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Gendered Leadership and Patriarchy : A Healing Feminist Autoethnography

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Gendered Leadership and Patriarchy:

A Healing Feminist Autoethnography

A DISSERTATION

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

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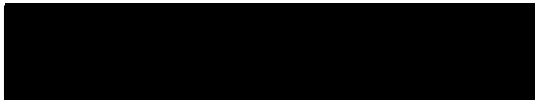
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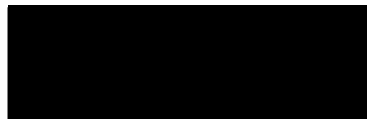
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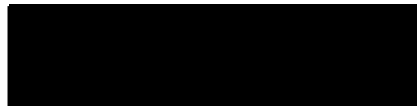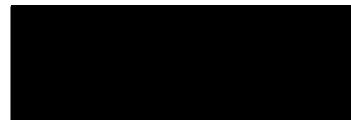and Acting Dean of the Graduate School

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Abstract

This healing feminist autoethnography examines my gendered experiences as a school principal during the 2021–2022 school year, centering upon two research questions: How can personal accounts of sexist experiences disrupt gendered norms in educational leadership? And how can I, as a feminist leader, exist authentically and truthfully in patriarchal institutions without placing myself in professional or academic peril? From July of 2021 through June of 2022, I collected 62 journal entries detailing critical encounters, experiences, and reflections and shared them with a critical friend who helped me process them. I then analyzed them within the context of relevant literature to examine emergent themes. The findings revealed three dominant themes: localization of patriarchal norms, small feminist disruptions, and grace. Each theme elucidated the intricacies of external gendered dynamics and internalized patriarchy, locations for feminist disruption, and the challenges of enacting an ethic of care with all individuals whom I encounter professionally, including myself. I conclude the study by considering further locations for feminist disruption and how I might expand the work into a more explicitly activist realm.

This study explicitly elevates emotional and spiritual knowledges as valued ways of knowing and is grounded in the belief that everything is connected, as Anzaldúa (1987) asserted. To highlight the importance of spirituality in this dissertation process, I used major arcana tarot cards as symbolic representations of each facet of the study. Individually, these cards serve as touchstones for important moments and facets of this study, and collectively, they represent this study's journey.

Keywords: feminist educational leadership, patriarchy, ethic of care, autoethnography

Acknowledgements

As I frequently half-jokingly say, "It takes a village to raise a principal." For the past several months while writing this dissertation, I have amended it to say, "It takes a village to raise a feminist." And, good goddess, it DOES. I first met Dr. Monica Taylor as my professor of a Gender and Sexuality class in the Fall 2017 semester. I loved the class – its format, its students, and all that is Monica. Beyond the course's content, Monica introduced me to the possibility that my more emotionally centered ways of knowing were not only valid, but valued. The following January, I called her about a concern I had, and she immediately said the thing I needed to hear: trust your intuition. The next thing she said was, "Do you want me to be your adviser?" And that was the start of this journey together. Monica is brave, fierce, and knows how to say the thing that needs to be said, even when it is difficult to say it. She is the high priestess of the village that has raised this feminist, and I am forever grateful for her continued guidance, beauty, intelligence, and candor.

Yet, Dr. Monica Taylor was not the first woman to compel me into this doctoral journey. Dr. Katrina Bulkley was a dear professor during my Educational Leadership master's degree program. Upon my acceptance into the Teacher Education and Teacher Development (TETD) doctoral program several years later, she simply said, "It's about time." She was my first adviser in the program, and she graciously supported me when I decided to transition my advisement to Monica. She was patient with my slow movement through the coursework, and her belief in me as an academic was immeasurably important during the darker times of this doctoral degree process.

I am also immeasurably indebted to Dr. Emily Klein. Her co-autoethnographic work with Monica has been an inspiration for my own explorations, and her insight, honesty, and

willingness to sit with me in the complexity of this work made my study far richer than I could have imagined. I am also extremely grateful to the many other TETD faculty including, but certainly not limited to Dr. Jeremy Price, Dr. Reva Jaffe-Walter, Dr. Fernando Naiditch, and the dearly departed Dr. Michele Knoebel. You all made me a better thinker, and there are few gifts more precious than that.

