativity, control, and identity recurred, yet these types of losses failed to garner understanding, support, or sympathy. I did not understand that these losses were perpetuating disenfranchisement, alienation, and grief (Doka, 2002; Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959). Moving on was the mantra I lived by and was the mindset of the institutions in which I worked.

Other than some minor civilities, losing my grandmother was not acknowledged at all. Losing my dad was recognized, but in the hierarchy of grief, this loss was a blip (Robson & Walter, 2013). Watching my daughter suffer from addiction, a disease that is ravishing her piece by piece, is known in my workplace, but there has been little acknowledgement of this most consuming loss and the unraveling it perpetuates (Doka, 2002). I learned to hide my hurt by pouring myself into teaching and caregiving, detaching from my grief (Gilligan & Snider, 2018).

Reflexively examining how loss after loss, I remained active and seemingly in control, I return to alienation through compulsive caregiving and detachment. I also consider that others in my story, like me, may have no awareness of how losses that seem insignificant may manifest into disenfranchisement and grief (Doka, 2002). They were
indoctrinated in the same “get over it” culture with its hidden rules and hierarchies of who has the right to grieve and what losses merit grief (Devine, 2017; Harris, 2010; Robson & Walter, 2013).

Losses are a natural part of living, and our body’s response to these losses is grief (Kumar, 2005). But losses for an experienced woman teacher are complex and rooted in the system that disenfranchises not only her losses but disenfranchises her as well (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Harris, 2010; Knopp, 2012). This is critical in unraveling the disenfranchised grief of a teacher. Awareness is key to healing.

Transformation as critical consciousness developed over the course of my education and career; however, aging and experience deepened my awareness and widened my perspective.

Transformation as development

Writing from an experienced woman teacher perspective allowed me to reflexively filter my lived experience through my development. Age, experience, and education were all a part of my awakening and recognizing my disenfranchised grief. As I matured in my womanhood and the profession of teaching, I began to see things, becoming “attuned” to the disenfranchisement all around me and within me (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Merriam, 2004; Poulos, 2021).

Boyd and Myers (1988) explain that our first half of life is about exploring identities and establishing ourselves, focusing on our lifeworld, whereas the second half of life is about introspection and integration, focusing on our inner world. I noticed a shift in my writings over the decades that brought grief to the surface in my forties.
As my renderings progressed over the course of decades, I noted what Merriam (2004) described as wisdom birthed from critical and dialectic thinking made possible by my age, education, and experience.

Addressing RQ1 required me to have insights that only development could offer. Crucial to my understanding of disenfranchised grief, age, experience, and education all offered the necessary tools to examine the complex sources of my disenfranchised grief.

Following my renderings, my knowledge and emotional intelligence increased with age and experience, as did my questioning. Interrogating my experiences launched my journey to higher education. Revolutionary learning roused consciousness-raising (Freire, 1970). Conscientization birthed discernment through recognizing and receptivity, folding into individuation through grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Awareness is the result of these convergences.

**Transformation as individuation through grief work**

All roads to transformation, critical reflection, consciousness-raising, and development, have led to grief work. Finally, answering RQ1 required discernment that is vital to transformation as individuation (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Discernment consists of two activities, receptivity and recognition, both necessary aspects of transformation as individuation through grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988).

**Receptivity (attunement)**

Being receptive means that I had to become “attuned” through listening to the world around me and my position in it, leaning into discomfort to discover (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Poulos, 2021). Beyond that, I began holding onto what I was noticing and sitting with it to determine why I was noticing it. With disenfranchised grief, I began with
my responses to losses, untangling the cords that connected the losses to their sources. I
began noticing the alienation that manifested through compulsive caregiving and
detachment; I began noticing my powerlessness. These connections became even more
visible as I wrote autoethnographically (Ellis et al., 2014; Poulos, 2013).

Receptivity began with critical reflection, thinking deeply about my experiences.
It was fostered through consciousness-raising and critical education. It matured as I grew
in age and experience. I do not believe I could have completed this type of attuning in my
early years of teaching because of my conditioning and idealized notions of teaching.
Discernment brought it all in view through autoethnography. Throughout my renderings,
receptivity is evident in that I began exploring the sources of my grief. For the first time,
I was open to explore what happened to me.

Recognition (acknowledgement)

Recognizing my disenfranchised grief, the final step of awareness, requires
acknowledgement (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Receptivity permitted the sources of grief to
surface, but recognition revealed former disenfranchisement, permitting me a choice of
whether or not to name the sources (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Choosing to identify the
sources, generational and patriarchal disenfranchisement, woman teacher as a
commodity, and recurring grief is how I began the work of recognizing my
disenfranchised grief.

Surfacing from the depths were stories that I long held onto. My narrative
inheritance became a significant source of my disenfranchisement (Goodall, 2005).
Events that occurred as a girl and woman from poverty kept rising to the surface, a
generational reprisal of grief that had been buried. Naming the oppressors and the
institutions that caused my disenfranchisement through autoethnography answered RQ1, but beyond that, served as the impetus for my continuing grief work.

Recognition was a challenge and harnessed grief itself. Reacquainting myself with alienation, I felt alienated in the writing of the renderings, never considering that even in this moment, far removed from trauma and grievous events, I still feel alienation most keenly. Naming the sources, pointing the finger at people and places from my past, seemed treasonous. Turning the finger to point to myself hurt me most deeply. Yet, to heal, to grow, to be liberated, recognition was vital to my grief work.

There is no denying that harm was commonplace throughout my renderings. Perpetuated through generational and patriarchal disenfranchisement as well as through my commodification, RQ2 required a closer examination of harm’s pervasiveness at the hands of many.

**RQ2: How can disenfranchised grief perpetuate harm professionally, personally, and pedagogically?**

When I first began my investigations into this topic, I had little doubt that harm was being perpetuated throughout the teaching profession. I am an insider with insights and knowing, who has been harmed and who has inflicted harm. RQ2, how can disenfranchised grief perpetuate harm professionally, personally, and pedagogically, required the assistance of transformation as critical consciousness and transformation as individuation (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998; Freire, 1970, 1973). Applying a Marxist feminist lens to my renderings and subsequent data analysis, perpetuating harm (self/other) recurs throughout my lived experiences and findings. Centering around the iterations of alienation through powerlessness, detachment, and compulsive caregiving,
disenfranchised grief runs undercurrent throughout my renderings (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959). I chose a cycle to represent my experiences with disenfranchised grief because my experiences are recurring and cumulative, rooted in systems that fail to change (Rowling, 1995). Illustration 2 cites the relational, cyclic presence of disenfranchised grief throughout my lived experiences.

Key to answering this question is understanding what constitutes the disenfranchised grief of an experienced woman teacher (RQ1), understanding my positionality within the generational, patriarchal, and commodification of both my selfhood and womanhood, and choosing to name these forces (Freire, 1970, 1973). From there, discernment through receptivity and recognition is pivotal to unraveling the harm disenfranchised grief perpetuates, requiring a dialectical examination that integrates grief work in RQ3 (Freire, 1970; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

Next, utilizing reflexivity widens our view of our experiences and allows for the examination of power, and those who hold it, within cultures and systems (Poulos, 2013, 2021; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Reflexivity also provides a lens to examine our own roles in perpetuating harm upon ourselves and others who traverse within our lifeworld (Adams et al., 2015; Brommel, 2017; Poulos, 2013). Recognition is key to understanding the sources of harm, but to understand the perpetuation of harm, an examination of experiences below the surface is required (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).
**Transformation as critical consciousness**

Being receptive and recognizing disenfranchised grief, its sources, and its perpetuations are critical when examining harm to self and others. My initial renderings featured a surface level examination of harm that had been solely inflicted upon me. Examining how the sources of disenfranchisement perpetuated harm, I drilled deeply into my experiences and emotions, memory mining for details that needed to be divulged so that I could also examine my role in harm’s perpetuations (Poulos, 2021). Once again, significant iterations such as generational and patriarchal disenfranchisement emerged as well as the commodification of a woman teacher.

