Co/Autoethnography as a Feminist Methodology

A Retrospective

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Abstract

In this chapter, we show how co/autoethnography, a self-study methodology, has enabled us to put into action feminist principles through concrete examples from a series of self-studies we have conducted over the past 17 years. Using salient features of co/autoethnography, we hope our readers will see the possibilities of advancing their understanding of their practice through feminist self-study methods and approaches. By providing a retrospective look at how co/

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autoethnography is a feminist self-study methodology, we examine the past and offer a glimpse into how self-study could expand to include more of a focus on examining teacher education practices through the intersectional lens of social justice. We begin the chapter with some history and background of how our methodology of co/autoethnography emerged within the context of self-study. After providing a definition, we illustrate its key tenets using narrative examples from past co/autoethnographies. In doing so we make connections to self-study literature that explicitly draw on feminism while looking to the future. We hope through this work to show how our aims as socially just self-study researchers are enriched by a feminist perspective.

Keywords
Co/autoethnography · Feminism · Self-study · Intersectional · Social justice · Autobiography

Introduction

As far back as 20 years ago at the first Castle conference, Barnes (1998) noted that the self-study group was a caring and supportive community that offered educators an environment based on openness, a commitment to collaboration, and a willingness to see topics anew through reframing. Within this community, the possibilities of what is studied and how questions are studied are endless. In self-study, there is no recipe, no single truth (Loughran 2004). This is why we were drawn to self-study and we are sure this is why many others also find their home in this academic community.

At the very heart of self-study is the radical idea that those who practice have something important to say about that practice. As an academic and professional community, self-study works to ensure that all who come to it see it as a home, a place where we have a voice: one that has epistemological and ethical weight. All voices have merit in our community. We take care to be open to shifting our attitudes as our community moves and grows as we engage together in constructing an environment that can accommodate and support us all. In many regards, this is why Zeichner (1999) called self-study "the single most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research" (p. 8).

In the self-study community, we do not pretend omniscience but claim knowledge based on our experience. What we, as practitioners, have to say about our practice is important not just for us as particular practitioners in our own particular context but for others similarly situated. Thus we understand ourselves as a community who can speak to each other of what we know and can share that knowledge with others in a wider community that share similar fields of practice.

Within this context of openness, voice, and ownership of meaning making resides a deep-seated commitment to concerns about equity, diversity, and social justice. Often self-study researchers choose to examine their practices personally, collaboratively, and programmatically around social justice change in

terms of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and power or more all encompassing lenses like multiculturalism and alternative ways of knowing (Tidwell and Fitzgerald 2006). For this chapter, we focus on our self-study research through the lens of gender and feminism. The self-study approach, as laid out above, enriches, affirms, and provides a way of researching our practice, but it importantly also dovetails with many of our feminist beliefs and practices.

In this chapter, we show how co/autoethnography, a self-study methodology, has enabled us to put into action feminist principles through concrete examples from a series of self-studies we have conducted over the past 17 years. Using salient features of co/autoethnography, we hope our readers will see the possibilities of advancing their understanding of their practice through feminist self-study methods and approaches. By providing a retrospective look at how co/autoethnography is a feminist self-study methodology, we examine the past and offer a glimpse into how self-study could expand to include more of a focus on examining teacher education practices through the intersectional lens of social justice. We begin the chapter with some history and background of how our methodology of co/autoethnography emerged within the context of self-study. After providing a definition, we illustrate its key tenets using narrative examples from past co/autoethnographies. In doing so we make connections to self-study literature that explicitly draw on feminism while looking to the future. We hope through this work to show how our aims as socially just self-study researchers are enriched by a feminist perspective.

Part I: Our Feminisms

> Feminism goes wherever we go. If not, we are not. (Ahmed 2017, p. 15)

Throughout our careers we have been moved by a sense of injustice and by a sense that something is in fact not right. These feelings, senses of wrong, motivate us to examine our teacher education practices to ask ourselves what we could do as teachers and teacher educators to address this. We wonder how we are complicit in these wrongs, the limits of our complicity, and how we can help to redress them. We have always seen ourselves as feminist teachers. We have been drawn to feminism as a lens for understanding the injustices we experience and witness in our personal and professional lives. Feminism provides a central perspective on our identities as women such that for us being feminist teachers is intellectual, embodied, and emotional. Our feminist perspective on our necessarily gendered community seeps into the language we use in our everyday lives as well as our teaching practices and research. We bring it into our classrooms, conferences, and reading of texts. Sometimes, of course, words alone cannot capture our feminism, as feminism is manifest in our bodies, in the ways we move in the world, are positioned and perceived by others, are used to communicate, and are guarded and how we use our bodies to interpret our students and their interactions with their students.

Just like our talk, we use our bodies to perform our teaching as well as a vehicle for learning. Our feminism exists in our minds and bodies.

We are moved by a sense of injustice in our minds and bodies, and therefore in response we must take action and make real change. This work is built from individual struggle but requires that it be done collectively. We cannot do this work alone as individuals or isolated in the collaboration that we have created by ourselves. As Ahmed (2017) writes: "Feminism as a collective movement is made out of how we are moved to become feminists in dialogue with others" (p. 5). We need to work with others – in order to feel buoyed and supported, in order to make change in ripples rather than linearly, and in order to have a shelter and a space to re-energize. hooks (2000) defines feminism as "the movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation, and sexual oppression" (p. 33). But this does not mean it is separate from race, class, sexuality, language, or ability. Feminism is a movement that needs to be both still and in motion; it needs to be taken up – by ourselves, our students, our academic colleagues, our teacher partners in schools, and the greater community. It needs to be everywhere – transcending and disrupting race, class, sexuality, language, and ability. For as Dzodan (2011) reminds us, feminism will be intersectional or "it will be bullshit."