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The educators with whom I currently work, and the educators with whom I have worked previously, are and will always be my inspiration and an endless source of laughter, hope, and awe. In spite of countless forces pulling and pushing them in different directions, they make beautiful things happen every day. I always say, "Mess with me? Fine. Mess with my teachers? Look out." I adore all of you.

It has taken me seven years to complete this degree, and I would have given up long ago if it were not for my friends who have been steadfast in their support, grace, and laughter. My dear Laurie has been here since we started this program together, and our friendship has exceeded anything I could have imagined. Yana, who is one of the fiercest human beings I know, allowed me to feel seen and heard, always framing things in a way that added nuance and uncovered truths. To my Tribe since 1992: I hope this study is the latest of our "Safety, first. Then rebel, rebel, rebel!" efforts. Mel and Bec, you are brilliant and true and complex and

glorious. WAHOOWA, my dear friends. You know all the pre-internet secrets, and I thank you

for keeping them. It takes a village, and I have an incredible one.

Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated to my sister, my dad, my mother, and my husband. Although I was raised as an only child, I have a soul sister, and her name is Alexiandra. Although she's technically a "step," there's absolutely no "step" in our relationship. Alex, I love you so. You are magic. Dad, you continue to learn and grow, and although I have always been proud of you, this last year has shown me how incredibly strong, resilient, and reflective you are. I love you, and I am so grateful for everything from the impromptu sprinkler romps in the 1980s to moments of quiet support now. Mom, our relationship is complex, but you gave me my fight, and I certainly needed it here. My beloved Chris, you see it all, hear it all, and love me through it all. You deal with the middle-of-the-night freak-outs, the silences that come with deep thinking, and the darker moments in which I really, really feel unlovable. You endure angry diatribes over the dinner table, in the car, on a run… You made me want to get married again, and that's really saying something. I love you beyond words. And finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Georgia Tenore Jadick. Georgia, your time on earth was cut way too short. I can still hear your voice and feel your presence, you mudslinging pyromaniac. Words cannot begin to express how much I miss you. Your absence is a presence.

Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I'll tell you a secret no one

wants you to know.

You do not have to be good to be brave.

You do not have to be perfect,

your mind completely clear,

your heart full of joy,

everything soft and sacred.

They make it out like the brave never lie, but the truth is, all of us lie at least twice a day and that has

no bearing on how much courage you can hold in your heart.

(Gill, 2018, p. 53)

I recently discovered the work of poet Nikita Gill (2018), and it is gorgeous. The above

quotation is the beginning of her poem, "Beauty and Bravery" (p. 53). When I read this poem, it

spoke to how, in retrospect, I feel about this study. Throughout this entire process, I was imperfect,

confused, and angry. I worried about how it would be perceived – if people would take offense, read

excerpts out of context, or question its truth. In each moment of imperfection, I took a deep breath, and

girded by my supportive friends and colleagues, said "This is my truth." I moved forward. Each time I did

this, it was an act of bravery. Putting this work out into the world is also one.

Problem Statement: A Critical Moment

I have been in public education for twenty years, and although I have certainly

experienced sexist situations, it was not until I became an educational leader that I felt the full

brunt of it. The following statement was included in the "Areas in Need of Improvement" in my

summative principal evaluation for the 2016–2017 school year: "I encourage you to focus on

more effectively managing your display of mood/emotion." My supervisor at the time wrote it

after I had endured a lengthy healthy workplace environment investigation prior to receiving

tenure. A healthy workplace environment investigation can be launched by any staff member in a

school district who feels that s/he has been treated in a disrespectful or malicious manner by a

colleague or a superior. Once the district receives a written account of the allegations, they are

required to conduct an investigation. If the investigation determines that conduct concerns are

founded, the district is to take remedial steps to ensure that the conduct does not occur or

continue to occur (New Jersey Employment Law Firm, 2023).

My investigation resulted in the above notation in my summative evaluation, which was

the first negative notation in all of my four years of employment in the district. I was not put on

any remedial plan, nor was I given any support to address the concerns that were presented.

Despite the dearth of support my district afforded me, I wrote a response that included a plan in

an effort to show that I was reflective, capable of accepting feedback, and willing to address any

concerns presented to me. Although I was skeptical as to why the investigation was launched, I

always want to be open to feedback. Over lunch a few months later, my supervisor characterized

the investigation as "water under the bridge."

