

# Chapter 6

## Allowing the Personal to Drive Our Self-Study: Texting, Emailing, and Facebook Messaging Our Way to Feminist Understanding



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**Abstract** In this chapter, we explore how our personal friendship and daily correspondence became the vehicle through which we made meaning in our co/autoethnographic self-study research. We are two friends who are teacher educators at the same university, identify as feminists, and collaboratively research and write together. We use co/autoethnography as a feminist self-study research methodology that takes autoethnography, a research paradigm that examines autobiographical narratives in relationship with larger cultural norms, and moves it beyond the singular to the plural. Using co/autoethnography enables us to come to know through the interweaving of our stories and dialogue so that validity, insight, and analysis all emerge as we write together exploring similar issues. In order to illustrate our collaborative writing process, and “show rather than tell,” we examine the dialogue that emerged through texting, email, and Facebook messaging after the election of President Trump that led to our exploration of our own embodied narratives of experiences of sexism and oppression within the context of our childhoods, schooling, and the teaching profession. We investigate our growing questions about our relationship to feminism as teacher educators and the principles that underlie this feminist writing partnership and our collaborative work.

I want to tell you this: There is a truth that lives inside you and no one can give you permission to tell it except yourself. You can tell the whole thing, the full truth—and you deserve to. You deserve to tell the story of your anger and heartbreak and regret, your foolishness and apostasy and your unquenchable thirst for revenge ... (Johnson, 2018)

*Monica: Sorry that it has taken me so long to respond. I am having one of those days where I just feel like I am not enough: not as a professor, ally, parent, or human being. I had horrible insomnia and was just feeling so overwhelmed on so many levels. I am working through it, having lots of small meetings with students*

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*which is helping but I have a general feeling of Ugh. I just have to push through it and put on my big girl panties and move forward. I am feeling so much and it doesn't feel like I am doing near enough.*

**Emily:** *Hey honey, I hear you. I feel it too. I'm so exhausted and can't figure out why. love you. take care of you and be gentle.*

*(Covid-19 Email Exchange: Wednesday, June 3rd, 2020)*

It happened unintentionally and in some ways quite unexpectedly. Over the course of our fifteen-year partnership, we repeatedly reminded each other that our friendship needed to come first that, in the end, we would prioritize and value it over our professional commitments. This was the main reason our professional relationship was so valuable to us, and without it, the work would be less meaningful. We would have never predicted that the personal would in fact become a vehicle for our professional research and writing. Our chapter is focused on the ways in which our personal relationship drives our self-study research collaboration. We examine how our friendship is interwoven into our professional lives and the vital role it plays in the ways that we make sense and analyze our experiences as teacher educators.

About two years ago, in the midst of our working partnership and deep sisterhood friendship, we began to notice how our daily personal correspondence through texts, emails, and Facebook messages had become a new way that we were making sense of our experiences in the world as women, scholars, and teacher educators. It was, in some ways, a natural and evolving rhythm. We would message to make plans or mention an incident with our kids and it would somehow bleed into our work. Or we would text about an urgent work question, and remember to then ask, “How are you?” After years of collaboration in which we more deliberately compartmentalized our work/friend selves, we began to intuitively listen to the natural organic rhythm of our collaboration. We found ourselves working to honor, value, and pay attention to the ways in which this less formal, more intimate space allowed for us to interactively dialogue and construct a type of co/autoethnography that focused on the convergence of our personal and professional lives. In particular, we used this blended method of the personal/professional in order for us to explore our reactions to the sexism and misogyny that emerged during Kavanaugh hearings and the implications for teacher education (Taylor & Klein, 2020). We are also currently engaged in this co/autoethnographic writing process for a book that examines the ways in which our bodies tell the story of oppressive experiences of the patriarchy and how to disrupt these in the classroom (Taylor & Klein, [in press](#)).

In this chapter, we—Monica and Emily—explore how our personal friendship and daily correspondence became the vehicle through which we made meaning in our co/autoethnographic self-study research. We are two friends who are teacher educators at the same university, identify as feminists, and collaboratively research and write together. We use co/autoethnography as a feminist self-study research methodology that takes autoethnography, “a form of self-representation that complicates cultural norms by seeing autobiography as implicated in larger cultural processes” (Taylor & Coia, 2006, p. 278), and moves it beyond the singular to the plural. Using co/autoethnography enables us to come to know through the

interweaving of our stories and dialogue so that validity, insight, and analysis all emerge as we write together exploring similar issues. In order to illustrate our collaborative writing process, and “show rather than tell,” below we examine the dialogue that emerged through texting, email, and Facebook messaging that led to our exploration of our own embodied narratives of experiences of sexism, exploitation, and oppression within the context of our childhoods, schooling, and the teaching profession.