**Naming sources of disenfranchisement**

Marxists feminists believe that historical materialism, the mode and relations of production within their historical contexts, ultimately generates “superstructures” that reinforce modes of production, keep classes divided, and, consequently, women oppressed (Tong & Botts, 2018, p. 74). Historically, oppression results from the division of labor and women’s relations to the mode of production and reproduction (Tong & Botts, 2018). Specifically, superstructures are the ideologies that form from the economics of society within their historical standpoints. For instance, capitalism is currently a mode of production, and the laws, religion, and social norms of our time are the superstructures that support the mode (Tong and Botts, 2018). From a both a class and gendered standpoint, women are caught in traps that are recurring both generationally and patriarchally because our gender and class affiliation neutralizes, exposes, and exploits our resources, commodifying and objectifying us both sexually and economically (Allman, 2001; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Mitchell, 1971).
Iterations of generational and patriarchal disenfranchisement emerged from my lived experiences with disenfranchised grief; however, understanding that my story is one of many within the collective of impoverished women, a tale of surviving within the superstructure is important to note when delineating connections and implications.

**Generational disenfranchisement**

Generational disenfranchisement surfaced as harmful. I examined the harm perpetuated by beloved family members, institutions, trauma, and gendering. I found a resurgence of pain as memory after memory confirmed recurring disenfranchisement (Rando, 1993; Rowling, 1995). I connected to critical literature, seeking theory as healing, finding a home with Marxist feminism, an explanation for harm’s pervasiveness in my life (hooks, 1994; Tong & Botts, 2018). Generationally, harm was inflicted upon me, my mother, and her mother in a never-ending cycle where we had no control or choice in its manifestations.

Freire (1970) served as a reminder of the interconnectedness of oppression which permitted me to see the perpetuation of disenfranchisement as dialectical. I saw the generational flow of disenfranchisement, but I began seeing my own participation in its perpetuation.

Perpetuating harm within myself, I fell into the same cycles that were set before me, a generational roadmap through disenfranchisement (Boylorn, 2015; Carter, 2002; Goodall, 2005). Following the same migratory pattern of the women before me, I was subject to repeat victimization and subjugation (Ronai, 1995). However, unknown to me at the time, this cycle of disenfranchisement was overarching, stretching beyond my street. Proletariat women, including my family, in my state were in service to the
superstructure, ensnared in its tendrils, working without due compensation, in service to the economy while paying tithes to men and children in the home (Folbre, 2001; Hochschild, 2003a, 2003b; Lussier & Backer, 2020). Marrying and birthing children while still children themselves, women like me became chained to the home where the man holds the key, a pattern we know and repeat generationally in the South (Uecker & Stokes, 2008). Our narrative inheritance as daughters of this nation, caught in systems of capitalism, is servitude (Goodall, 2005). This narrative is perpetuated through silence, the price we pay to live through capitalism and patriarchy.

I remained silent when words were needed, but I was powerless to render them spoken (Harris, 2010; Kuhn, 1989; Seeman, 1959).

*From a sociocultural and materialistic perspective, I had the makings of a victim, spiraling, powerless, unrecognizable (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Carter, 2002; Ronai, 1995).*

Never did I consider that my daughters were witnesses to my disenfranchisement. I shared the roadmap with them that I had been given, their guide through the trenches, their model of subjugation. I remember my own mother’s compulsive caregiving, modeling habits that were instinctual, ingrained that became second nature to both me and eventually my daughters.

*Despite my efforts to conceal my compulsivity, my detachment through caregiving, they picked up the mopping where I left off, leaving streaks that will never rinse.*

As the model of how a mother should grieve, I became compulsive and detached, perpetuating alienation and continued loss (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). At the time, I did
not know that I was perpetuating harm. I was in survival mode, just trying to remain efficient.

My grief, a stream of constant sorrow, bubbles from disenfranchisement, a spring sourcing the disenfranchised grief of daughters under my wings.

Although this type of acknowledgement is painful, it also is liberating. I followed the path set before me that was likewise set before other proletariat girls and women in and beyond my lifeworld. It is a cycle of subjugation that is ingrained, conditioned, and culturally acceptable (Hochschild, 2003a, 2003b). Through this work, I was able to see my own role in perpetuating class and gender disenfranchisement. Breaking generational silence through autoethnography has provided a window into a healing journey for my entire family, but beyond that, proletariat women might consider revolutionary learning practices, finding solidarity through my stories and attempts at making sense of my experiences with subjugation (Poulos, 2013). As a witness and a survivor, breaking silence barriers is only the beginning where cycles of harm may end for my granddaughters and the many other daughters that inhabit my lifeworld.

Additionally, generational disenfranchisement has worked in tandem with patriarchal disenfranchisement, perpetuating harm personally, professionally, and pedagogically. Although patriarchal disenfranchisement informs and empowers generational disenfranchisement, I attempted to distinguish between the two through a concerted focus on generational codes mostly rooted and reproduced in the home throughout generations and on patriarchal codes perpetuated in schools through hierarchy, feminization, and commodification of women teachers. Noted throughout my renderings, patriarchal disenfranchisement operates with stealth and cunning, and
remains an antagonistic player no matter where I am, but this study aims to voice experiences within schools.

**Patriarchal disenfranchisement**

Patriarchal disenfranchisement is undeniably harmful. Subiterations that surfaced in RQ1 such as feminization, gender roles, and hierarchy are all pervasive, leading to false ideologies (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). Stakeholders within the patriarchy were responsible for inflicting harm throughout my renderings and subsequent analysis and play vital roles in my subjugation and the subjugation of many of the teachers I served alongside.

Understanding that schools are sites of contradiction is vital to understanding how students and teachers can become powerless and alienated as well as how the school might be a contributor to recurring disenfranchisement and subsequent grief. My indoctrination as a teacher is exemplified in my commodification and the harm this ultimately has caused to and through me.

Recognizing that there are hidden rules that support the superstructure of education has been grievous (Tong & Botts, 2018). Schools “function to reproduce, circulate, and enforce particular ideologies” (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017, p. 11). Within this context, ideologies are “a system of ideas that function to legitimate existing power relations, expressed in dominant hegemony” (Apple, 2019; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017, p. 11). This is vital to capitalism and the controlling of the proletariat (Knopp, 2012). Schools are where we learn our place in society; it is where we learn our subjugation (Knopp, 2012). Teachers are caught in the patriarchal web; their labor, bodies, and sustenance are all state-controlled (Apple, 2008).
According to Knopp (2012), by understanding the impact our economy has on our institutions, we can begin to better understand how schools function in their reproduction and control of resources. Most importantly, schools, where domination discourses are reproduced, may also be places where resistance discourse is promoted (Gioux, 1988). Change may be located in the middle by occupying the contradiction, yet seeing this requires revolutionary practices (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Freire, 1970; Knopp, 20012). Acknowledging and naming these perpetuation throughout my career and subsequent renderings, however, has been most liberating. See Table 2.
Table 2: Woman teacher as a commodity: Hidden rules

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Body as commodity

I have felt both dehumanized and sexualized throughout my life, but I never expected to endure this treatment as a teacher. This was disorienting initially, but over the years, I became desensitized despite the continuance of the treatment. I was objectified by design (Awasthi, 2017). Throughout my renderings, I refer to myself as a machine, going through the motions of producing (Apple, 2008, 2019; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Knopp, 2012).

Night after night, I found myself with a stack of endless papers and a to-do list that never got done. I felt more like a machine and less like a teacher.

When facing objectification by a student, I sought my male principal’s support. Harassment by students was not something I was prepared to face nor had ever witnessed (Blase, 2009; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012; Nauman et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018; Terry, 1998). He advised me to dress differently to avoid provoking the student, to avoid further objectification. I internalized this message and began proliferating the profession with the message myself.

Encountering and rejecting sexual advances from an administrator, I faced numerous consequences as discussed in “Good Old Boys.” My body was not only objectified by the principal in this case but faced targeted exclusion by those within the community. This was my first experience with workplace bullying and harassment at the hands of a principal and other teachers (Blase, 2009; Nauman et al., 2019; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012; Santoro, 2018).