Coming to Co/autoethnography Through Autobiography

> A feminist is any woman who tells the truth about her life. (Woolf 1929)

Although not always explicit, it is not surprising that our methodology of co/autoethnography is built upon feminist principles. Self-identifying as feminists was in fact the very reason we were drawn to each other 20 years ago. Monica was interviewing for her first professorial position at a small liberal arts college where Lesley was working. Intending to conduct a more informal interview, Lesley invited Monica into her office. Monica noticed a copy of *The Education Feminist Reader* (Stone 1994), and we immediately shared our enthusiasm for Maxine Greene, Nel Noddings, and Elizabeth Ellsworth. Although we came from different educational fields, it was in that moment that we realized our shared deep-seated commitment to feminism:

> The longing to tell one's story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release. (hooks 1998, p. 431)

From the beginning of our collaboration, we were interested in exploring the use of autobiographical reflection with our preservice teachers. We had both, individually, come to understand that our purpose as teacher educators was less about equipping our students with the tools and more about helping them to understand who they were becoming as teachers (Britzman 1986). We recognized the ways in which autobiography had the potential to provide women a space to share their

narratives, which were often either dismissed, overlooked, or presented through a patriarchal lens (Heilbrun 1988; Smith and Watson 1998). As feminist educators, we saw validity in personal narratives, expanding the kinds of ways of knowing accepted in academic settings to those that are personal, subjective, communal, relational, and even embodied. We understood that there wasn't a single story and we wanted to discover how we could invite multiple voices into our classroom, particularly those voices that are rarely heard or noticed. Drawing from Witherell and Noddings (1991), we encouraged our students to write personal narratives as a way of making meaning of who they were as students and who they were becoming as teachers embedded in particular cultures, languages, genders, belief systems, and histories. We hoped that the use of personal narrative would invite students to present their stories in complex ways, where their identities could legitimately be seen as fragmented, fluid, and dynamic. We believed writing autobiographical reflections would be a valuable tool in helping our students find their voices as beginning teachers. We introduced this assignment in our middle school methods course and provided students with a series of prompts to consider as they wrote their stories, also asking them to reflect on the writing process (Taylor and Coia 2001). Collecting their narratives and reflections, and our field notes, we created a relatively traditional research relationship. We, the teacher educators, were the researchers, and our preservice students were the participants, and we used the constant comparative method inductively (Glaser and Straus 1967) to derive our findings.

For many of our students, writing autobiographical narratives felt very much like thinking as a teacher. We reflected: "Writing autobiographically encouraged students to unearth, clarify, and make concrete the beliefs and concepts that they already held about teaching rather than focus on new information. Our preservice teachers were able to connect their past, present, and future selves and strengthen their perspectives on teaching" (Coia and Taylor 2006, p. 21). We were excited by these findings as we believed this was a process for students that had the potential to help them realize how they could make meaning for themselves. This realization very much paralleled our feminist beliefs about teaching. We understood that our students needed opportunities to come to know for themselves, where they started with their own past experiences and constructed understandings from their histories (Brownlee and Berthelsen 2008). Also for many of the students, sharing and discussing personal narratives in class helped build a safe and trusting community. Although several of our findings felt positive, we still realized that there were limits to using autobiography in a class. We questioned whether requiring students to write these narratives would influence the authenticity and reflexivity of their pieces. Like Ropers-Huilman (2001), we understood that just because we "invited" them to reflect this did not mean their reasons for doing so were authentic or purposeful. And as she points out, at no time did our students feel that they could say: "I've already been reflecting, teacher, so I don't need to do this assignment, but thanks for the opportunity" (p. 54). There was some discomfort too on our part in reading our students' personal narratives as outsiders examining their lives through the lens of some authority. We were reminded of the feminist critiques of autobiographical writing and its lack of criticality. We worried that our students would simply

reproduce the narratives of the master without problematizing issues of power and authority (Smith 1998). How could we continue to reflect through autobiography but in more authentic and critical ways?

Our first move was quite simple. We decided to put together a group of teachers to reflect alongside of us using autobiography. Aware that teachers often feel either isolated or without agency, we hoped that writing together as a group would provide a space to explore freely, potentially strengthen our beliefs and convictions, and inspire us to grow as teachers. Writing and analyzing alongside the teachers also shifted how we conceptualized our research methodology to a more participatory method. The group could also avoid the slippery slope of navel gazing: we were exploring our individual narratives within a community, so although these were private stories, they were shared publicly. From the start, we understood that this work had to be done in an organic way so that each individual in the group had the opportunity to explore coming to know in different ways. What we shared in common was the experience of writing reflective narratives, sharing them as a group, and participating in a discussion.

Our community created a space where we could safely share a wide range of our experiences and feelings – we were not restricted to only presenting our successes. We were able to be vulnerable and to share our personal and professional selves, validating the importance of questioning, of recognizing uncertainty, and even of being emotional. Additionally, several of us noted that our group meetings were a time to analyze and theorize about our teaching, something we rarely had opportunities for in our daily teaching lives. Doing this together strengthened our community and at the same time blurred the boundaries between individuals (Taylor et al. 2002).