My tenure was ultimately approved, but I was forever changed by the experience. It

gutted me emotionally and psychically, and it made me question my ability to be an elementary

principal, a role that I had relished ever since I had started in it. I doubted my self-worth, my

self-perception, and my ability to self-reflect. It called into question everything I had worked so

hard to achieve as an educator and as a human. I had twenty years of this work therapy under my

belt. Had I been completely deluding myself all along?

I first wrote about this experience for a summer course in 2020 entitled "Critical

Feminisms" with Dr. Monica Taylor, while the global pandemic raged on without an end in

sight. Crisis was everywhere, and I felt that I owed myself the space and time to reflect upon the feminist rage that the mere thought of my investigation ignited. I chose to take a feminist autoethnographic approach, centering emotional knowledge in my study, which was a deliberate disruption not just to the implication that I lacked an ability to regulate my emotion, but also that I *should* regulate my emotion. This disruption extended to related sexist research norms such as logic being valued over emotion, compelling me to challenge what "counts" as knowledge. In rereading my Critical Feminisms study now, I am struck by my vulnerability and honesty. I owned my lifelong struggle of accepting my own anger, and I shared so much of what still brings me a sense of shame. That I even had an unhealthy workplace claim against me still, to this day, evokes a profound sense of embarrassment (Jadick, 2020).

In sharing the initial autoethnographic study with my classmates, I realized that I was not done with this work. In fact, despite my significant vulnerability in writing it, I felt that I had not pushed it as far and as deep as I could have. I had not referenced my adverse childhood experiences and the parenting that allowed me to acquiesce to criticism of my "moodiness" so easily and without question. I also had not considered my emotional response to the entire situation as knowledge because I had never truly embraced emotion as a valid and valued form of knowing. I had not searched for other researchers and works that centered non-dominant ways of knowing, and I had so much more to do in locating my work within the broader field of feminist research. I also understood on a very deep level that my research must include how I internalize patriarchy, and how even this internalization is legitimate and important knowledge.

In beginning to review relevant literature, I discovered that my gendered experiences were not unique. I have not found any documentation of healthy workplace environment cases that evidence gender bias, and this is unsurprising, as personnel documentation is generally

protected under privacy laws. However, I did find several texts that examined critical gendered

incidents women have experienced within the field of education, and in particular, when they

were perceived as a threat to academic and institutional norms (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Blount,

1999, 2000; Blackmore, 2013; Brunner, 2000; Chase & Bell, 1990; Franklin, 2015;

Kropiewnicki & Shapiro, 2001; Peters & Nash, 2021; Watson & Baxley, 2021).

In the following sections of Chapter One, I provide an overview of the study, share my

research questions, and discuss the historical context of women in education. This

contextualization includes how women were positioned in the 19th and 20th centuries and how

men in education quickly realized that to maintain their social status, they needed to distance

themselves from women, both literally and figuratively. I then provide some personal context as

to how these dynamics prevail today and how I, as an elementary school principal, experience

them. Finally I offer working definitions to key terms in the study.

Research Question

Figure 1

The Fool Thoth Deck Tarot Card

Note. This card represents readiness to take a risk and the courage to journey into the unknown.

From Tarot Card Meanings by TarotX (2022).

I characterize this study as a healing feminist autoethnography. As every journey begins

by taking a risk and venturing into the unknown, I began my dissertation expedition by

embodying the spirit of The Fool, as depicted in Figure 1 (Ziegler, 1988). This study involved an

examination of my gendered experiences as an elementary principal, how I internalized and processed these experiences, and how this processing could potentially inform divergent leadership styles. This specific type of self-study allowed me to culminate my doctoral work through a fully embodied practice that made me a more intuitive principal with a more holistic and socially just practice, disrupting hegemonic leadership norms and replacing them with a more emotionally grounded, feminist stance. I explored the following research questions: How can personal accounts of sexist experiences disrupt gendered norms in educational leadership? How can I, as a feminist leader, exist authentically and truthfully in patriarchal institutions without placing myself in professional or academic peril.