Professional codes of conduct throughout the teaching profession focus on how bodies are represented and adorned with an insistence on professional appearance which
is highly subjective, controlling the bodies of both teachers and students (Cumming-Potvin, 2023). My choice in clothing had little impact on my experiences with Educator Targeted Bullying (ETB) nor did professional attire protect Ms. Johnson from the story “Mission Impossible” from being teased by her colleagues for her eclectic tastes (Blase, 2009; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012; Terry, 1998). Teaching is an embodied, somatic, vulnerable experience (Palmer, 2017). Our bodies are tools for performance, pedagogy, and patriarchy (Hochschild, 2003b; hooks, 1994). My body has and always will be an object in the patriarchal spaces I traverse (hooks, 1994). Supporting the superstructure with our bodies requires committing to the ideologies of how women teachers’ bodies should appear (Mitchell, 1971). This ensures our subjugation as we are in a constant cycle of trying to fit into the standard of beauty that is professionally and economically sanctioned (Johnson, 2015).

**Competence as commodity**

Within the hierarchy of schools, teacher competence is constantly being debated and evaluated (Knopp, 2012; Russom, 2012). Measures to ensure teacher competence are in place, including standardized testing for licensure, impact on student learning, and evaluation by administrators or students (Danielson, 2007). Along with myriad competencies to ensure teacher excellence and effectiveness are unspoken expectations that I noted throughout my renderings regarding assimilating to middle class cultural norms (Apple, 2008, 2019; Danielson, 2007; Knopp, 2012). Trying to appear competent while drawing from an empty well of middle-class experiences, I felt powerless and alienated. I began “passing” to be accepted by others at the expense of myself (Marvasti, 2006). I had to fake it to make it.
I recall Marvasti (2006) who investigates stigmatization, bringing awareness to “passing” where those stigmatized might try to fit into the critical cultures, assuming their look/behaviors/etc., in my case their tongue, in an effort to avoid detrimental treatment and alienation.

Additionally, I felt scrutinized with my competency from judgements about how I talked to my mispronunciation of words. When my daughter’s addiction became public knowledge, I felt my competence on full display with disparaging remarks and concerns regarding my parenting. How could a good teacher have a drug addict for a daughter? These experiences likewise had alienating, harmful impacts as documented throughout my renderings.

Skills as commodity

Because of the feminization of teaching, teachers have lost control of their practice through deskilling (Apple, 1988; Freedman, 1988; Runte & Runte, 2007). Apple (1988) asserts, “It is not a random fact that one of the most massive attempts at rationalizing curricula and teaching had as its target a group of teachers who were largely women" (p. 103). The deskilling of teachers involves “the loss of skill or craft or traditional knowledge” along with dehumanizing efforts that may come in waves to remove teachers from creativity and connection (Lawn & Ozga, 1988, p. 90). Deskilling recurs throughout my renderings, both in K-12 and higher education, and it had detrimental effects, including perpetuating powerlessness and alienation (Apple, 2008, 2019; Runte & Runte, 2007). Controlling my skills, restricting my production, severed me from what made me a teacher, and this severance resulted in disenfranchised grief (Apple, 2008; Doka, 2002; Knopp, 2012).
Even when invited to share in curriculum mapping, I felt targeted and even violated. We were not simply being told what to do and how to do it, we were being told how to think and even faced scolding and teasing. Meeting after meeting, I remember administrators attempting to rally the troops with battle cries of “We’re all in this together,” but I felt more alienated by this language, realizing that I would never be able to drink the Kool-Aid they were serving.

Examining pay increases over the decades for faculty in addition to the disparities between administrators and faculty, we are not in this together (Campos, 2021).

I felt a deep sense of grief festering within me as, year after year, another change resulted in more control over my creativity and skills. Deskilling is noted in the literature for having an alienating impact (Apple, 2008, 2019; Runte & Runte, 2007).

Proletarianization enforces and controls the skills of the proletariat by means of deskilling through concerted efforts to remove and undermine the creative endeavors, skills, and intelligence of the proletariat (Apple, 2008, 2019; Knopp, 2012; Runte & Runte, 2007; Russom, 2012). We become divided from our craft, the fruits of our labor, and eventually lose the ability to create, perpetuating dependency and alienation (Apple, 2008; Runte & Runte, 2012). This separation is what ultimately keeps us silent in our silos. We remain focused on the work, caught in “we’re all in this together” conditioning, yet we fail to ever develop class consciousness because we are too busy producing and reproducing (Apple, 2012; Hoyle, 1969; Lambirth, 2010; Manstead, 2018).
Words as commodity

Remaining silent was a protection mechanism I began using in adolescence. Silence is my narrative inheritance, a product of patriarchy (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Goodall, 2005).

Instead of speaking up, I spoke down, scribbling my feelings and thoughts on lines, turning the pages before my words could be found. Leaving them in hiding to fend for themselves.

As a woman teacher, I have found that silence is pervasive and has both resulted from and contributed to my disenfranchised grief (Kuhn, 1989). Kuhn’s discussion on “communal silence” frames my experiences from a personal, pedagogical, and professional perspective (1989; p. 244). Silence was an offering to the males in my life, in service to the patriarchy. When I needed to challenge, question, or tell secrets, I remembered my place and remained silent (Boylorn, 2015). I was not alone in my silence.

According to Gilligan and Snider (2018), induction into patriarchy begins with our induction into the sisterhood of silence where our voice is sacrificed. This offering begins our walk with loss, the loss of our voice (Gilligan & Snider, 2018).

We inherently knew our place.

“We are they,” became a tool for silencing our words, especially if they challenged administrators. Although I was uncomfortable with this notion, I did not realize how indoctrinating this language was and how with each chant, each iteration, our words were being controlled.
We most certainly were not they whose salaries quadrupled the most experienced classroom teachers, yet some teachers scribbled these words on their whiteboards as daily reminders of their indoctrination into a system that severed their worth.

The teaching profession, in my experience, perpetuates a culture of silence where sharing our stories, difference, insights, and struggles is often not supported (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Kauffman, 2002; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Runte & Runte, 2007). Hierarchies are designed to support the superstructure; any deviation is treasonous and fails to support allegiance to the ideologies that keep control of the proletariat, in this case, teachers (Apple, 2012; Brännmark, 2021; Knopp, 2012; Mitrano, 1978). Reminders about the “pecking order” were frequent, a hidden code of silence and control of words. One of my principals took his concerns to the faculty meeting, an attempt to control the words of his teachers.

“If you are struggling, you come to me. I don’t need to hear about issues from a parent or another teacher,” he commanded in meetings. “Your job is to teach the kids. I get paid to deal with the big stuff,” he would feign encouragement of the troops.

I also began finding my work on committees was futile. My words would be censored, revised, edited, reducing them to their words. Also, when opportunities to serve on committees that do make decisions are limited, silencing may be covert, but nonetheless, words are controlled (Apple, 2008; Knopp, 2012).

Throughout my renderings, silence, the controlling of words, is both institutionally and internally sanctioned (Apple, 2008; Kuhn, 1989). Self-silencing was a
consequence of disenfranchisement and powerlessness, a most harmful perpetuation (Harris, 2010; Kuhn, 1989; Seeman, 1959).

I am owning that I remained silent in circumstances where I should have spoken up. I allowed louder voices to drown mine out.

**Behavior as commodity**

Professionalism is a key process in teacher education programs and training, but with a Marxist feminist lens, it is a process of dictation and dominance in middle-class ideology, with teachers serving as “functionaries” of the state, assuming responsibility for the “social and cultural reproduction of capitalism” (Lawn & Ozga, 1988, p. 83). Professionalism has become another aspect by which teachers’ bodies and practices are evaluated, controlled, and conditioned by the upper echelons of the hierarchies (Apple, 2012; Ozga, 1988). My indoctrination in professionalism has been evident throughout my renderings but most profound with efforts to deskill and the policing that came with it (Blase, 2009).