> Our way was messy. (Coia and Taylor 2006, p. 24)

We began to question whether the autobiographical method served our needs or limited us. Our collaborative work no longer focused on a singular "I." We needed a different sort of methodology that could help represent the more complex understanding of self. Autoethnography intrigued us, especially Reed-Danahay's work in anthropology and Lionnett's work in postcolonial literary theory. As Reed-Danahay (1997) explains, "Autoethnography is a fluid concept, synthesizing both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography has been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question" (p. 2). Our work with the teacher group required that we begin to shift our research methodology to find a means to use ethnographic methods to analyze our autobiographical writing. Our narrative analysis was no longer just for our private selves – we were sharing our stories with one another, and the meaning making was occurring through our interactions and discussions.

Looking back at the evolution of our co/autoethnographic methodology, we wonder if our move to a more collaborative analysis process was driven by our

feminist principles and the commitment to examine ourselves together within the larger social contexts. Were we trying to create a space where we could be more critical and also more prone to take action? Were we looking for a methodology that would ignite political action as Zeichner (1993) called for or a means of doing what Griffiths (1994) describes as "critical autobiography"? Were we seeking a community to develop our feminist subjectivity? Were we, like Griffiths (1994), hoping for a methodology that would draw from both Haraway and Harding's epistemologies which "depend on taking individual perspectives and combining them, politically, into group perspectives" (p. 74)?

We soon came to realize that despite its obvious attraction and applicability, autoethnography was limiting as it did not seem able to reflect or capture how we were analyzing our narratives together in collaboration. Our self-study methodology required us to embrace the idea that we could "research ourselves only within the context of others" (Coia and Taylor 2009, p. 7) because our meaning making was relational and emerged in dialogue and conversation. Our relational epistemology had emerged organically as we grappled with our teaching in the context of our relationship. As Lysaker and Furuness (2011) write:

> . . . a relational view of knowing and knowledge is grounded in the idea that we come into being in and through relationship (Belenky et al. 1986). All knowing and learning come from our human need for connection with others and with the world. Given this epistemic stance, it follows that our knowledge of the world is mediated by our relationships with those around us . . . (p. 187)

With this stance in hand, we searched for a methodology that would capture this lived experience and one that would mirror the interpersonal nature of teaching.

Tending to relationships and caring for our students intellectually and interpersonally undergirded our teaching (Noddings 1984, 1992). We understood that our students "come to us not as problems to be solved, but as people becoming" (Taylor and Coia 2009, p. 171). We strove to build caring relationships with our students in order to model and guide them to develop as caring teachers. We recognized that these relational tenets of teaching and learning emerged from our feminist ideology for as Noddings (1992) writes, "only if education is organized around centers of care are we likely to avoid the domination of groups in power" (p. 169). With the complexities of the relationships, with each other and our students, firmly in mind we developed what we came to call co/autoethnography: a methodology that captured the power and importance of our relationships.

Almost immediately we also realized that co/autoethnography was a better fit for the self-study community than autobiography or even autoethnography because it explicitly values relationships and collaboration. Change can occur individually but there is greater change when this work is done with others. In the self-study group, great emphasis is placed on interaction and the potential of what can emerge within a community of learners (LaBoskey 2004; Pinnegar and Hamilton 2009). The context for co/autoethnography includes the wider community: our relationships with

ourselves, our past, our connections through literature, art, and music, as well as our connections to our self and others, including our professional communities.

Part 2: How Do We Define Co/Autoethnography?

> But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences. And it was the concern and caring of all those women which gave me strength. (Lorde 1984 p. 41)

Co/autoethnography is a self-study feminist research methodology that takes autoethnography, "a form of self-representation that complicates cultural norms by seeing autobiography as implicated in larger cultural processes" (Taylor and Coia 2006a, p. 278), and moves it beyond the singular to the plural. This methodology focuses on the ways we construct knowledge and in particular how we do so together, for as we have argued, "Knowledge is social and individual. It has to do with who we are. The knower is important" (Taylor and Coia 2006a, pp. 280–281). We come to know through the interweaving of our stories through dialogue so that validity, insight, and analysis all emerge as we write together exploring issues of concern. We investigate our own selves within the social context of our relationship as well as the larger culture of teaching. Creating a co/autoethnography and reflecting about our teaching in this particular way are rich endeavors: it is not conducted in a vacuum.

Our experiences, research, and knowledge of the literature are vital and explicit components of our methodology such that, as we have noted, "[o]ur analysis is derived from the theoretical, practical, and personal knowledge we bring to conversation" (Coia and Taylor 2006, p. 26). There is a reciprocity between these knowledges that both inform and are informed by one another. The back and forth of this process allows a means of "coming to know that does not privilege either the subjective or the objective" (Coia and Taylor 2006, p. 26).

> We write into each others' lives. (Coia and Taylor 2006, p. 26)

Co/autoethnography heightens our awareness and increases our understanding of our blurred identities as teachers, friends, and women, but this is only something that we can do in collaboration with one another. We rely on the caring and strength of our relationship, as Lorde writes above, to push us to be critical, and honest, and to embrace the partial, complex, and multifaceted nature of our relationships. As we note, "We are not interpreting each other by rewriting our stories according to some preconceived format of what needs to be included, whether narrative or theoretical; but then again, the process demands we reject some posited innocence or the primacy of raw experience" (Coia and Taylor 2006, p. 26).