This chapter begins with a discussion of how our collaboration was born. We describe our friendship, our teaching, and early writing together, and how those foundations manifested in new collaborations after the election of President Donald Trump. We explore how our personal friendship works alongside our professional partnership in order to make meaning. We investigate our growing questions about our relationship to feminism as teacher educators and the type of writing that emerges from this focus. In the final section, we explore the principles that underlie this feminist writing partnership and our collaborative work.

## 6.1 Coming to Know Through Our Feminist Friendship: Connecting Through Daily Texts, Emails, and Facebook Messaging

Maybe our girlfriends are our soulmates and guys are just people to have fun with. (Bushnell, 2006)

**Monica:** *Hey Sweetie: Have had you on my mind all weekend! I can only imagine how you are feeling and how hard it is and then tomorrow is the anniversary of your dad’s passing. I just want you to know how much I love you and how incredibly proud I am of your courage and clarity. . . I feel that I am taking off in the thick of this—but I am here if you need me!! Xo*  
(Text Message to Emily, Sunday, July 12 8:15 am)

**Emily:** *Thank you honey!!! I am ok—I really sat with my feelings yesterday and didn’t run around. And then slept and woke up super happy and peaceful. . . I am sure it will come and go in waves. I love you and know you are ALWAYS there.*  
(Text Reply to Monica: Sunday, July 12 8:27 am)

Fifteen years ago, we began our friendship as colleagues at the same institution, when we were collaboratively designing a teacher leadership program. Monica had already been at Montclair State University for four years and Emily was beginning her career as a teacher educator. Looking back now, it is hard to remember a time when we were not friends—when we didn’t refer to one another as “work wife,” “one brain,” “soul sista,” or “friendsister.”

### 6.1.1 Emily's Memory (January, 2020)

*I remember meeting you for one of the first times one warm August day when I came in to set up my office for my first semester of teaching. You were there putting together your tenure binder, ready to submit, juggling motherhood of two young kids. I was recently married, a new PhD in my first academic position, with no children (but a plan!). I was awed by what seemed like the graceful way you navigated what seemed like an overwhelmingly chaotic jumble of positions, roles, and jobs. At the time, I tended to focus on “one thing at a time.” I rarely took on more than I thought I could handle, I had gotten good at saying “no,” and I was careful about anything that infringed on my traditional work time. I had a narrow frame for my work: write, do traditional research, teach. Do them well and do very little else. This had developed largely as a result of 7 years of ongoing and mysterious medical problems later diagnosed as fibromyalgia. I had learned as a result to parcel out my energy, to shrink my life such that the world never saw the physical pain and struggles that kept me from engaging in my life as fully as I wanted. I looked to you and saw a reflection of a way of being a woman scholar that I did not believe I could ever be.*

*Academia is—sadly—inherently conservative. For new scholars desperate for academic positions and tenure, the safest of research and publications is more likely the norm. My inner “good girl” wanted to do well—perform in ways that were recognized by the academy. In a practical sense I wanted tenure. But what we see after years of this is a limitation of what is possible. Both mentally and physically my life had shrunk. Your instinct is to say “Yes. I’ll do it. I’m not intimidated, I can make this work, I can make this happen.” You are always shifting, trying, growing, experimenting. After years of closing off, limiting, saying no, I found that as I worked alongside you I felt safer to say “yes” and “let’s try it.” Part of that is knowing that you had my back.*

### 6.1.2 Monica's Memory (February, 2020)

*Ah yes, that was the August I decided to do the tenure file march—coming in every day for six hours for about a week until the final dossier was complete. I was pretty anxious about getting it done—I remember that I was listening to the Beck CD Guero on repeat as I needed to stay focused and get it done. It is funny to think about that time in my life, how far away it seems now, and yet I do think it is pretty representative of how I live my life. I tend to work intensely for periods of time and then play hard. I think this has always been my mojo for a long while and now I am attempting to find ways to find more balance and integration.*

*And my memories of first meeting you—well they are consistent with how I always think of you—radiant, focused, clear, super organized, and together. I think, from the first time I met you, I envied your ability to manage your time wisely with schedules*

*and timelines. You exude a sense of confidence, that you have a tight handle on everything, with not even a hair out of place. You always seem to have a purpose, there is very little nonsense, and you do it all with a smile. You seem to always anticipate what is to come or be in transit on your way to the next meeting, appointment, or engagement. Next to you my life felt incredibly messy and chaotic. (Google.docs)*