*The classroom was losing its sacredness. This type of policing, lording over the ladies, at the hands of administrators was intimidating and, at times, harassing (Blase, 2009).*

The “pecking order” dictated behavior as well. Seeking advice or opinions beyond our school gatekeepers was not always appreciated and needed to be approved before sharing. Controlling not only my words but with whom I could discuss concerns stifled my ability to make meaning of my experiences within the school. What began as an attempt to better understand how an ELL student might need special education services became a hostile encounter with a principal as rendered in “Mission Impossible.”
Time as a commodity

Intensification has been evident throughout my disenfranchised experiences with teaching. Intensification is serving beyond the job as well increasing duties and expectations of the job without due compensation (Apple, 1988, 2019). Intensification is ghost-like; gradual additions and services become institutionalized (Apple, 2008). I also noticed that the busier we were with increasing demands, the more divided we were (Apple, 2008; Ingersoll, 2007, 2011; Knopp, 2012; Love, 2019). “Whatever it takes” is symbolic throughout my renderings, a battle cry for going above and beyond, never questioning, just serving.

I have lived and taught through concerted intensification, both K-12 and higher education (Apple, 2008). Class sizes increase, course loads increase, workload expectations increase, yet pay remains stagnant, hallmarks of intensification (Apple, 2008).

Intensification does not end there but for many women, including myself, continues in the home (Chun et al., 2020; Cobble, 2004; Dean et al., 2021; Folbre, 2001; Gimenez, 2005; Hochschild, 2003b). This was felt most keenly as caregiving roles intensified with my children, grandchildren, and ailing family members during COVID but has recurred throughout my renderings.

As the designated caregiver for my family, I have also assumed caregiving for family members in need. This included ten years of caring for my dad. Caring for others, oftentimes, came at the expense of caring for myself (Sullivan & Miller, 2015). This intensification of caregiving resulted in powerlessness and alienation through both detachment and compulsivity (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959).
I, however, was depleted and felt like I too was dying. I was finishing up coursework while preparing to teach my own courses. I had to also render care to my own family.

Emotions as a commodity

Emotional labor

A review of the literature found that both emotional labor and repression were predominant in teaching, especially centered upon teacher disenfranchised grief (Case et al., 2017; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). My experiences were likewise disenfranchising, alienating, and grievous.

Controlling the emotional labor of women teachers, hierarchies instill expectations of care that go beyond the instructional duties required for competence in teaching, perpetuating boundarylessness (Apple, 2008; Chun et al., 2020; Dean et al., 2021; Funk et al., 2018; Harris, 2010; Knopp, 2012). Cognitive labor, when combined with emotional expectations, perpetuates load stacking where one is rendered powerless in the face of the many demands (Dean et al., 2021). For me, this type of conditioning mimicked burnout and feeling overwhelmed, but in actuality, it was loss sustained by repression of my emotions that needed tending (Jotkoff, 2022).

A mantra from my early days of teacher preparation remained ingrained within me. It's not enough to teach a child, you must love them. The emotional labor of teachers is an ingrained, cultural expectation (Kariou et al., 2021).

There is an understood code of conduct for teachers where adherence to emotional norms is expected. For the woman teacher, mothering, in addition to teaching, is ingrained in the profession (Dean et al., 2021). Hochschild (1979) compares emotional
laborers to method actors who must remain in character at the discretion and direction of institutions where they perform. Teaching is an embodied, often performative profession, and women teachers have a daily curtain call in the classroom. Not only was I powerless to the cognitive labor demands and deskilling, but even my emotional labor was scrutinized. Throughout my renderings, I inadvertently utilized metaphors that compared teaching to acting or gaming and referred to myself as masked and veiled, a player on the field and an actor on the stage to demonstrate my alienation and powerlessness in the profession.

This began a long career in acting (Hochschild, 2003b). I felt an inauthenticity within me where my true self and the image of the good teacher blurred (Hochschild, 2003b).

**Emotional repression**

Repressing my emotions was how I learned to protect myself and others, aligning my practice with societal norms regarding teacher behavior (Case et al., 2017). Being strong required repression, especially during difficult times. Falling apart was not an option if I wanted to be perceived as competent (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021). But this repression came with a price where splitting myself resulted in alienation and subsequent grief.

Attempting to be one person in one space and another in a different space fragment not only our stories but our selfhoods- this splitting perpetuates alienation and subsequent grief (Carter, 2002; Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959).
Throughout my career, I have heard, “Put your big girl panties on.” Although highly offensive, I never considered questioning this lingo. The message I received was life goes on and you need to move on with it. This pervasive message is recursive, indoctrinating women in an unrealistic notion that big girl panties might suffocate our pain while hiding our flaws. I have yet to find a pair that pull off this enormous feat.

*My oldest is a high school teacher; her stories were my stories. The cycle repeats itself despite the distance between her experiences and mine. Rendering an encounter with me about a classroom incident, she said, “I just need to put my big girl panties on and toughen up.”*

**RQ3: How can an experienced teacher heal through her disenfranchised grief?**

This question required the assistance of transformation as individuation with an emphasis on grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998). RQ1 features the activities of discernment, receptivity and recognition. RQ 2 features the activity of recognition while RQ3 features experiences with grief work.

Before this study, I had a limited awareness of grief, and when I began researching and talking about grief, I found many others shared my confusion and avoidance of the subject. Grief is complex and is highly individualized (Devine, 2017; Doka, 2002; Neimeyer, 2005, 2006, 2016). No grief experience is the same; therefore, I address this question with this disclaimer (Kumar, 2005; Rando, 1993).

Another disclaimer is that grief does not always guarantee transformation (Devine, 2017). I have experienced many losses that did not result in illumination and healing (Devine, 2017). My renderings offer evidence of questioning, pining, and despairing over losses that I still grieve. Describing grief in delineated stages while
pushing a transformative agenda can perpetuate narratives that espouse superficial healing. Claiming that teaching or writing will heal the hurts brought on by extensive generational and patriarchal disenfranchisement perpetuates an ideology that is patriarchal in its origins and harmful in its effects (Apple, 2008, 2019; Knopp, 2012).

In her research and work with Western ways of grieving, Devine asserts, “Grieving people are met with impatience precisely because they are failing the cultural storyline of overcoming adversity” (2017, p. 34). Grief work and grieving do not guarantee arrival at transformation or the crafting of a hero’s tale; however, the journey may prove healing for those able and willing to sojourn. The name grief work itself suggests that one must toil, working their way through grief, to earn healing. My ability to grieve within the acceptable guidelines will usher healing that is prescriptive, grief by numbers, if only I do the work (Devine, 2017). My healing, however, may violate society’s notion of overcoming grief in that healing is not a destination, and its circuitous pathway means that most of us are in a perpetual grief and healing cycle.

Patriarchy and capitalism, for now, are here to stay, and with their reign, women teachers will continue to face adversity and loss from these oppressive systems. Additionally, experienced women teachers will see seasons of cumulative grief within these oppressive systems. Connecting to our grief while detangling ourselves from strongholds takes courage, vulnerability, and hope and a willingness to work through our grief (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Neimeyer, 2005, 2006, 2016; Palmer, 2017; Scott, 1997).
Awakening: Transformation through grief work

Daring to grieve means that I am receptive to healing through my grief; I recognize my need to heal through acknowledgement and choice; and I take action through grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988). I am healing through learning. I am healing through teaching. I am healing through writing. I am healing through sharing. I am healing through, and that is the difference.

Healing takes effort; it too is work. This process began with discernment, receptivity and recognition, tuning in and taking note of my experiences with disenfranchised grief and exploring my own feelings of alienation and powerlessness that resulted.

Throughout my renderings, grief is evident, even when unacknowledged. Story after story, I entertained a multiplicity of losses and went through the motions of life, detaching myself, yet remnants remained.

Later renderings, “Mission Impossible” and “Blackbirds and Redbirds,” I began acknowledging my grief, awakening to its call, and transforming as a result.