Our methodology is critical, approaching critique in a feminist way, through relationship. In co/autoethnography, "[t]he narrowing of space between writers

encourages the retelling of stories, so we encounter our autobiographies not as fixed entities but rather as texts that encourage a re-examination, re-living, dialogue, and inquiry. Through this re-telling and re-writing we are forced to examine our beliefs from different perspectives and initiate change" (Coia and Taylor 2002, p. 149). It is in the listening and recounting of stories, rather than the acting or telling, that leads to critical analysis. We read through our stories, looking for insights and making meaning. Sometimes the meaning of stories changes as we dialogue together. Our words and memories are not static – they shape shift and evolve as we consider them together.

> We are not inserting ourselves in a story where we have no business, or trying to make ourselves invisible as traditional researchers did. We are insiders and outsiders. We are talking about our own experiences but they are analyzed from a number of perspectives and vantage points, including our own. . . (Coia and Taylor 2006, p. 26)

The purpose of self-study is to improve our practice by systematic research by us as practitioners. Thus, the core idea undergirding and motivating self-study is the idea that the practitioner, the teacher, can know. At the heart of both co/autoethnography and self-study is the insight that the practitioner's knowledge is expert knowledge. To hold this position involves reducing or eliminating the traditional power imbalance between the research and the subject of that research. Early on in the course of our self-studies, we came to understand that our collaboration itself produced knowledge (Coia and Taylor 2004, p. 72) in our acknowledgment of the teacher's subjectivity, of being the subject and the object of the research, and being the person who can both practice and improve one's practice. "The private voice, the subjective voice" as we have shown in our previous writings (Taylor and Coia 2006a) "is necessary if the distancing and objectification of education is really to be rejected" (p. 281). The knowledge we construct through our co/autoethnographies makes real the idea that the boundaries between ourselves are permeable and that together are responsive to the language and conditions that create our identities. The knowledge we produce is ours, but it resonates.

What does co/autoethnography look like in practice? Building upon the feminist notions of relational knowing, all co/autoethnographies involve at least two researchers. It is *in relationship* that data are generated through a nomadic writing process that includes writing, rewriting, and sharing stories, discussion of pre- and post-writing, reflective writing and response, analysis of theory and research, and the collaborative generation of new texts. There is no particular order to this process. To some extent, it resembles improvisation, boundary crossing, or even what we have called "nomadic jamming" (Coia and Taylor 2014). As we explain, [o]ur process is nomadic, inviting a mixture of improvisation as well as knowledge from experiences in our past, present, and future. Co/autoethnography allows us to 'move about' (Minh-ha 1986/1987) because teaching practice has no clear or set bounds, and "if we stay in one place, thought, or framework for too long, we could become stuck" (Coia and Taylor 2017, p. 59). What constitutes a narrative can be flexible too. We have mostly written stories, reflections, and dialogues, but the texts we produce

could be poetry or visual or audio texts. Similar to the fluidity of the text, our method of communicating is also fluid and can be either electronic or face to face.

Essential parts of the co/autoethnography process are conversation and dialogue, through which our themes and patterns emerge. These interactions include our responses, questions, and even our own stories to one another's narratives but also connections we make to literature, other research, art, music, and our daily interactions both inside and outside of the classroom. Much like the Arizona Group (2006), our dialogue becomes a process of knowing. We have explored how the dialogic process itself leads to insight, suggesting that "[i]nsight comes in telling our stories to one another. We do not tell the stories because we have insight: they are not complete in that way, with their lessons neatly attached" (Coia and Taylor 2013, p. 10). Consistent dialogue and discussion are key for co/autoethnography, so that we have opportunities to make meaning together.

Once we have identified our themes, we turn to the crafting of the co/autoethnography. Together we write and rewrite our narratives, bringing our multiple perspectives as feminist teachers, women, and writers to the piece. Our drafts resemble a work of Middleton's (1995) that has influenced us. In this article, Middleton breaks with the traditions of academic writing and blurs the lines between the personal and the professional. She integrates "everyday experiences which are usually rendered invisible in academic writing" (p. 87) to show how our "lived reality" can generate our feminist educational theory. As feminist researchers, we craft our co/autoethnography by blending personal and professional stories, pushing the conventional boundaries of academic writing. We pay close attention to the imagery of our language and the ways in which it may impact the reader.

At this juncture it is important to note that co/autoethnography is trustworthy. It demonstrates its trustworthiness by adhering to the criteria Richardson (2000) outlines for writing as a means of inquiry. Thus, a co/autoethnography is trustworthy if our writing contributes to the field of teacher education in a substantial way, speaks to and moves the readers, has esthetic merit, expresses a reality, demonstrates reflexivity both in terms of how "the producers and the products" are presented, and finally leads to the generation of other ideas or writing. The criteria speak to our methodology because they allow for fluidity and change – the kind of fluidity and change that are valued when we believe as feminist meaning makers that our identities are fluid, dynamic, and always under construction.

It might be tempting to present co/autoethnography as a series of clear easy steps or a recipe to follow faithfully, especially with the pressures we feel in the teacher education context around standards, criteria, and rubrics. Yet we know from our own research experience, as well as those of others in self-study, that what we learn cannot always be described in concrete, definitive, and generalizable ways. Our learning is complex and messy and is not readily or usefully translated into propositional knowledge (Coia and Taylor 2014). With that in mind, we are not naïvely encouraging the taking up of this feminist methodology over another. We are not privileging our messy complicated process over a more traditional positivist, technical methodology. For if we did, we would be acting in a hypocritical

manner. This would not invite disruption, rather it would just offer substitution (Coia and Taylor 2017).