In pausing to reflect on our feminist friendship and how it fuels our professional collaboration, we note that the friendship came first, but it developed in the context of our work relationship. Our daily texts about everyday life also always include “water cooler talk” (Brown & Gray, 1995) about our teaching (How to help students understand the importance of building relationships with students? What was that crazy faculty meeting about? With what would you pair this reading?). This friendship relies on deep professional and personal vulnerability. Our earliest work together involved both co-teaching and co-writing. For each of us, this meant a unique way of sharing the self, our most vulnerable professional self, and also the self that often we cannot share with others such as our partners and closest friends. Co-teaching, for example, is a particular kind of dance. It can be intuitive and physical (Who takes up space and voice? How do they own and share that space? Who speaks? How much? When?). It is deeply emotional (How do you share stories? Share yourself and your emotions? How do you balance the caring for and relationships with students when there are two of you?). It is also intellectual (How do you plan a lesson together? How do you prioritize content and pedagogy? Whose ideas take center stage?). Both of us identify as “teachers”—being a “teacher” is central to who we are, it is how we feel respected, valued, effective, and even our “best” selves, as we have strong and lasting relationships with students. Each of us developed that “self” in the years before we worked together. Because teaching is a solitary activity in some ways, it can be a very private self, known only to the students, but not necessarily even to our closest peers. There is anxiety and vulnerability in sharing this central, but private self with another (What if she thinks I’m a bad teacher? What if I struggle in my teaching and she witnesses it?). Co-teaching is a dance; as much as you can try to state up front the values and norms underlying your practice, the practice of co-teaching comes in the doing of it, navigating the space (intellectual, physical, and emotional) in the moment to moment steps. Communication most certainly helps, but like any complex relationship there are underlying values (students should share power with professors, knowing is co-constructed) and intuitive chemistry (it feels easy, we notice when the other hasn’t taken up space and should) that influence the experience.

The dynamics of vulnerability in co-teaching are the same dynamics at play in our self-study research as teacher educators. Our writing selves are more public, but also deeply vulnerable. As we have reflected in the past, “we are committed to caring for one another in our personal and professional lives and believe that doing so has the potential to transform the spaces” in which we work and live (Taylor & Klein, 2018). The privileging of personal experience has been an essential characteristic of the field of self-study of teaching and teacher education (Fletcher, 2020; Munby & Russell, 1994; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). Munby and Russell (1994)

emphasized how exploring one's teaching practices helps the researcher to gain authority of one's experience rather than relying on reason. Feminist educators understand that the personal is meaningful, valuable, and a way of knowing about the world (Coia & Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Coia, 2020). Our collaboration takes this one step further, as we are inviting our personal lives outside of our professional work to help us to reflect on and transform practices that might perpetuate sexism and heteronormativity. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote:

Following Dewey, the study of education is the study of life—for example, the study of epiphanies, rituals, routines, metaphors, and everyday actions. We learn about education by thinking about life, and we learn about life by thinking about education. (p. xxiv)

Similarly, our friendship exists at the crossroads of our personal and professional lives and therefore is the ideal vehicle for meaning-making across the boundaries, messiness, and contradiction. We make sense of the world and the ways in which we interact with it through collaboration, connection, and cooperation within the context of a caring relationship (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Maher & Tetreault, 1994), which allows for dissonance, partiality, and confusion (Ellsworth, 1994). For example, through the COVID pandemic, we struggled to redefine our teaching selves in an era of zoom instruction. How did we create community? How did we respect the personal challenges we and our students were encountering? Sometimes, we would text midclass while students were in groups, trying to figure out how to respond to in moment crises we were facing. This was especially true when this summer, Monica taught a seminar on Critical Feminisms during the rise of Black Lives Matter protests and needed an emotional and intellectual sounding board throughout her teaching. Our friendship buoys us to shake things up, disrupt, and open ourselves to new possibilities (Lather, 2006; St. Pierre, 2000). We see this work as a continuation of that which has come before us in the self-study of teacher education practices: the imperative to explore issues of gender, privilege, and power (Arizona Group, 1996, 2000; Manke, 2000; Perselli, 1998, 2004; Skerrett, 2007). We hoped that writing from our everyday vulnerability would help to disrupt sexist and misogynistic norms and replace them with new opportunities for ourselves as well as our students. Much of this scholarship emerged from 2016 to the present day, as we reflected on our gendered childhoods and early years of teaching in response to increasing assaults on women in society.