Numbness and panic

Throughout my renderings, I faced many losses that forced me into a state of panic; going through the motions; pouring myself into caregiving or work; and detaching. In other studies that featured the disenfranchised grief of teachers, resuming routines, returning to normal, was encouraged (Case et al., 2017; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). This perpetuation kept me suspended in grief for extended periods of time, and with each new loss, I fell back into a state of numbness. Every loss I experienced, I used compulsive caregiving and detachment as tools to
manage my grief when in actuality these tools just prolonged it (Devine, 2017; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). This is where my powerlessness was most profound (Brooks et al., 2008; İnandı et al., 2018 et al., 2018; Seeman, 1959).

Trying to fit my grief into boxes, ensuring I pass through acceptably and quickly further disenfranchises my grief experiences (Doka, 2002; Harris, 2010). Healing through grief, I began giving myself permission to navigate the numbness at my own pace and my own way. Not all numbness is bad (Devine, 2017; Doka, 2002; Neimeyer, 2005, 2006, 2016). Teaching, writing, caregiving, and even detachment, at times, provided me with some sense of purpose during very challenging times (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Seeman, 1959). Acknowledging my suspension and avoidance, I began finding that the seemingly small act of naming my numbness began my grief work, and this acknowledgement provided me with pause and purpose. Naming numbness, for me, was my admission that whatever loss or disenfranchisement I discerned had caused me to grieve. This is not only where grief work begins, but it is also where healing is made possible.

In my initial days of writing autoethnographically and after many months of discernment, I acknowledged my disenfranchisement at the hands of many oppressors. This admission brought on a wave of grief that ushered numbness. I struggled writing through the experiences, finding myself riddled with emotions and resurging alienation. Rereading my renderings, I would sink into nothingness, feeling the powerlessness and loss all over again. This process took time to move beyond, but discerning my disenfranchisement, followed by navigating numbness through writing, reading, and discourse began my healing journey.
Pining and protest

Pining and protest were also prevalent throughout my renderings (Boyd & Myers, 1988). When facing harassment and accusations by a student; I protested only after a long walk with numbness. When leaving urban education for rural education; I pined for my students and the world I left behind. When faced with deskilling and being dressed down repeatedly in curriculum meetings, I protested by talking back, questioning others and myself.

Transitioning from panic and numbness to pining and protest is not a definitive move, but in my experience, slowly creeps into the numbness that loss often brings (Devine, 2017; Doka, 2002; Rando, 1993). For example, when I first faced deskilling, I pined for my previous creative endeavors and the joy teaching unleashed birthed. After some time, I began to protest through questioning curriculum and those pushing it. I also began seeing my own role in its delivery. Blazing within me, protest was the impetus for transformation.

In this space, I questioned myself primarily and how I might have prevented or ignored the loss. When faced with my daughter Luna’s addiction, I vehemently questioned my role in her addiction. When faced with sexual harassment by an administrator, I vehemently questioned my role in provoking him. When faced with harassment by a colleague at the university, I vehemently questioned my worth, my intellect, and my abilities. This was a space where reflexivity was noted as well as self-blame.

I pined my recognition and acknowledgement of losses. If only I could unsee. I pined speaking up when I protested. If only I could remain silent. I protested when I
pined. Writing autoethnographically, layering my accounts and experiences, allowed for this multiplicity of emotion and sense making, and spaces such as this provide room to heal (Poulos, 2013; Ronai, 1995).

When contemplating my disenfranchised grief, I see pining and protest as conduits for compulsivity (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). I believe I got stuck here when grieving some of my losses. For example, I questioned deskilling but remained stuck while implementing bad curriculum for several years. I looped between numbness, protest, and pining which was alienating. I protested in silence and in hostility (Boyd & Myers, 1988). But this looping was necessary for me at the time (Kumar, 2005).

**Disorganization and despair**

Disorganization and despair have been most profound in my grief experiences (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). When faced with Mr. Adams’ harassment, I found myself spiraling, and this came with total disorganization and dysfunction (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). My despair is evident in my grief response.

*I lost weight to the point I looked sick. Clogging the drains, my long, dark hair fell out in clumps. My head and stomach ached. My breasts leaked and even bled. I have since learned that when I grieve, my body responds by losing pieces of itself. Slowly, I disappear.*

I have found that my disorganization and despair do not function linearly but surface sporadically in response to loss and recurring losses (Devine, 2017). The fracturing of my voice as a result of patriarchal loss continues to be a source of despair (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). The dehumanization I experienced as white trash continues to be a source of great sadness (Freire, 1970; Isenberg, 2016). Acknowledging my perpetual
sources of sadness does not mean that I am broken or even depressed, I now realize that these are fissures that are a part of who I am. It is okay have memories, experiences, and states of being that make me sad (Devine, 2017).

As a culture, I have always felt that the appearance of wellness mattered, even when I was not well. I denied my despair despite its evidence all around me. I sent the message that grief is to be managed or simply ignored. I modeled skipping this stage of grief work all together because that is what I saw as modeled.

Making room for grief to be heard is noted in my final rendering “B

Writing autoethnographically through despair and talking with others, my seasoned guidance, has allowed me to speak my grief (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Doka, 2002; Neimeyer, 2005, 2006, 2016; Poulos, 2013). Speaking my grief has been vital in my healing work.

**Restabilization and reintegration**

The final stage of grief work is restabilization and reintegration (Boyd & Myers, 1988). This is where healing is made known through illuminations, healing, and transformations (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998; Scott, 1997). For me, it is seeing iterations of disenfranchisement, analyzing them, naming them, contemplating them, questioning them, and learning from them (Freire, 1970). It is awakening and moving forward in the lucidity of awareness.

*That year under the pines, I panicked, I protested, and despaired after months of discernment (Boyd & Myers, 1988). My reintegration came in the form of my exodus, subsequent graduate school, and illumination (Boyd & Myers, 1988).*
Although teaching has not healed me of the many hurts disenfranchisement has delivered, teaching has been a healing space for doing the healing work grief really requires. My healing has come in the form of continued learning. I seek stories that speak healing to me (hooks, 1994). These stories inspire the trajectory of my own. My healing has come from women warriors who soldiered through lives before me, sharing in their epigenetic battles that I never had to fight. My healing has come from writing my way through a lifetime of disenfranchisement and grief. Taking time to remember, I find pieces of myself returning.

_I am not healed, but I am healing. This work is my commitment to continuously learn and transform on my journey to healing, one that may inspire the legacies of mine and others’ daughters._

Reintegration is noted throughout my renderings, but, most notably, in my pedagogical acts. When I named my numbness, shared in my grief experiences with my students, I found these acts allowed for not only vulnerability but authenticity. Returning to myself, daring to grieve, is an act of courage that, for me, required a lifting of the mask.
Discussions

Returning to the significance of this study, I proposed that experienced teachers could be leaving the profession because they are grieving and that their grief has failed to be acknowledged. Study after study featuring teacher disenfranchised grief captured their grief as it pertained to student loss; however, few studies highlighted more complex contributions (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). I sought to study my experiences with disenfranchised grief and transformative learning through a Marxist feminist lens with the purpose of voicing an experience that might encourage others to voice their own and inspire research in this area to pursue new directions.

Theoretical implications

Both Marxist feminism and Dirkx’s (1998) four lenses of transformative learning have served as guideposts throughout my examination of disenfranchised grief. Their implications have been vast. Applying Dirkx’s four lenses of transformative learning provided for holistic examination, a convergence, of transformative learning experiences and how developmental transformation led to individuation (1998). Marxist feminism both widened and sharpened my vision, allowing for a critical review of the experienced teacher as a commodity with an examination of generational and patriarchal disenfranchisement and their impact. Implications significant to this study include accessibly, silencing, passing, and comedication. Because I wrote an autoethnography, I divulge implications that are both personal, applicable to the Self, and cultural, applicable to the social spheres under study.
Marxist feminism

Before this theory’s utilization, I did not fully understand how gender and class have affected me personally, professionally, and pedagogically, and I rarely questioned the hidden rules despite the grief I often experienced through their implementation (Harris, 2010). Marxist feminism handed me both a telescope and a magnifying glass, expanding and sharpening my view, guiding me to finally see what had been there along, supporting me in naming my grief, and, in doing so, beginning the work of healing. Most importantly, however, by assuming a Marxist feminist stance, I connected deeply to the experienced women teachers serving students daily with whom I have journeyed and the women from the mire, those who occupy my lifeworld, who placed a lamp at my feet, who need healing too. It is my turn to shed light on the paths of others. Shedding light is theoretical implication, but this requires clearing the pathway through accessibility. My struggle may embody their struggle.