Originally, I included, "How can a critical analysis of my own gendered experiences assist in disrupting other facets of marginalization?" in my questions, but as I began to move through the year of journaling for my data collection phase and subsequently began to analyze the data, it became apparent that this study centered upon the two former questions, and the latter became more of an implication. Essentially, I needed to critique my own work and consider it within the context of my own experiences before I could arrive at any implications as to how I might apply what I had learned to other facets of marginalization. Thus, the question about using this study's process to disrupt other facets of marginalization became an implication explored in Chapter Five.

My study's nontraditional research orientation allowed me to disrupt academic norms as well. A significant facet of these disruptions resided in critically examining my own internalizations of patriarchy within my professional and academic spheres, balancing systemic assumptions with how I have internalized those assumptions. I embodied the spirit of transdisciplinary feminist research in embracing and legitimizing divergent ways of knowing and

being in my research. I also embraced the facet of transdisciplinary feminist research that values

learning as healing. I viewed this study as a weaving of a warm blanket, one that will invariably

have missed stitches and imperfections but that was made creatively and lovingly, comforting me

in times of self-doubt and challenge and providing me a symbol of my work and its importance.

Context of the Study

Figure 2.

The Empress Thoth Deck Tarot Card

Note. This card represents feminine ways of knowing. From Tarot Card Meanings by TarotX

(2022)

It is essential that this study is grounded in the history of women in education in the

United States, as this history reflects its pervasive, centuries-old sexist educational foundations

and structures. Although education is considered a woman-rich professional field, it is rife with

patriarchy and it is this dynamic that places this study within women's historic roles in

education. The Empress tarot card, shown in Figure 2, emphasizes feminine ways of knowing,

and it is important to understand how and why these ways of knowing were marginalized

historically (Ziegler, 1998). By first exploring historical and policy contexts and then moving

into my personal experiences as a woman leader in education, it becomes abundantly apparent

how our education system is structured to perpetuate the dominance of men and the

subordination of women despite the fact that women educators significantly outnumber men (Blackmore, 2013; Blount 2000).

Historical and Policy Context

Fraser (2007) offered a historical overview of how American teacher preparation developed from the mid sixteenth century onward. He detailed the emergence of institutions that ranged from informal "dame schools" and religiously centered schools to Ivy League colleges that offered a means of teacher preparation in the 1700s (p. 23). This period was followed by a shift toward more structured and formal teacher preparation programs in the 1800s, due in large part to the advocacy work of Emma Willard and Catharine Beecher, who pushed for a more formalized path to teaching as a means of women entering the workforce. Their advocacy, however, needed to account for gender norms and the socio-cultural expectations of women. In this respect, Willard asserted that "educated mothers" would better contribute to children's character building and therefore their education would contribute to the prosperity of the new nation. She stated that teaching "was an extension of motherhood, and therefore in women's sphere" (Fraser, 2007, p. 31) and used the prospect of U.S. economic gain to further her call for professional teacher education for women. Blount's (1999) work reiterated this alignment of teacher preparation with "traditionally accepted duties and roles expected of women," (p. 57) which allowed women a route into the workforce with fewer obstacles.

This tension between advocating for more women in the workplace and reifying traditional gender norms to do so continued into the mid-1800s. Fraser (2007) characterized this dynamic as a "bargain . . . being struck between women's social role and domesticity" (p. 42). Although this bargain can be seen as a perpetuation of the oppression of women, it did seem to move women into the field of education in more formal ways, and by 1850 education was

considered a professional field for women. This tension continued through the 19th century; as the field continued to become more "feminized" (p. 59), it did so by reinforcing the conception of women as domestically oriented nurturers best suited for working with children.

This feminization of the profession influenced the perceptions of male teachers, and accordingly, they attempted to distance themselves from women teachers. Blount (2000) noted that male teachers became concerned with being subjected to the cultural and sociological subordination previously reserved for women. In response to this concern, men began to create what Blount (2000) called " male-identified niches" that, unsurprisingly, included administrative positions (p. 86). Not only did administrative roles allow men to reinforce their dominance over women, these roles also allowed men to decrease their literal proximity to women, as the location of administrative central offices tended to be near commercial and governmental centers rather than near schools (Blount, 2000, p. 86).