## 6.2 Our Background to the Self-Study: Living Feminist Contradictions

**Monica:** *I cannot even recall the first time I became aware of the power and importance of the male gaze. I feel like the messaging was constantly loud and clear. You want male attention. Heads should turn. Attracting men is valuable and important.*

*My mother was a true knockout. Absolutely gorgeous—probably model material in her day—and her parents constantly told her what a beauty she was. She had the most beautiful clothes. For her Sweet Sixteen, a doll was made of her in her dress. That summer she went to Europe with her parents on a ship and was lavished with attention from men of all ages. My grandfather loved to take my mother out because of all the admiration he received with her on his arm. She constantly dieted—she bragged that during her college years she lived on lifesavers. It was always about looking good. She had THE most bizarre relationship with food.*

**Emily:** *It's so interesting Mon. My mom was lovely, but she never felt attractive. I remember—from my earliest years—her talking about feeling unattractive, too heavy, aware always of her poverty in North Carolina. She carried herself so elegantly—beautifully—like a model. But I cannot remember a time when I did not know that there was self-loathing of her body and her sense of her physical self in the world.*

**Monica:** *My mother's continual concern about her looks and the male gaze seemed to always conflict with her feminist ideals. She would bathe me in the tub with photos of Gloria Steinem and others on the wall and talk about how women could do anything they wanted. She seemed to believe in women but her power as a sexual object always seemed to come first. She had grown up in the 50s and in some ways she was never able to shake that mentality. In many ways she defined herself by her relationship with a man.*

**Emily:** *I saw this conflict in my mother as well. She would constantly talk to me about Virginia Woolf and the importance of having a “room of one's own.” She had supported herself and my dad until I was born and while they had agreed she would stop working, she felt the financial dependence on him so deeply. She rued it, but seemed not to feel able to change it. She would both emphasize body positivity in me, but was miserable in her own body. And even the body positivity was framed as a kind of “you're beautiful and that will make your life easier” way that had a real impact on me. (Facebook Messages: February 6th, 2020)*

Even though we recognized that our own upbringings of being raised on second-wave feminism of the 1970s and Helen Reddy's “I Am Woman” and our coming to know as third-wave feminists and pro-choice supporters of the 1990s were complex and often contradictory, we would never have imagined that almost forty years later, we would be still be living in a nation and a world dominated by sexism, misogyny, and the patriarchy. In the fall of 2015, as we mustered up the hope that we would soon have a female president in the USA, a dream that we had as children and that our mothers promised would one day be actualized, instead a sexist, white supremacist was elected. Recognizing that the notion that we lived in a “post-sexist” society was not true, we grappled with the constant assault of narratives in the news and social media that remind of us that the patriarchy is alive and well and has not lost its tight grip on the lives of women, children, and all those who are marginalized.

Three years later, we watched as Dr. Christine Blasey-Ford thoughtfully shared accounts of being sexually assaulted by Brett Kavanaugh at a high school party in a

privileged community in the 1980s and along with thousands of other women, we thought to ourselves her narratives could be our stories, of being sexualized, sexually harassed, and physically abused. We knew that our stories were not unique and that the assault on women is pervasive nationally and globally. Months of messaging and dialoguing about our own experiences of abuse and assault would form the first of a series of pieces that took us from the personal to the professional (Taylor & Klein, 2020).

In our writing, we wrestled with how assaults on women manifest in a variety of ways including lack of access to healthcare, birth control, and abortion; few opportunities for education increase of domestic violence; economic disparities of single mother households; the police murders of Blacks and the systemic racism that exists in society and in schools; the growing concern for the rights of LGBTQ youth in schools and society; and the misogyny of fundamentalist religious and political groups. We acknowledged the possibility of schools as sites where these inequities could be examined and problematized and yet we were acutely aware of the tensions of that goal with the neoliberal agenda of claiming to be gender neutral but in fact reproducing sexist, racist, and heteronormative inequalities (Taylor & Klein, 2020; Taylor & Klein, [in press](#)). Our personal experiences became how we investigated the implications for our teaching and professional lives. Throughout this chapter, we interweave examples from our personal correspondence to illustrate our process of co-constructing meaning around these issues.

### **6.3 Our Co/autoethnographic Method: Texting, Emailing, and Facebook Messaging to Understanding**

The version of co/autoethnography that we used for this self-study research drew from a long legacy of methodological use that Monica had developed with Lesley Coia (Taylor & Coia, 2020) but was reshaped by her collaboration with Emily and new nuances and features that emerged from our co-construction. Like the co/autoethnographic work, we found ourselves constructing knowledge together through dialogically interweaving our stories. We attempted to examine how our selves were presented through these narratives within the third space of our personal/professional relationship as well as the larger society in which we grew up and live. Similar to Monica's work with Lesley, we tried to allow the meaning to emerge through the dialogue, rather than critiquing one another's experiences. We found meaning and connection in "listening and recounting of stories" (p. 573). We began to realize that we had a true authentic burning question (Wells, 1999) to explore, when we dialogued about our personal responses to the Trump presidency within informal personal communications of texts, emails, and Facebook posts and messages.