Accessibility

I faced scrutiny from well-meaning others when I mentioned utilizing Marxist feminism as part of my theoretical framework, mainly due to negative connotations surrounding Marxism itself (Heilbroner, 1980). Even I initially worried that writing from such a radical theoretical perspective might result in my professional exclusion in spaces where conservative norms are expected, especially in educational environments here in the South. Fear of the theory and confusion regarding its tenets may be to blame for its exclusion when considering disenfranchisement in general as well disenfranchised grief in the literature (Doka, 1989, 2002, 2016). Marxist feminism simply allows for the consideration of both gender and class when examining problems and phenomenon
pertaining to women and class is a hope of this work. Let us not demonize a theory because of its name.

Throughout my renderings and review of the literature, Marxist feminism served as grounding, a safe place to center experiences. For the profession of teaching, Marxist feminism has the potential to provide teachers, specifically experienced teachers, with scaffolds of understanding of their own disenfranchisement. Research in the disenfranchised grief of teachers failed to capture that women are restrained by patriarchy, and some are further subjugated by class relegation (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Their grief will always be disenfranchised as they filter loss through these intersectionalities (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). This recognition is critical to conscientization, empowerment, and transformative learning (Freire, 1970). Instead of viewing the theory as radicalizing, teachers might grow into the theory as humanizing (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017). Awareness of the sources of our dehumanization and disenfranchisement, including generational and patriarchal origins as well as our commodification through hidden rules, might provide elucidation that leads to discernment and illumination (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Fear of the theory might be to blame for its exclusion, therefore, limiting our ability to name our oppressors in the profession, silencing us through our lack of awareness.

Yet, misunderstanding the theory could also be credited to its convolution. I chose to write an autoethnography because of its versatility and readability based on my targeted audience (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008; Poulos, 2021). However, as I dove deeper into my theoretical framework, I realized making Marxist feminism comprehensible to teachers was the real feat considering that most of the literature based
on Marxism, including the works of Marx himself, are incredibly complex and challenging, filled with contradictions and abstractions (Allman, 2001; Bannerji, 1995; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Haug, 2015; Heilbroner, 1980; Knopp, 2012; Mojab, 2015). Storying individual experiences allows for connection, a most sacred aspect of humanity (Poulos, 2013). Marxism is noted as a theory that critiques division and individualism, calling for class consciousness, yet conscientization begins with the individual (Freire, 1970). Storying our individual human experiences could lead to recognition of our deepest connections of the collective (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Grief may be experienced by individuals differently, but grief is universally experienced by humanity (Doka, 2016; Neimeryer, 2016; Rando, 1993). Marxist feminism should consider how stories might humanize the theory and its conception and connection to class consciousness.

I chose to focus my work on alienation and its subconstruct powerlessness because these were most comprehensible and representative of the personal, professional, and pedagogical innerworkings of an experienced woman teacher (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Seeman, 1959). Capturing both alienation and powerlessness through my renderings, manifesting through compulsive caregiving and detachment, humanized the theory, its implications, and my experiences (Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Specifically, stories that evoke and connect us to the stories of others with similar experiences have a way of inspiring our own stories to speak (Poulos, 2013). It is ultimately about human connection, and stories, especially ones that bear resemblance to our own, have a way of doing exactly that (Brewster & Zimmerman, 2022; Poulos, 2013). Humanizing our stories, giving life to theory, is an implication of this work.
This study highlighted several conditions that dehumanized an experienced woman teacher, including silencing, passing, and commodification, perpetuating further alienation. These subconstructs should likewise be considered in Marxist feminism and used as a lens to study the experiences of women teachers, specifically, experienced women teachers.

**Silencing**

Taking a Marxist feminist perspective allowed for talking back in a profession rooted in patriarchy, seething with silence (Apple, 2008, 2019; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). Silencing is seen through pervasive hidden rules in the school as well as through generational conditioning (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Harris, 2010). Breaking these codes of silence, exposing hidden rules of patriarchy, required a revolutionary theory (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Breaking free from the cult of education is daring to grieve. Achieving class consciousness as a profession begins with stories being rendered, especially those of abusive practices (Blase, 2009; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012; Nauman et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018; Terry, 1998). Educator Targeted Bullying (ETB) is a reality for many educators, yet experiences remain locked behind closed doors, trapped within the very walls in which they occur (Blase, 2009; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012; Nauman et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018; Terry, 1998). More stories must be told to awaken our profession. Awareness of the individual’s experience might fuel the recognition of the collective, igniting conscientization (Apple, 2008; Freire, 1970).

Moreover, the reality is that the profession of teaching does not always support the rendering of stories, the telling of truths as we have experienced them, and I do worry that some teachers may not be ready to consume the knowing this theory unveils. It is
painful, even grievous, to acknowledge disenfranchisement, and most of us have been conditioned to not see it, let alone, talk about it (Apple, 2008, 2019; Kuhn, 1989). I felt treasonous in my renderings, knowing that I was going rogue in speaking up. Communal silencing is cultural and symptomatic of an oppressive profession (Apple, 2008; Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Kauffman, 2002; Kuhn, 1989; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Runte & Runte, 2007). Speaking up, telling our stories in the full recognition of disenfranchisement offers a space for teachers to heal (Brewster & Zimmerman, 2022). Calling teachers to situate themselves in the healing waters this theory has to offer requires a long walk to get there; one that some may never be ready to encounter.

This research uncovered that students can be the source of our disenfranchised grief, yet this is not represented in the literature. Never in profession developments or teacher training have I encountered training for this most likely of offense. Reading Freire (1970), I fully immersed myself in the knowledge that teachers can be oppressors; I knew them, and, at times, I was one of them. Up until my own investigations, I found limited stories of oppressed teachers. Most of my searches rendered stories of teachers oppressing students, not the other way around, and stories of oppressive administration or other teachers are even scarcer (Blase, 2009; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012; Nauman et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018; Terry, 1998). Yet, every semester, I counsel teachers who face bullying from students, parents, and administration who question their choice to teach, who grieve through their disenfranchisement. Lifting the veil of silence, initiating discourse, is an implication I believe this work has the potential to incite.
**Passing**

An undeveloped class consciousness is undeniably to blame for my own feelings of nonpossession when it comes to class identity and subsequent interactions within the middle class (Apple, 2012; Hoyle, 1969; Lambirth, 2010; Manstead, 2018). Marvasti (2006) detailed his own experiences with passing, attempting to assimilate to cultural norms despite the lack of cultural currency, and the harm this splitting perpetuates. We become two people, a splitting of self, to survive (Bochner, 2018). The teaching profession perpetuates splitting, leaving life at the door, performing (Palmer, 2017). Removing the mask, teaching from our authentic selves is problematic when cultural norms are not shared with the dominant culture.