Blackmore (2013) further examined sexism in educational leadership, highlighting how education policy research largely neglects the critical examination of hegemonic systemic dynamics in the field. She argued that common educational leadership orientations are positioned in quite gendered ways. Through her analysis of various leadership styles, she showed how even seemingly "shared leadership" orientations are largely patriarchal, centralizing power with one individual and requiring those within the school community to adapt to the school system rather than requiring the system to adapt to their needs. Marshall and Edwards (2020) provided statistics supporting the assertion that education is a field rife with sexism. Although women make up the lion's share of teaching roles, the percentage of women in educational leadership positions is significantly less.

Statistics from New Jersey Department of Education's website support this gender

disparity in K–12 settings, although it takes a bit of analysis to see it. In 2022, the percentage of

women administrators (51.4%), was slightly higher than that of male administrators (48.6%[1]).

This statistic is promising at first glance, but when the proportion of men versus women in

education is considered, it paints quite a different picture. Whereas the ratio of male

administrators to male teachers in 2022 was 1:8 in New Jersey, the ratio of women

administrators to women teachers was 1:26. Taking into account the significantly larger number

of women in K–12 teaching positions in New Jersey (90,254.0 female teachers versus 26,718.8

male teachers), the proportion of male administrators to male teachers was three times that of

women administrators to female teachers. There may have been more women administrators than

men in New Jersey in 2022, but their percentage does not reflect much parity when the number

of male teachers versus female teachers is taken into account (NJDOE, 2023a). New Jersey's

statistics indicate that the historical dynamics that Blount (2000) detailed are still quite present in

the field today: men hold a disproportionate number of leadership positions compared to women.

Working Definitions

For the purposes of this proposal, it is important to establish operational definitions of

feminism and patriarchy. hooks (2015) framed feminism as "a movement to end sexist

oppression [that] directs our attention to systems of domination and the interrelatedness of sex,

race, and class oppression" (p. 33). She further noted that this framing "compels us to centralize

the experiences and social predicaments of women who bear the brunt of sexist oppression as a

way to understand the collective social status of women in the United States" (p. 33). This

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[1] The 2022 NJDOE statistics included nonbinary gender considerations, but the percentage of those educators
reporting as nonbinary was less than 0.1%.

definition is explicitly and implicitly intersectional, noting how we cannot extricate one type of oppression from another and must acknowledge the compounded dynamics of oppression to eliminate all of them. As such, I use the term "feminism" intersectionally throughout this study, as I view sexism to be inextricably woven with other forms of oppression.

Although there are many useful definitions of patriarchy, I find Gilligan and Snider's (2018) definition to have the greatest resonance. They defined patriarchy as "a culture based on a gender binary and hierarchy, a framework or lens" that

1. Leads us to see human capacities as either 'masculine' or 'feminine' and to privilege the masculine.

2. Elevates some men over other men and all men over women.

3. Forces a split between the self and relationships so that in effect men have selves, whereas women ideally are selfless, and women have relationships that surreptitiously serve men's needs. (p. 6)

Gilligan and Snider (2018) further framed patriarchy as a mechanism to subvert human relational capacities in order to create conditions hospitable to any and all oppressions, echoing the intersectional feminism defined by hooks (2015). They asserted that detachment from human connection is essential to perpetuating hierarchies, also noting the correlation of detachment to patriarchal research norms that value high levels of detached objectivity and dismiss knowledges rooted in emotional connection and engagement. It is important to note that this definition focuses upon patriarchy as a *mechanism*—what patriarchy *does* rather than what it is. In doing so, they provided a definition that can be used to understand how patriarchy operates systemically and situationally to reify all facets and multiplicities of oppression. This definition

is also useful because it includes the emotional aspect of this work and connects to my own

feelings of gender-inflicted bias.

By connecting the history of women in education in the United States to my personal

experiences, I created a correlation between the historical experiences of women in the field and

my own. hooks's (2015) definition of feminism provided me with a constant reminder of both the

inextricability of one oppression from another and the necessity of an intersectional stance in this

work. Gilligan and Snider's (2018) framing of patriarchy as a mechanism allowed me to examine

how systems use gender as a lever for control. These facets served as the foundation upon which

this study can be built.