Once we realized the power of dialoguing through these personal media, we began to do so intentionally. Rather than compartmentalizing our professional



writing, we allowed ourselves to just write back and forth to one another within texts, emails, and Facebook posts and messages (Cardetti & Orgnero, 2013; East, Fitzgerald, & Heston, 2009; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2014). We were using a kind of “nomadic jamming” (Coia & Taylor, 2014), which allowed for us to move back and forth from the past to the present, from our personal experiences, to our professional experiences as teachers and teacher educators. We jammed and flowed, and started and stopped, adding in references to things we were reading about teaching and the experiences of secondary trauma, and embodied ways to address them in the classroom. Within the context of these informal messy ways of dialoguing, we found ourselves wading through deep emotions. Our friendship helped to hold space for those feelings, whether new or old.

We grappled with how to compose a co/autoethnography that reflected this interweaving of the personal and professional. What would it look and feel like? How could we capture our emotions and yet still offer professional insights? Drawing from Richardson’s (2000) criteria for trustworthiness in writing for inquiry, we wanted to construct a piece that spoke to the readers aesthetically, but we also engaged them intellectually. Rather than separate the personal and the professional, we wanted to create a piece of writing that blurred the boundaries as a means of analysis. We looked at Middleton’s article, *Doing feminist theory: A post-modernist perspective* (1995), in which she provided two versions of her research, one personal and one professional, and took our co/autoethnography one step further. We wrote collaboratively from blended voices of the personal and professional in order to have our lived personal experiences engage with our professional identities.

This process has manifested in a series of published pieces over the years (Taylor & Klein, 2020), but most recently as we began work on a book about gender and teacher education (Taylor & Klein, *in press*). In this final section, we describe and illustrate two major purposes our writing served. Rather than provide a series of clipped examples for each, we include one significant example of each kind of writing in an attempt to capture the kinds of dialogue that occurred. In some cases this writing was deliberate—i.e., we set out to try and raise these issues in our writing together while in other cases it was spontaneous. In each case, our ability to write across Facebook messenger, text, email, and Google document allowed us spaces for both deliberate and spontaneous dialogue.

Overall our collaborative writing served two purposes:

1. To make sense of our past and present experiences as women and teachers.
2. To improve our current work as teacher educators through dialogue and interweaving our personal stories with the theory and research on trauma, anger, and feminism.

These purposes were specifically tailored to our current interests as scholars/educators/women but could be generalized to the work of all self-study researchers.

### 6.3.1 *Making Sense of Our Past and Present Experiences as Women and Teachers*

Writing serves as a kind of “sensemaking” (Weick, 2001), something that “gives us an insight into where we come from” (Langenberg & Wesseling, 2016, para.12). In order to generate narratives for our book, we began writing back and forth to one another over email. Sometimes, this would take the form of beginning to make sense of our early teaching years, as we did in a series of emails about anger, our first years of teaching, and how that manifested in our early 20s. We felt a kinship as we realized that we were both NYC school teachers at almost the same time, just out of college, and navigating schools where large portions of our students were of color and living in poverty. In that sense, many of them brought to school their own traumas and we were navigating both our experiences of personal trauma, our students’ traumas, and learning to teach. We were attempting to understand what it meant to be an urban teacher and where our personal and professional lives met and diverged.

**Emily:** *My first year was so brutal. So so brutal. I'm truly amazed at how my students from that time remember me as loving and caring because pedagogically I was so limited. But yes—that year I moved into my own apartment in the city for the first time—living alone. And by the end of that year I was starting to drink and drink hard! Lots of fun, but in a dark way over time.*

**Monica:** *I was exactly the same—drinking, dancing into the night, going out A LOT. I was so exhausted from all the feelings that I carried around every day that I did not want to feel a bit.*

**Emily:** *I remember how hard it was for me to manage anger and direct confrontation. For years I had avoided conflict in that way and mostly I could use humor to manage and navigate that. But sometimes I struggled with what I knew—not to take things personally. When my students stood up for themselves, were seemingly rude to me, aggressive, talked back, said no—it raised so much emotion for me and anger too.*