Applying a Marxist feminist lens to my research and renderings allowed for a deeper, more comprehensive examination of the lived experiences of an experienced woman teacher from poverty. This theory permitted the weaving in of adverse childhood and adult experiences, including trauma and abuse, and their continued impact on me personally, professionally, and pedagogically. For the multitude of women from poverty who have chosen teaching as a profession, I believe their voices, their hidden grief, may be found in this work as well. They may find healing in these renderings and findings, connecting through story, but most importantly, healing through theory, empowering them to render their own stories (hooks, 1994). Most importantly, considering how the teaching profession perpetuates passing as part of its professional codes of conduct is an extension that I would like to see further explored with Marxist feminism. Widening the net for the exploration of the perpetuation of passing and its harmful impact on teachers is worthy of notice (Marvasti, 2006).
Commodification

The commodification of an experienced woman teacher included several findings that dehumanized, objectified, minimized, and deskilled her in her personal, professional, pedagogical spheres, furthering her alienation. Marxist feminism, along with insider experiences, provided a lens to explore the hidden rules that perpetuated alienation and powerlessness through commodification. Although the literature on Marxist feminism discusses workers as commodities, this research captures how commodification was actually experienced and its implications.

Objectification by students, parents, administrators, and colleagues is not heavily represented in the literature, yet what is mentioned fails to capture women teachers’ experiences with body shaming, sexual harassment, and teasing (Blase, 2009; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012; Terry, 1998). Widening the lens, interrogating a women teacher’s experiences with abusive practices in both the home and the workplace, Marxist feminism has a place here. Women teachers are often mothers, wives, daughters, and come from various intersectionalities. This work expanded the lens of experience to include objectification in personal, professional, and pedagogical spheres.

Further, deskilling removes teachers from not only their creative capabilities but the fruits of their labor (Apple, 2008, 2019; Runte & Runte, 2007). Teachers become technicians, delivering curriculum with limited input regarding its creation and implementation. With national efforts being made to standardize curriculum and its implementation, teachers need to be aware of the harmful implications of deskilling, including its alienating effects (Apple, 2008, 2019; Runte & Runte, 2007). Marxist feminism has started the conversation, but this work has humanized the implications.
Transformative learning

When interrogating disenfranchisement, transformative learning provided insight and hope as I wrote my way through grief. Utilizing Dirkx’s four lenses, I was able to view my experiences with transformative learning holistically (Dirkx, 1998). Examining my renderings for transformative learning, I saw transformation as critical reflection; transformation as critical reflection; transformation as development; and transformation as individuation as converging and causative (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Daloz, 1999; Dirkx, 1998; Freire, 1970; Illeris, 2017; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1997, 2000). Finally, it took writing as inquiry to interrogate and name my experiences with transformative learning. Autoethnography may be a tool for transformative learning discoveries.

Convergence

An implication is viewing transformative learning through a multiplicity of lenses, allowing for overlapping and convergences. Exploring how transformative learning has provided a healing space in my disenfranchised grief journey resulted from all four lenses of transformational experiences, culminating in discernment and grief work, being applied (Dirkx, 1998). Taking one lens limits the potential of a theory that serves as an impetus for transformative learning and development in adults. Applying multiple lenses allows for the complexities and perplexities that life and aging bring.
Causative

Examining transformative learning from more than one lens allowed for complexities and overlapping to emerge through storying lived experiences. Critical reflection is an important step to attain consciousness-raising (Dirkx, 1998; Freire, 1970). But, noteworthy to my research, is that as we age and grow in experiences and education, we may find transformations in wisdom, but most importantly, transformation through discernment. Developmentally, I was not ready for transformation as individuation in my early years as a teacher. This was the impetus for my focus on the experienced teacher. It took a culmination of wisdom, age, education, and experience to dare to grieve.

I saw overlapping, spaces where it was difficult to discern a rational versus an extrarational transformation in the research and within my own experiences. I attempted to detail how each lens of transformative learning proved pivotal in my discernment and grief work through individuation (Boyd & Myers, 1988). A connection that I made in my research is that transformation as critical reflection, consciousness-raising, and development were needed to experience transformation as individuation (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1997, 1998). For me, I returned to the disorienting dilemma, the loss, the disenfranchisement, to determine the transformative learning I experienced, but individuation was the culmination of previous transformations.

Writing as revelation

An additional implication that I noted is that I could not see transformative learning until I reflected deeply upon my renderings through discernment and grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Poulos, 2013). Autoethnography itself became a tool for examination of transformative learning as well as transformative through individuation,
an unexpected outcome (Poulos, 2013). Writing was a conduit for examination and an impetus for transformation (Ellis, 1991; Poulos, 2013).

Another implication is adding to the research of disenfranchised grief and transformative learning. My review of the literature failed to locate any examples of persons linking disenfranchised grief and transformative learning through grief work through individuation (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Those experiencing disenfranchised grief might find hope in transformative education and subsequent grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988). My study provides an example of how others daring to grieve might find connection, guidance, and strength to speak their grief and find healing in the sharing. This is significant and will hopefully serve as an impetus for others.

**Practical implications**

From the inception of this topic, I saw teacher education, adult education, and professional development for teachers as a necessity, empowering practitioners with knowledge and tools for discernment and grief work. Teachers have a critical role here. From building grief awareness with a focus on disenfranchised grief to supporting teachers in compassionate, healing practices, including contemplative pedagogy, teacher educators and administration must be responsive to the grief of teachers. This requires a paradigm shift that begins with recognizing that we have a need.
**Grief-awareness education**

Trauma-informed education is being heralded as a solution to the struggles our students are facing, yet teachers have been traumatized, too (Stokes, 2022). What of their trauma? Understanding the complexities of trauma is of great value when it comes to providing inclusive education, but, important to this study, it is critical to unraveling the origins of disenfranchised grief of teachers. Taking it a step further, we need to consider grief-awareness education that incorporates healing practices for our both our teachers and students.

**Attunement**

Returning to my purpose, empowering teachers with an accessible, representative methodology that allows for connecting, sense-making, and transforming through disenfranchised grief was originally my motivation when I began this project (Adams et al., 2015; Doka, 2002; Poulos, 2021; Rowling, 1995). Experienced teachers, in particular, need tools to meet them where they are in their development, tools that empower their creativity and cultivate their ability to do transformative work instead of caging their skills, atrophying an entire profession.

Although critical reflection still has a place in their development, professionally, experienced teachers need to be guided through discernment and equipped for grief work (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Mezirow, 1990). Attunement begins our work to discern our experiences. Journaling and documenting encounters that have caused discomfort or disease would be a place to begin conducting inner dialogue and subsequent writing (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 1998; Poulos, 2013, 2021). During this time, memory mining regarding experiences with losses could be attended to through journaling (Prend, 1997).
Beginning with discomfort regarding an encounter, tuning into one’s emotional responses, is how we become attuned to our disenfranchised grief.

Attunement can also be cultivated through tuning into the hidden rules in our homes and schools that silence, subjugate, or sever us from our worth. It is building our awareness to our losses and understanding that these losses might perpetuate grief responses. It is paying attention and taking notes.

**Acknowledgement**

Once we become attuned to our grief, our disenfranchisement, we need a place to process it. Writing autoethnography can serve as a space to sift and sort through the struggles, unearthing and unleashing our painful experiences, and a site to heal (Ellis, 1991; Poulos, 2013). Writing alone will not cultivate our awareness of disenfranchisement.

Acknowledgement requires a commitment to hurting and healing. Recognizing disenfranchised grief, in my experiences, required revolutionary revisioning that called for substantial unlearning. Increasing awareness of disenfranchised grief and its manifestation in our patriarchal society, including the harm it perpetuates, is crucial when it comes to grief work and healing, but this type of unlearning requires a willingness to dive into critical theories and revolutionary learning (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Freire, 1970; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). This has taken years for me to uncover within myself, but autoethnography provided the conduit for a reflexive turn and introspective examination (Bochner, 2016, 2018; Poulos, 2021). From a personal angle, I see where generational and patriarchal grief both have had adverse impacts not only upon ancestors, but their impact can be traced through my mother, myself, and my daughters. Owning
this might shift the trajectory so that my granddaughters do not get caught in the snares of subjugation. Consuming critical literature and critical autoethnography fueled my awareness and birthed my acknowledgement. Teachers can likewise be empowered through autoethnography and a commitment to revolutionary learning (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Poulos, 2013).