Overview of the Dissertation

The pattern of this study built its own weave, meaning that as I began to move through it,

the literature, my data, and my reflections all started to knit together, giving a unique texture to

the work. This weaving dynamic can be seen in all of the following chapters of this study. In

Chapter Two, I move into my theoretical framework and literature review. My theoretical

framework spans three main areas: embracing the unknowing, disrupting internalized patriarchy

and external patriarchy, and challenging epistemological patriarchy. I then share a review of

relevant literature to highlight the broad context to my study. This literature review begins with

historical and political considerations of women in the field of education. I then move into the

literature that examines current gendered dynamics in education, specifically focusing upon how

women educational leaders are positioned at work, how they navigate this positioning, how they

conceptualize power within the sphere of education, and how they create more care-centered

leadership dynamics. I then shift to an examination of patriarchy and trauma responses and

connect this work to emotional epistemologies. I conclude the literature review by examining

relevant systemic considerations.

In Chapter Three, I describe my methodology of healing feminist autoethnography,

noting the study's nontraditional structure and approach and highlighting the nuance of working

with a critical friend as a way of processing my data while maintaining an autoethnographic

stance rather than a co/autoethnographic one for this study (Taylor & Coia, 2019). Further

reflecting its nontraditional orientations, I then provide an explanation of how I used the major

arcana cards of the tarot as symbolic touchstones and representations of various facets of the

study and its findings, as well as how I engaged my spirituality as a facet of my analysis. I also

provide some personal context relevant to the study and my location within it.

I then describe how I collected my data through journaling about my professional and

personal experiences during the 2021–2022 school year, noting how I shared these journal

entries with a critical friend for an additional facet of reflection through dialogue, and how I

often also engaged in discussions with other critical friends throughout the studied school year. I

then describe my process of data analysis, reading through the entries multiple times to identify

larger themes and sub-themes and moving between these entries and the literature to begin to

make sense of the entries within the context of relevant research. I also note the use of periodic

"member checks" with those individuals I referenced in certain journal entries (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). I conclude Chapter Three by noting the importance of "trustworthiness" and its

criteria, highlighting how I met each of the criteria in the study (Richardson, 2000).

In Chapter Four, I share my findings within the context of three major themes of

localized enactment of patriarchal education systems and norms, small feminist disruptions with

authority, and grace. Subthemes of patriarchal education systems and norms were turning my

othering as a woman leader into agency, male fragility with women leaders, women colluding

with patriarchy, disrupting my own internalized patriarchy, and negotiating the balance between

acting authentically and protecting myself from professional peril. The major theme of small

feminist disruptions included subthemes of an emergent feminist leadership practice, openly

sharing my vulnerability, disrupting educational hierarchies, disrupting dominant educational

narratives, and enacting feminist care with those who have hurt us. Through the final theme of

grace, I explored how I could be kinder to myself as I moved through this embodied work. I then

use this theme of grace to bridge into the implications of this study.

I conclude this study with reflections, conclusions, and implications in Chapter Five. I

reflect upon who and what helped me to navigate the emotional work of this study, using

Ahmed's (2017) "Killjoy Survival Kit" as a means of framing these supports (p. 235). I then

move into further considerations based upon the themes established in Chapter Four. I reconsider

Bowlby's (1969) concept of "repair" and how Gilligan and Snider (2018) connect this repair to

the process of moving "out of patriarchy" (p. 139). I also consider how centering humanity and

community can be a valuable means of repair, and how sharing our stories can be a compelling

means of feminist disruption. I broaden these communal considerations to include developing

communities of women leaders who enact more care-centered leadership and support each other

in doing so. I conclude this chapter by considering how I might apply what I have learned in this

study with the agency afforded me through my whiteness to disrupt other dominant narratives

and norms and advocate for others who experience different or added marginalizations.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore the potential of personal accounts of sexist experiences disrupting gender norms in educational leadership while acting authentically and safely within patriarchal institutions, I needed to ground the work in a theoretical framework that valued emotion as epistemology and challenged dominant academic assumptions of what "counts" as knowledge. Accordingly, the first part of this chapter explains how I arrived at a feminist theoretical framework that centered the poststructural concept of "unknowing" and decentered more traditionally valued ways of knowing (St. Pierre, 2000). I highlight the major arcana High Priestess tarot card as a symbol of intuitive feminine powers and explore how other researchers have engaged more spiritual ways of knowing in their work. I address concerns of white feminisms and how women's internalizations of patriarchy can cause women to collude with patriarchy in order to gain proximity to power. I conclude the theoretical framework portion of this chapter by explicitly noting my cultural positioning as a white woman and the privilege it affords me.