**Monica:** *Did you express your anger? I feel like I was just a bundle of raw emotion those first few years. I would get so pissed off at my colleagues in the teachers' lounge. There were mostly male teachers there at the time and I was one of four young women who were hired. Those guys had been there forever and they treated us in sexist and patronizing ways. They also had no understanding of what good teaching—they were great with discipline but super traditional—teaching the same shitty lessons year after year after year. I would just lose it with them and start screaming. I clearly had a lot of anger and they made me so mad. They weren't really making a difference in the lives of the kids and it felt so frustrating.*

*And I also broke three door windows as a teacher. I would be so frustrated with the students. They wouldn't listen or they would be disrespectful and I would just lose it. And they were so inappropriate with me at times—talking about my body,*

*flirting, asking me out. As I write this I think no wonder I was so fucking angry—I was sexualized by the male teachers and students constantly. I literally started dressing like the kids to hide my shape, baggy girbaud jeans and a big sweater.*

**Emily:** *Yes by the end I was expressing my rage but in crazy ways—I almost came to blows in a bar with a woman once—I remember that scared me. I would go into rages on the subway because people would walk up the stairs on the wrong side (ha!!) . . . My rage and anger was all over the place by the last year I was there. I remember cursing once in front of my students when they were inappropriate laughing at a rape scene in a movie we were showing about Vietnam. The next day I came in and apologized—it was the first time I had done that in front of them. They kept saying "oh Miss don't worry teachers curse at us all the time." I cried after that. I didn't want to be another person in their life who couldn't behave like an adult. It's not that I care about cursing—it's that I thought there should be one space in their life that is different you know?*  
(Email Exchange, Sat, May 23, 2020 at 11:03 AM)

For over a month, we dialogued back and forth through email and text about these past experiences as young, white women learning to teach. The process began more messily than not, after a series of emails and texts about how we might do this, we decided email was the easiest way. One of us started writing a little bit about a memory or a thought. Then, the other would respond back, writing in bold to distinguish who was speaking and responding directly to different sections, thus creating a dialogue. With each response, we used a different font (italics, bold italics, etc.) to mark clearly who was the author. In doing so we created a rich back and forth, of personal musing, responsive writing, and sometimes journaling. We tried to write every day, but sometimes our responses took a few days to formulate. But the other waited; it was important to us that we not continue to write until we had heard from the other. Much of co-authoring can involve two people writing in parallel, but for us, the source of our narratives was dialogic and interwoven. We were actively listening to one another and then responding. The other's response often became a new way of thinking about our own experiences. We wrote dialogically to make sense of our past and to think about how our past helped to inform our present ways of theorizing about being young novice women teachers.

### **6.3.2 Allowing Personal Dialogue to Make Professional Meaning**

Part of what made our reflection more than mere navel-gazing was the work we actively did to connect it to our professional lives and selves. Some of our daily writing involved the texts we were reading. In a separate Google document, we kept a record of everything we read and our notes about those texts. Sometimes, we read the same things, certain foundational pieces we wanted to write about, but often we did not. We realized that it was more efficient to read some separate texts, and this

way we read more broadly. As we were reading, It was not unusual for one of us to text the other with an interesting quote or idea. We were each other's think-partner, and we often wanted to process new ideas together. These notes and insights often came into our collaborative writing. Dialoguing through writing helped us to find ways to weave together our understanding of the literature with our own personal stories and reflections. Sometimes, this would involve naming past or present experiences, and other times, we would discover new understandings for ourselves beyond the literature that would have implications for our work as feminist educators. This kind of dialoguing broke from traditional academic writing where one might write a summary paragraph of all we know about a particular topic and aimed to see how these texts worked together to give shape and meaning to our lives. It was a blurring of the personal and the academic or professional, one that emerged from the friendship (nobody would be able to dialogue in this way if they were strangers) and also helped to build our friendship. The process was bidirectional.

**Monica:** *Reading about women and anger in this book Burn It Down (2019), I am reminded that angry women are called bitches, witches, whores—they are hysterical, crazy, dangerous, bitter, jealous, emotional, dramatic, petty, hormonal, and they are shunned, shamed, shut down, drugged, locked up, and killed, women are not allowed to be angry. They just aren't.*