Making Meaning When Identities Are Fluid, Dynamic, and Under Construction

> Women, I believe, search for fellow beings who have faced similar struggles, conveyed them in ways a reader can transform into her own life, confirmed desires the reader had hardly acknowledged—desires that now seem possible. Women catch courage from the women whose lives and writings they read, and women call the bearer of that courage friend. (Heilbrun 1997, p. 138)

> We are teacher educators, but no matter how it may feel at times, this is not all we are. None of us is solely defined by our identities as teachers, and our identity as teachers is not solely defined by us. The conceptualizations of identity as complex and culturally informed motivates our development and use of co/autoethnography. A corollary, central to our methodology, is that identity is dialogical. We maintain our identity in relation to others. (Coia and Taylor 2009, p. 3)

We start from the assumption that our identities are in flux, dynamic, and always under construction. While we may, in any particular context, privilege one aspect of our identity, that moment and that identity is not forever. As a consequence we do not worry over much with beginnings or origins, or with producing a clean finished product. As we have previously noted, "the stories we tell are not finished;" rather they create spaces for a purpose: to open and continue a conversation (Taylor and Coia 2006a, p. 274). For our self-studies, although we are interested in how our past informs our present, we are always in the middle, in the midst of our stories. In our co/autoethnography exploring issues of power and authority, for example (Coia and Taylor 2004), we consciously acknowledge that there is no point, nothing fixed from which we can begin. Just as we always begin somewhere in the middle, we also recognize that "[t]here is an important sense in which no co/autoethnography is ever complete, although the findings of each co/autoethnography can be valid" (Coia and Taylor 2009, p. 15).

Our identities are socially constructed and produced. We define ourselves but we are also defined by others within a particular culture. Being teacher educators now at this time and in this cultural space involves being constructed in a specific way using a shared discourse. There are multiple interpretations of who we are, and there is room for this identity to be malleable, shifting and moving in response to the needs within the culture. It is in this complex space that our co/autoethnographies are constructed as we explore how we are defined by our relationships, conversations, and interactions with others.

Identity Is Dialogical (Coia and Taylor 2009)

> Are you talking Monica?
> No. I am listening. (Skype conversation, February, 2012) (Coia and Taylor 2013)

> We make ourselves in part out of our stories about ourselves and our world, separately and together. The great feminist experiment of remaking the world by remaking our ideas of gender and challenging who has the right to break the silence has been wildly successful and remains extremely incomplete. Undoing the social frameworks of millennia is not the work of a generation or a few decades but a process of creation and destruction that is epic in scope and often embattled in execution. (Solnit 2017)

> We are looking at ourselves from the inside and outside. (Coia and Taylor 2006, p. 27)

Our process begins with our relationship and the ways in which meaning is constructed through a collaborative analysis. When we write our teaching lives, we bring together and create aspects of ourselves. Relying on the trust that we have built with one another as well as with our students over time, we identify what is happening in our classes through the collaborative self-study experience. In doing so, we strive for reciprocal and bilateral relationships (Coia and Taylor 2004).

We draw from the poststructural feminist work of Ellsworth (1989), Britzman (1993), Lather (2001), and St. Pierre (2000). As Britzman (1993) writes: "All categories are unstable, all experiences are constructed, all reality is imagined, all identities are produced, and all knowledge provokes uncertainties, misrecognitions, ignorances, and silences" (p. 22). Our feminist methodology does not look for *the* answer or *exactly* what is going on. It cannot become "routinized, stable, and predictable" and instead needs to "shake" things up (Lather 2006, p. 1). As feminist teachers, we embrace uncertainty, unpredictability, and unknowing (Britzman 1993; Coia and Taylor 2013, 2014; Ellsworth 1989; Taylor and Coia 2012). We are always searching, questioning, examining, and investigating. We are careful not to be stuck or to latch onto one idea or concept too wholeheartedly. This work never lets up because we hope never to become complacent.

Co/autoethnography is about being open rather than fixed in the ways we interpret our teaching, experiences and the world. In this we agree with Weedon (1987) who reminds us that "meaning can never be finally fixed. Every act of reading is a new production of meaning" (p. 134). This is equally true for co/autoethnography: every act of writing and rewriting brings new meaning. All aspects of our identity are, on some level, available for inquiry providing a richness to the self-study, recognizing the importance of the self as a source of insight without fixing that self in one place with one story for all time. In co/autoethnography we see this feminist stance manifested in our teaching and writing about our teaching in the ways we welcome uncertainty into our classrooms. Allowing for uncertainty and unpredictability opens up space for others to be heard, and for us this is central to our work as teachers using self-study to improve our practice, where we are provided with never-ending room for "moving about" (Minh-ha 1986/1987, p. 7). As liberating as this can be, it can also make us feel uncomfortable and unsettled.

The discomfort is, however, important for it forces us to continually question our teaching practices. These evolving and often evocative questions "are constantly moving," and "one cannot define, finish or close" (Lather 2001, p. 184) the process or the questioning. We believe this is one reason we were initially drawn to the self-study of teacher education practices: the way it aligned with our feminist beliefs on the importance of focusing on *our* authentic and often dynamic questions as they shift and change to the rhythm and beats of the teaching dance, a dance that is never a solo performance (Coia and Taylor 2013).