The second half of this chapter provides a review of the literature that begins with the historical and political subordination of women in education and current gendered educational dynamics. I then explore conceptions of power, internal and external navigations of patriarchy, the myth of gender neutrality, and male dominance and fragility in education. Shifting to more emotionally centered considerations, I examine the connections between patriarchy and trauma response as elucidated by Gilligan and Snider (2018), and then move to an exploration of women's emotional labor and anger. I conclude the literature review by considering feminist leadership styles and relevant systemic dynamics.

Feminist Theoretical Framework

Feminist Epistemology: Embracing the Unknowing

Figure 3.

The High Priestess Thoth Deck Tarot Card

Note. This card represents a trust in the self and accessing intuitive powers. From Tarot Card Meanings by TarotX (2022)

The High Priestess tarot card, shown in Figure 3, honors the intuitive powers within us and our willingness to trust them. In order to access, engage, and honor these intuitive powers in my study, it was necessary to understand where I stood within the context of the work. I had to be honest and open about who I was in order to participate authentically in this work. Therefore, it was imperative that I located myself in my privilege and whiteness. I am a white, middle-class, cisgender, bisexual woman who serves as the principal of a suburban elementary school. The child of educated parents, I have succeeded professionally and academically by playing by its hegemonically-constructed rules, and I largely believe that I could have written a dissertation within these rules that would have led to a doctorate. However, as I moved toward this study, I developed a sense of disruption in my professional and academic work that I could not ignore. This development could be ascribed to one moment at which I came to understand that my "good student" persona had not yielded particularly good learning or knowing. Rather, it was a burgeoning sense of disruption in my understanding of knowledge and how I related to it, engaged with it, and danced with it.

I am what one would consider "a good student." I have always managed to get the paper in, complete the assignment, and pass the test, with a few painful exceptions during my undergraduate foray into the sciences. I did what I needed to get into the schools that I wanted to attend, and I was academically successful once there. Yet, being "a good student" was not always easy for me. In fact, it was decidedly difficult for me throughout my childhood, adolescence, and four years of college. Whereas my fellow undergraduates could seemingly remember the smallest details from a novel we had two weeks to read, I could barely keep the characters straight in my head. Historical dates? Never. Tenets of the great philosophers? Nope. I marveled at my peers' seeming ease with high levels of academic rigor while I struggled to keep up.

At the time, I perceived my way of processing as an academic inadequacy. I could always remember how readings and concepts felt as I encountered them, but this knowledge, or way of knowing, did not seem to benefit me academically. Nevertheless, when I think back to my college days and the texts I read, I remember them more as beloved encounters. I have such a sense memory of where I was when I read the middle chapters of *Portrait of a Lady* (James, 1995) —in a wingback chair in Newcomb Hall, or how *Orlando* (Woolf, 1995) allowed me my first thoughts about gender and identity, sitting with that character for hours, and feeling a deep sense of kinship with Orlando's experience. I relished relating seemingly unrelated things to each other, often connecting them through non-academic concepts that I encountered in my spiritual explorations, during a walk in the woods, or while catching up with an old friend. I found that I remembered more when I was able to make these connections. It was as if my experiences with these texts and concepts were somehow buried deep within me. Even though I did not quite

understand how they all came together, I trusted that they would, just as I have always trusted

that I would have a need for all of the rubber bands in my junk drawer.

Nevertheless, throughout the decades of my education, I had placed little value upon

these collected concepts and ideas, the feelings that they have evoked, and the connectedness

among them. Instead, I ascribed to the dominant value system of knowledges in my academic

spheres, those exclusively based upon agreed-upon rational, logical facts, figures, and well-

established theory and practice. I accepted that the concepts and understandings valued by my

professors and those I was told I must grasp to become "knowledgeable" in my field were what

knowledge was. I dutifully read the assigned texts, I wrote my master's thesis according to the

parameters and guidelines of my thesis committee, and for my second masters, I studied all of

the concepts I needed to know for my administrator certification test. I graduated, passed,

graduated again, and moved into an administrative position, ultimately becoming a principal of

an elementary school in a large suburban district.