**Emily:** *I thought of this today as I was looking through Traister (2018). I remember reading and being told that biologically being angry is bad for our bodies—our blood pressure, etc. And I was trying to reconcile that with my belief that it's important for women to express anger in part because we are not allowed to. I came across this quote: "I confess that I am now suspicious of nearly every attempt to code anger as unhealthy, no matter how well meaning or persuasive the source. I believe Stanton was correct: what is bad for women, when it comes to anger, are the messages that cause us to bottle it up, let it fester, keep it silent, feel shame, and isolation for ever having felt it or re-channel it in inappropriate directions. What is good for us is opening our mouths and letting it out, permitting ourselves to feel it and say it and think it and act on it and integrate it into our lives, just as we integrate joy and sadness and worry and optimism" (p. 244). I think that's really profound. We aren't taught to change systems that create the anger, that allow us to make changes in our lives that could prevent anger in some serious ways. But rather we are simply taught that it's bad for us and bad. But I do want to go back and look at some of that literature. She frames it more positively this way:*

*"On some level, if not intellectual then animal, there has always been an understanding of the power of women's anger: that as an oppressed majority in the United States, women have long had within them the potential to rise up in fury, to take over a country in which they've never really been offered their fair or representative stake. Perhaps the reason that women's anger is so broadly denigrated--treated as so ugly, so alienating, and so irrational—is because we have known all along that with it came the explosive power to upturn the very systems that have sought to contain it. What becomes clear, when we look to the past with*

*an eye to the future, is that the discouragement of women's anger--via silencing, erasure, and repression--stems from the correct understanding of those in power that in the fury of women lies the power to change the world" (p. 52).*

**Monica:** *I did that too for years, because for me being angry meant being like my biological father, fiery, passionate, angry, and often violent. I spent much of my life, from the time I was about 8 until maybe 10 years ago, terrified of strong emotions--terrified that there existed some sort of demon in me that I needed to actively hold down. And it's not like I didn't feel anger--it certainly was there for me--but I was always repressing it. But I can get very angry and want to release it physically. I can feel it boil up in me.*

*Jamison (2019) wrote about how women are not allowed to be angry--they are only allowed to be sad because sadness is more refined and selfless. When women get angry, they often feel shame or embarrassment. I remember feeling this way when we were trying to decide who to admit to the UTR (Urban Teacher Residency) and I got into an argument with Mike D about the resident who I knew was sexist. He told me he didn't know what I was talking about and I finally blurted out: "Well that is because you are not a woman." And then I felt incredibly vulnerable because I had spoken from a place of anger and also fear, probably. Like I let the wall down and showed myself and it made me so uncomfortable.*

*Kring (2000), a psych professor at Berkeley, wrote about how men express their anger through physically assaulting objects or verbally attacking people, while women are more likely to cry when they are angry--like that is the acceptable emotion for the outside world as women. Angry women make people uncomfortable--they are much more likely to deal with a sad woman who will evoke sympathy. She loses her social capital when she is angry.*

**Emily:** *I think it is helpful for me to think about our anger as less than as not only about how it hurts us, but how it has possibility for liberating us. That speaks to a lot of what you have written below--what is the purpose of our anger? It does make people uncomfortable (and go to the stuff we wrote on likeability--we are PUNISHED for it in the workplace)--and Kring is right--we try to find socially acceptable ways to express our anger, to make it palatable and sympathetic. We can't just be angry because SHIT IS WRONG. We have to be angry because we are scared or sad.*

**Monica:** *I am struck by how often women are silenced or shamed when they are angry. . . . At some point when I started to explore anger on the dance floor through 5Rs, I learned about the purpose of anger--our anger instinct is there to protect things that we love--it fuels us, our actions against injustice, our protection of others, of ourselves. It is a necessary emotion, one that we need. Lorde (2007) talks about this in her essay on the uses of anger--it is a catalyst for useful discomfort and clearer dialogue. Jamison (2019) wrote, "anger isn't just a blaze burning structures to the ground; it also casts a glow, generates heat, and brings bodies into communion" (p. 22) . . . "this is a vision of anger as fuel and fire, as a powerful inoculation against passivity" (p. 23).*

*Where does anger exist in our teaching? Where do we allow anger with our students? I think about the students' bodies in schools that are always being controlled—stay calm, stay attentive, stand up straight, stand in a line, fold your hands—but where do kids get to feel their anger, work through their anger, use their anger as fuel? I think of the Rodney King riots when I was a teacher—and staging a protest with my middle school students in the school yard because I just had a gut feeling that they needed to be in their bodies.*

**Emily:** *I think related to this—the idea of where anger exists in our teaching. I think a lot of what you say is true. Part of it is honoring the anger that students come to classrooms with —about injustices they can't name or powerlessness in their worlds. I think part of what we do as teachers is teach them to NAME that anger, the injustice. It is not enough to offer an alternative vision of the future (i.e. "you can get an education and your life will be great!"), but rather help them harness their anger to create a world that addresses the roots of their anger. Teachers—preservice and in-service need this too. They need to feel they have a voice, that what they are seeing and experiencing matters—that the injustice that is perpetrated on them as laborers is also something they can protest, change, etc.*