A Focus on the Everydayness

> Feminism is wherever feminism needs to be. Feminism needs to be everywhere. Feminism needs to be everywhere because feminism is not everywhere. (Ahmed 2017, p. 4)

> The stories we have told are everyday events. There is nothing extraordinary about a student sharing a personal experience or a presentation in class by a visitor. These are ordinary small moments in a teaching life, part of our on-going story of learning to teach. They talk of the ways in which the pedagogy and content of our teaching are in continuous negotiation with our lived experience and ideas about teaching. (Coia and Taylor 2014, p. 164)

As a feminist methodology, co/autoethnography often addresses the prosaic moments of our classes rather than critical incidents or dramatic episodes. This is because we focus on what Bateson (1997) calls the "everydayness" of experience. For it is in the day to day of our lives that the real learning takes place. In many ways this too is a feminist stance as it acknowledges the blurring of personal and the professional and gives value to our daily interactions as women. The everyday for women is not simple or mundane. It is the landscape where power and constraint are manifest as we have seen in our work where we "honor the everyday as sites for reflection on issues of power and authority" (Coia and Taylor 2017, p. 59). We like to study "the planned unpredictable moments in the classroom. . . Our interest is in the unpredictable, spontaneous, small moments that are out of control, as we suspect this is where the learning occurs" (Coia and Taylor 2014, p. 160). In short, teaching occurs in the "continuous negotiation with our lived experience and ideas about teaching" (p. 164).

We are grounded in our everyday lives as women – we cannot remove our gender from our research. Examining our teaching through a gendered lens has happened organically as we have crafted our methodology of co/autoethnography. This may be due in part to our commitment to feminist principles in our teaching and research. We recognize the importance of focusing research on "women's diverse lives" (Bloom 1998, p. 144) and "listening to women tell us about their lives and experiences" (Harding 1991, pp. 123–124). We acknowledge how compelling the writings of Anzaldua, Lorde, and hooks are and echo Ahmed's (2017) sentiments about them when she writes, "here was writing in which embodied experience of power provides the basis for knowledge. Here was writing animated by the everyday: the detail of an encounter, an incident, a happening, flashing like insight. . .. I began to appreciate

that theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin" (p. 10). When we construct our co/autoethnographies, we attempt to emulate our feminist foremothers, bringing theory into the everyday and the everyday into theory.

This orientation towards the everyday is very much evident in our work. For example, in one of our earlier pieces, when examining our feminist authority, Lesley told the story of one of her students, Annie, who was struggling to figure out how to respond to her students who were wearing T-shirts with confederate flags. In our second round of reflective dialogue, Monica shared a snippet of conversation that she had with a friend about parenting. She wrote:

> You know I have been thinking about Annie. Her story really reminds me so much of motherhood. I was talking to a friend the other day. She told me her six year old attended a birthday party when she was the only one wearing a dress and was so upset about being different from everyone. We talked about how much harder it is for us as parents to watch our children go through the conflicts, insecurities, and challenges of childhood. It is more painful for us to witness our children in pain then for us to be in pain ourselves. I think it is the same experience for our students. (Taylor and Coia 2006b, p. 57)

This anecdote as well as a return to the feminist literature helped us to think through our co/autoethnographic findings on authority in the classroom. As we continued working through the chapter, we began to realize the parallels that were present between the ways in which Monica parents and her teaching stance around issues of authority. We wrote, "Unconditional nurturing does not work in any part of Monica's life, whether working with Lesley, her students, or bringing up her sons. In all cases there are moments of being cared for and of caring. For Monica, this project has meant a realization that caring and authority are not only complimentary but also need to be seen, as Applebaum (2000) argues, in relation with each other" (Taylor and Coia 2006b, p. 65). Here, as so often in our work, we have discovered that in order for us to examine how we engage with our students, we have to consider the ways in which our self is constructed in relation to others outside of the classroom (Taylor and Coia 2009).

Co/Autoethnography Invites Our Whole Selves

> Who we are, to whom we are related, how we are situated all matter in what we learn, what we value, and how we approach intellectual and moral life. (Noddings 1992, p. xiii)

> Recently, Griffin (Monica's youngest child) saw his teacher in the supermarket. He could not believe it. He laughed and laughed. He could not believe that she shops or eats. We are all aware of this construction of the teacher as one who lives and breathes school, a person who is barely a person, someone with few personal attributes or emotions. Although we find this understanding of the teacher frustrating and baffling, we also play into it with our own lack of acknowledgement that we, too, bring our whole selves to the classroom. (Coia and Taylor 2009, p. 4)

We share this story as it is one to which many can relate, and it is not just restricted to K-12 teachers – our own students often forget that our lives are rich and full and involve more than just answering emails and providing feedback on papers. We recognize and value that we are teacher educators. But that is never all that we are. Being educators and researchers requires us to bring our whole selves into our work. We draw from the personal, professional, and political to inform our teaching and our research. When we think about or reflect on our teaching, we are not able to separate who we are as people from who we are as teachers. Who we are is important (Hamilton and Pinnegar 1998; Korthagen and Russell 1995; LaBoskey 2004) and includes all facets of our identities, how we identify ourselves, our relationships with others, our past experiences, as well as what we care about. Early on in our work, Monica reflected: "I think that was the first time I realized that so much of who I am as a teacher is who I am as a person" (Coia and Taylor 2002, p. 50). We understand that teaching is "an intentional personal activity" and that therefore "it is people who teach" (Taylor and Coia 2009, pp. 170–171). We come to our teaching and research as persisting beings whose identities are complex and who have a history. As we wrote, "There is no such thing as a discussion of the disembodied or impersonal practices of teaching. All discussions of practice involve the personal whether or not this is explicitly acknowledged" (Coia and Taylor 2009, p. 4). For example, when teaching, Monica brings multiple identities to the classroom including herself as a teacher, mother, daughter, sister, dancer, and music lover. Her identity as teacher takes the lead but she cannot shake off the other identities that are present.