My acknowledgement of disenfranchised grief grew from my doing autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015; Poulos, 2013). Discernment was not instant; it was cultivated through crafting renderings and creative ponderings (Dirkx, 2001). From journaling to rendering stories of practice, teaches might find, as I did, dialectical connections and relationships that have both hurt and healed them personally, professionally, and pedagogically. Teachers might find the writing of their stories both disturbing and healing (Brewster & Zimmerman, 2022).

For example, acknowledging the perpetuation of harm within schools by administrators, teachers, parents, and students has been illuminating, but acknowledging my own role in harm’s perpetuation has been grievous, a most necessary lesson that I needed to learn and write through. I needed to both write of my experiences and read of my experiences. Returning to my own words helped me see what I could not see prior to writing autoethnographically. This process incited introspective reflexivity.

For example, writing through grievous harassment and abuses, I began turning inward and conversing with myself regarding my perpetuation and participation in perpetuating harm. I fully expected to see myself as the mastermind of my misery, yet introspective reflexivity softened and sharpened my view. Unlike surface level reflections I had completed before that always centered on my faults, I began to see things
differently through the application of a critical lens. I did not see self-disenfranchisement as significant as I saw social disenfranchisement as the sole perpetuator (Rowling, 1995). Disenfranchising myself is the result of social disenfranchisement.

This realization served as a springboard into Educator Targeted Bullying (ETD). More work must be done to bring awareness to Educator Targeted Bullying and its alienating, disenfranchising impact (Blase, 2009; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012; Terry, 1998). Storying our experiences is only the beginning when it comes to inciting change. We need spaces to do this interrogative work. We need time to learn, process, and grieve. Autoethnography provided a space to discern these experiences through storytelling.

Awakening

Grief work is all about awakening (Boyd & Myers, 1988). This does not mean that grief work results in cataclysmic transformations, but it does mean that we are awakened to the grief we are experiencing. Once we have acknowledged our grief, awakening to the grief that this acknowledgement brings requires connection, both to ourselves and others. Seasoned guidance has a place here (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Teachers need seasoned guidance, especially where grief is concerned. Counselors, administrators, and even other teachers could serve in this sacred role. Ensuring our schools have compassionate others who can help enfranchise grievers is vital (Boyd & Myers, 1988). Healing circles might also be an option for schools seeking to be sites of restoration (Case et al., 2017). We need spaces to connect to one another and validate our experiences. Teachers are grieving, and they need one another to heal.

This is also a time to talk to ourselves about our evolution. To do this, I took drives, long walks, and began videoing my grief work ponderings. This requires
commitment to a practice of not only grief work but healing work. This is not to be confused with self-care. This is healing work, a change in how we see ourselves and our work in the world. This begins our conscientization (Freire, 1970).

Women teachers need time to grieve. Schools, for example, need to review their policies to ensure that grief has a place of importance (Doka, 2002; Harris, 2010). Pervasive grieving rules need to be discussed and reconsidered with faculty participating in their reconstruction (Case et al., 2017; Harris, 2010). We have to get comfortable with asking for what we need.

Acceptance

From attunement and acknowledgement to awakening, grief work may acquiesce to healing work. Teachers need to be reassured here. When I first began this research, I remember saying that I wanted to write about the healing qualities of teaching, how the classroom can cultivate contemplation and connection, quenching our thirst for knowledge while feeding our souls with compassion. I knew this was possible because I had been a part of such healing spaces, both as a teacher and a learner. I spent a few years researching contemplative practices and began their implementation both as a solitary practice as well as a classroom practice. Nestled within a few of the renderings are episodes where contemplative practice served as the impetus for transformation. Acknowledging my grief following my dad’s passing inspired story, reflection, discourse, and, ultimately, transformation. Contemplative literature through critical readings paved the way for reflection, compassion, empathy-building, and unlearning. These experiences were made possible by daring to grieve. Healing through teaching may seem idyllic given
the webs of disenfranchisement and commodification teachers are ensnared within; however, I choose to make space for it now.

**Additional considerations**

I divulged experiences with addiction and detailed what addiction has done to my family, especially, my child. I have not found the research or resources to support me in my understanding of addiction and how to best support my adult daughter. I have found that many families whom I have become acquainted with through my daughter’s addiction are often embarrassed or afraid to speak out about their experiences for fear of damaging their reputations and their child’s reputation. It brings shame, trauma, and grief to families, and few want to linger in the reality that addiction brings. It is a never-ending cycle. Once children get locked into the court system, fines and penalties add up, creating more reasons to continue using and avoid penalties. Laws need to be changed with a focus on rehabilitation and mandatory stays for drug arrests and hospitalizations. This is something I will continue to interrogate.

**Recommendations for future research**

Various studies featuring the disenfranchised grief of teachers zeroed in on teachers’ grief responses to student death and the disenfranchisement that often followed (Case et al., 2017; Hart & Garza, 2013; Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021; Rosenblatt, 2021; Rowling, 1995; Shalev et al., 2022). Returning to our objectification, teachers are viewed as commodities, emotional laborers, whose grief is only seen in the context of their service to students. There is little doubt that teachers who have lost students have grieved without acknowledgement, but what about their cumulative grief experiences? In my renderings, I grieved a multitude of losses throughout my professional walk that failed to
garner any recognition, not to mention the personal losses that amassed. Teachers are not machines, yet even the research treats them as such by limiting the complexity of teacher disenfranchised grief (Knopp, 2012). For example, interrogating Educator Targeted Bullying (ETB) experiences of women teachers with a lens of sexual, verbal, and physical harassment and assaults should be a priority. Examining the impact of personal and pedagogical grief on teachers’ wellbeing as well as digging deeper into reasons for attrition of our experienced teachers would serve research in teacher disenfranchised grief well.

More research is needed in examining the sources of disenfranchised grief for teachers because what has been grievous for me might not resonate with others. With lenses on generational and patriarchal disenfranishment as well as the commodification of teachers, it is my hope that others pick up the paragraph where I left off.

Autoethnographies by teachers, especially teachers with diverse intersectionalities would add to the voice of the disenfranchised grief of teachers. Collaborative autoethnographies between grieving teachers, especially, performative could include more voices, more diverse experiences through more accessible formats.

Examining the disenfranchised grief of teachers using other methodologies, such as grounded theory is highly advised. My findings are limited to my experiences. Casting a larger net, would be more inclusive of others’ stories and could offer a more comprehensive examination of this lived experience. From there, creating a guide for teachers, a pathway through grief might prove most helpful to the profession. Additionally, classrooms can be healing spaces when grief comes to call, but more research is needed to fully understand this (Castrellón al., 2021).
Throughout my work, I thought about how my renderings connected to other aspects of Marxist feminism. Continuing my examination, I would tap into Seeman’s other aspects of alienation, including meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement (1959). This examination might have allowed more experiences to emerge, experiences that need to be voiced. Additionally, contradiction played out in several instances throughout my renderings, especially regarding my complacency (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Tong & Botts, 2018)

**Conclusion**

This study examined the disenfranchised grief of an experienced teacher through autoethnography, a methodology that allows for sense-making and transforming through rendering stories about experiences from those living inside the culture under study (Adams et al., 2015; Poulos, 2013). Iterative reflexivity analysis was utilized, and significant iterations were dialectically examined and discussed in detail (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

This study addressed three research questions. As a process, (RQ1) how can an experienced teacher recognize her disenfranchised grief? As a purpose, (RQ2) how can disenfranchised grief perpetuate harm professionally, personally, and pedagogically? Finally, as a product, (RQ3) how can an experienced teacher heal through disenfranchised grief?

Each question was addressed using a Marxist feminist lens as well as Dirkx’s four lenses of transformation, including transformation as critical reflection; transformation as critical consciousness; transformation as development; and transformation as individuation (Dirkx, 1998; Tong & Botts, 2018).
I carry grief, patriarchal, professional, generational, personal, always will, but I carry her differently as my awareness grows and gives birth to illumination, transformation, and enlightenment. Each vignette represents my grief experiences, my body’s response, to disenfranchisement and loss. From the streets to the trenches to the skies, I lost and grieved, but I also transformed.
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