*(Email Exchange: Tue, Apr 21, 2020 at 1:01 PM)*

Above are examples of how we have interwoven our personal narrative into research, literature, and theory, creating a dialogue for the construction of meaning and breaking boundaries. Through an exchange of emails, we demonstrate how our personal dialogue drives collaborative meaning-making. We are able to disrupt the traditional binaries of personal/professional, theory/practice, lived experience/intellectual, mind/body to something more holistic like praxis. Our email exchange began as a response to readings that we were both doing and how they resonated with our own past experiences. We then connected to our personal work as teacher educators, and finally, we considered how these insights might improve our teacher education practices with preservice and in-service teachers. Again, because we rejected rigid binaries, it made sense that our meaning-making of our past experiences, the literature, and our writing helped to inform our thinking about teaching.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Women helped each other in ways small and large every day, without thinking, and that was what kept them going even when the world came up with new and exciting ways to crush them. (Cole, 2017, p. 164)

This chapter explores the elements of our feminist writing partnership, elements that through co/autoethnography act as guiding principles or touchstones for our collaboration. For us, a feminist writing partnership is grounded in:

### ***6.4.1 Friendship and Vulnerability***

We remind each other constantly that there is always more work, but friendships require nurturing. We come to the partnerships believing that the work is better and more meaningful when we can be vulnerable together both personally and professionally, as vulnerability allows us to be curious, caring, and connect to those questions and concerns that are of primary significance to our lives. For example, even as we were writing this, Emily was supposed to go visit Monica for two days at the beach. For a few moments, she wondered if she should cancel—she had so much writing to do on their projects. Would Monica be upset if she didn't make as much progress as she should? But she reminded herself, that without nurturing the friendship, the work would quickly become meaningless. What would either of us care about another publication if it meant that we lost each other as friends? We know this may sound simple, but we believe that a close personal friendship with a colleague allows for the kind of personal and professional vulnerability that is necessary to full engage in challenging and emotional self-study research. We hope that our readers already have those kinds of blurred friendships or will look to develop them as we rely so much on one another for personal and professional growth.

### ***6.4.2 Authentic Personal/Professional Meaning-Making***

Our research, reading, writing, and teaching are all grounded in the drive for authentic meaning-making that emerges from the interweaving of our personal and professional lives. We recognize that for us, this is a relatively recent phenomena with our privileged status as tenured, full professors. We have reached a career milestone where we can more easily (and yet within the academy never fully easily) commit to work that matters to us whether or not it is the kind of work approved of in the narrow confines of the academy (although we strove to do this prior to tenure and promotion as well). We went into this field, in part, because of who it allowed us to be and the ways it allowed us to grow, but we have committed to work that informs us as human beings as well as we engage in work that is informed by our lives. We believe that the constant need to produce in the academy can only be fulfilling if the research focus of teacher educators truly comes from the heart. We encourage our peers to listen to themselves carefully and only commit to research that speaks deeply to them.

### 6.4.3 Action

While we are both deeply reflective individuals, one of the purposes of our writing partnership is about creating knowledge that is action-oriented, driving our practice as teacher educators, fighting for social justice, and building knowledge that we can share with others and guides our teaching, advising, and collaborations with stakeholders. Our work resides in a third space, where we are always thinking about the practical implications. For example, for a chapter we are developing in our next book together, we are thinking through the ways to support preservice teachers who come to the classroom with trauma and work with children in trauma. We have begun to consider what we might add to their coursework to better prepare them to tap into both the strengths and challenges of working with children who have experienced trauma. We know that too often academics reside in the intellectual realm and do not always consider the implications of their work on the ground. We believe that when you put into practice what you learn through research, and specifically self-study of teacher education practices, you are contributing to change and agency. We encourage all of you to continue to think about the ways in which your research is action-oriented.

Neither of us can fathom a writing, teaching, and research partnership for ourselves that exists outside of a friendship, a friendship that is prioritized above and beyond the work. But we acknowledge that we are also fed by the work that the friendship is related to the work. And in truth, our solid and very reliable friendship is what has allowed us to try out a meaning-making process that organically happens through our daily interactions. Said differently, we trust that our friendship and the ways that we engage with one another help us to lead to new understandings of the world. We do not think there could be another route for our commitment to fight sexism oppression and exploitation as feminist teacher educators. We hope that others will take up these commitments too.

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