There is value to this holistic stance; by bringing our bodies, hearts, and minds to our research, we are able to unearth our values, beliefs, and motivations underlying our teaching. When we began our co/autoethnographic work, and wrote with former students and teachers, we saw the group as "an outlet for our feelings and a mechanism to explore our teaching experience. . . In our sessions there is freedom to express doubts, fears, concerns, plans, goals, etc." (Taylor et al. 2002, p. 11). This was a space unlike any other: it was the only space where we could share our "innermost feelings and thoughts about our lives as teachers" (Taylor et al. 2002, p. 11).

By challenging the dominant hegemonic and patriarchal notions of research with a capital R that center around objectivity, rationality, and separation from the self, co/autoethnography, situated within a feminist framework, offers an alternative, a means of blurring of the boundaries between the mind and the body, between the personal and professional, and between the political and the nonpolitical. Including our whole selves and examining everyday experiences become a way to challenge the "dominant discourses which can construct other individuals and groups in relation to many aspects of gender and education" (Cole 2009, p. 563).

For us this has meant allowing the personal into our teaching and interweaving the everyday narratives of friendship, of feminist friendship in particular, into our professional conversations. We share our personal feelings because they are a part of our whole selves and because they are another way of knowing (Jaggar 1989). We cannot remove or separate our feelings from who we are and how we engage in our work in institutional contexts that restrict and constrain. We understand Ahmed

(2014) when she reflects in her blog that "talking about personal feelings is not necessarily about deflecting attention from structures. If anything, I would argue the opposite: not addressing certain histories that hurt, histories that get to the bone, how we are affected by what we come up against, is one way of deflecting attention from structures (as if our concern with our own pain or suffering is what stops certain things from just "going away")" (Ahmed 2014, para).

Even after working together now for 17 years, the constant demands of our professional lives and the need to produce often interfere with the tending of our personal relationship. We set the intention of caring for our relationship each week, but the outside pressures often distract us from what is most important to us – our long-term friendship, the history we have together, and the unconditional support we have for each other. Co/autoethnography has been our way to "exist in relation" to each other: how we "can be in relation to others" (Ahmed 2017, p. 14). Conducting self-study alongside one another is about "gaining critical self understanding," and through our connections, we are able to find "intellectual and personal knowledge" (Bloom 1998, p. 151).

We know that our conversation cannot be neatly parceled into "work" and "personal." We remind ourselves to update each other on news about our families, share our feelings about a particular challenge at our college or university, or draw from our lived experiences to help provide insights into our teaching. We take time to engage with one another on a personal level, knowing our personal relationship plays an integral role in our collaboration. When we are rushed or on deadline and our conversations are all business, the loss of the personal is not mentioned, but there are emails afterwards that catch each other up on what is important, what is going on in our lives. The personal and the professional live together in our relationship and our work.

Bringing of our whole selves into our work is not unproblematic. We do not want to over-romanticize our relationship and how we work together. We are still two individuals working together. We do not always agree on what we are trying to say. We do not always understand where the other person is going with an idea. We try to capture our honest dialogue, and sometimes, because of our close relationship, we make assumptions, or take ideas for granted, or disagree. We want our research to be critical which requires a certain vulnerability that occurs when we share of ourselves. When we think about these issues, we are reminded that it is the strength of our friendship and our long-term collaboration that helps us welcome and navigate these tensions.

Drawing on Aesthetic Experiences

Other times, as we craft our co/autoethnography, our personal lives are evident in our writing as we draw on the aesthetic experiences we love and that serve to inspire us. It is not unusual for readers to discover references in our writing to musical bands, literature, poetry, theatrical performances, podcasts, or even pop culture. Reading the word and reading the world are ways of knowing that we embrace and use to make

sense of our practice (Freire and Macedo 1987). Our lives in the world inform who we are becoming as teachers, so bringing the world into our writing provides a way for us to connect to our readers. As we carefully select which aesthetic texts to include, we consider how these pieces will resonate or ring true for the reader (Coia and Taylor 2013). In an article where we try to uncover our feminist pedagogy, for instance, we frequently quote one of our favorite authors, A. S. Byatt, as a way to illustrate and engage the reader but also as a way to share of ourselves – our love of Byatt, our fascination with her evocative language from which imagery and emotions emerge, and the memory of the awe and wonder of seeing a beautiful butterfly. We chose the following quote from Byatt because we knew it would set the stage for our narrative about realizing that making a checklist of characteristics of feminist pedagogy would not help us to understand our teaching:

> *Morpho Eugenia*. Remarkable. A remarkable creation. How beautiful, how delicately designed, how wonderful that something so fragile should have come here, through such dangers, from the other end of the earth. And very rare. I have never seen one. I have never heard tell of anyone who has seen one. (Byatt 1992, p. 21)

We used the metaphor of capturing and cataloguing moths and butterflies to provide insight into our teaching:

> The gardens where we work, where the butterflies live, look messy. Classrooms are rich complex environments where experiences are not lined up in neat rows that can be dealt with separately. We are not dealing with a mono-culture but a rich ecology. Nonetheless, in an effort to isolate and capture our particular experience as feminist pedagogues, we brought out our butterfly nets. We turned to the literature with a large butterfly net and set about capturing the characteristics of feminist pedagogy as if they were butterflies to be pinned in place in a display case. We captured the attractive red admiral (building community), along with the massive moon moth (voice). We even snared the elusive small brown echo moth (listening). Now we had a set of principles: all out of context. They provided a function, but were limited. We had performed the collectors' task. We had isolated our specimens and placed them individually in a protected place to preserve them. We found it all too easy to run through lists of characteristics and say 'Yes, did that'. But somehow we seemed to have missed the point. We were at an impasse. (Coia and Taylor 2013, pp. 6–7)

We could have chosen to describe our realization of focusing on the wrong aspects of our teaching in a more traditional and straightforward manner, but this would have omitted parts of ourselves and ignored the value of using literature and other creative arts as part of our research.

Part 3: Co/Autoethnography – Moving Forward for Social Justice

> I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences have not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. (Lorde 1984, p. 41)

> . . . a feminist perspective on reflective practice can open the door of the classroom to the world and invite political actions that expand her sphere of influence locally, regionally, or

> even nationally. Our poststructural feminist lens transforms or reimagines reflective practice as a political endeavor with an explicit focus on recognizing power both when it is unequal and needs to be challenged and when it can be used for action to promote social justice practices. (Coia and Taylor 2017, p. 60)

Our co/autoethnographic methodology found a home in the self-study community. Besides a general openness, our work built upon those self-study researchers who adopted a feminist stance before us (Arizona Group 2000, 2004; Galman et al. 2010; Griffiths 1998; Hamilton and Guilfoyle 1998; Manke 2000; Samaras et al. 2004). Their feminisms are manifested in the ways they approached knowing as partial and socially constructed (Arizona Group 2004; Ellsworth 1997), how they conceptualized their epistemology of collaboration (Griffiths 1998), as well as in a commitment to examining power and authority through self-study (Arizona Group 1996; MacGillivray 1997; LaBoskey 2004; Skerrett 2007). Several self-study researchers have also adopted a poststructural feminist approach to their research on teaching (McNeil 2011); race and language in the classroom (Johnston 2000; Johnston et al. 2002); intersectional testimonio (Cortez-Castro 2016); problematizing text, voice, and representation (Ham and Kane 2004), interpretation (Hamilton and Pinnegar 2014); what it means to be a teacher educator (Abrams et al. 2012; Strom et al. 2014; Strom and Martin 2013); self-study methodology (Sandretto 2009); reflexivity (Kirk 2005); the paradoxes of praxis (Perselli 2006); transgressing academia (Gamelin 2005); and emotions and teacher education (Forgasz and Clemans 2014; Kelchtermans and Hamilton 2004; Kuzmic 2014). More recently there have been a number of self-studies that use feminism as a tool for social action. Some of these include Masinga (2013) who used positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1990) to examine her work with women teaching sexuality education in South Africa and Wood (2009) who problematized the influence of the patriarchy on normative beliefs about gender and sexuality in HIV prevention education.

As we reflect on the work we have done over the past 17 years, we acknowledge that although we use co/autoethnography for social justice, not all our self-studies are explicitly motivated by social justice concerns (Taylor and Coia 2014), but even if a particular self-study does not address feminism directly, our feminism is always present in our use of co/autoethnography. This is because for us, first and foremost, feminism is opposed to inequalities and injustice particularly around issues of gender and sexuality. Our feminist stance is a commitment to social justice. It starts by recognizing the reality and injustice of sexism and seeks through various methods and practice to address this.

Co/autoethnography is continually focused on criticality and most importantly action. Co/autoethnography as a self-study methodology and reflective practice provides an anti-oppressive vehicle that centers on a teacher educator's power to address various levels of injustice, that is, ideological, structural, and operational. It allows for a complex process based on the multiple dimensions of power and resistance and the importance of navigating the in-betweens. When we engage in this methodology, there is opportunity for change through action. Indeed, rooted in

experience understood from sociocultural perspectives with insight gleaned from each other and the world, co/autoethnography has the potential to be transformative.

What does this look like in the everyday moments of teaching and in our research on our own practice? Co/autoethnography "allows us to make our assumptions problematic while at the same time incites us to take a stand: to place as central our convictions around issues of feminism and more generally social justice. It invites us to reflect-in-action, recognizing that to be feminist teachers means to be engaged in action on an ongoing basis" (Coia and Taylor 2017, p. 59). As Burns and Walker (2005) reflect, "What feminist methodologies have in common is a shared commitment to drawing attention to the deep and irreducible connections between knowledge and power (privilege), and to making problematic gender in society and social institutions in order to develop theories that advance practices of gender justice" (p. 66). We hope we have shown that our development and use of co/autoethnography in the self-study movement are examples of just such a stance.

How can we encourage more feminist self-studies focused on social justice and on social action? Where are the openings and possibilities for this work? How can we put into action LaBoskey's (2004) call to the self-study community "to find ways to maintain the complexity, include more vices, detect bias, and disrupt our ways of knowing" (p. 824)? How can we increase the use of self-study as a means for social action and change? We realize, echoing LaBoskey (2009), that this involves asking the "hard questions about equity of ourselves, our programs, and our students" (p. 81). But it is also about taking risks and being willing to take a stand publically and use co/autoethnography as a platform to expose injustice, organize community action with our students and teachers, and examine critically the ways in which we enact justice in our teacher education classrooms and schools. In Sowa's (2016) self-study on developing preservice teachers' notions of social justice, she echoes our commitment, emphasizing the need to strengthen "the social action phase of social justice" (p. 22). We appreciate that there has been an increase of interest in diversity, intersectional stances, and even social justice topics in self-study, but we do not think it is enough.

We are living in contentious and troubled times where the toxicities of patriarchy infect our classrooms, schools, and communities. Our research cannot just be for the improvement of our teaching practices. It has to address how we can better prepare socially just teachers who are willing and equipped to take collective action and insist on change.

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