Although I never stopped making connections between concepts, I continued to place

little to no value upon them. When I began my doctoral work in the fall of 2015, I continued to

"learn" in the manner I had ascribed to academic success. I read, took notes, and attempted to

memorize the differences between new concepts such as neoliberalism and professionalism. I

responded to the assignments, and I wrote the papers, always striving to portray myself as that

"good student." The "good" grades came, and I moved, albeit slowly, along my course

progression.

Yet, something about this type of engagement began to prickle. The deeper I engaged

with ideas and learning dynamics that challenged hegemonic norms, the more alienated I felt

from my self-concept of "a good student." I began to read authors who disrupted dominant ways

of knowing and called for resistance against them. I revisited feminist theory only to find that my

undergraduate experiences, those in which I attempted to memorize and regurgitate feminist

concepts, left me with no understanding of them whatsoever. I also revisited the work of Freire

(1993), realizing that despite his work being integral to my master's thesis, I really did not

understand much of his work during my master's explorations either. Although I had gotten the

"good" grades and enacted a persona of a "good student," I really had not learned very much. As

I continued to expose myself to disruptive discourses, the more I realized that *I* was not the issue.

Rather, the problem was the traditional structure and norms of academia. I was no longer trying

to fit myself into a space that did not fit. I was finding an academic space that fit me.

　　Over the past two years, I found myself more comfortable in putting down concepts,

pausing, and then picking them up again several months later. More often than not, my

perceptions completely changed based upon a new reading or new experience, far more nuanced

and richer than before. These pauses allowed me to discover the weave of my learning—how

concepts and ideas moved among each other, integrating and creating things anew. In turn, I

became more comfortable in the unknowing, opting to trust that when I put a concept or a

reading aside, it would be there for me to reengage with it when I was truly ready to do so. I

allowed this unknowing to be present in my academic and professional experiences, which

provided me with a sense of deeper connectedness and authenticity in both spheres. It is also this

unknowing that embodied High Priestess energy.

　　The work of St. Pierre (2000) located this state of unknowing in poststructural feminist

theory. She noted that poststructural feminism diverges both in form and in function from more

traditionally dominant knowledges. Rather than seeking definitive truths, poststructural

feminisms decenter the knowing of "exactly what is going on" in favor of getting "lost in the

play of discourse" (p. 477). This concept of "discourse play" described my pauses, picking up and putting down texts, making connections, and developing new understandings in a nonlinear way. Taylor and Coia (2019) explicitly connected this "unknowing" to autoethnography in that it is a research process that "never lets up" and one in which the researcher is "always searching, questioning, examining, and investigating" (p. 12). This work is my lifelong play. It is a dance that, sometimes frustratingly and sometimes blissfully, never ends.

Combatting the Epistemological Patriarchy. Beyond the obvious academic patriarchy of women in academia merely being "added in" rather than having space made for them (Edwards, 2017, p. 628), Hughes (2020) provided epistemological considerations of patriarchy in research. In advocating for transdisciplinary feminist research, she challenged the assumption that knowledge is "coherent, and even absolute," noting the possibilities in traversing outside our known disciplinary fields to examine "how status, power, and hierarchy work in terms of who is recognized as a knower and the status of the knowledge we produce" (p. 1). She then pushed beyond this in noting that transdisciplinarity also requires "a fundamental shift in the political-ethical questions that are being asked at the heart of knowledge practices" so that we remain "alert" to the tendency to be pulled back into "the normative drag of disciplinary knowledges" that "haul us back to the status quo" (p. 3). She concluded in affirming that a transdisciplinary feminist approach is not one of particular comfort, but one that "is an exceedingly generative one" (p. 3).

This prioritization of knowledge development over comfort was a particularly resonant one for me, as it largely reflected how I have gained the knowledges that I value the most. Although my investigation was the most painful professional experience that I endured thus far, it deepened my understanding of how I experience the world and how I might better respond to

it. It allowed me to see insidious hegemonic structures into which I had, until then, been able to contort myself. I was no longer able to collude with them easily, and ultimately, I could not conceive of examining anything else in my dissertation.

Spirituality as a Way of Knowing

It is the poststructural feminist "unknowing" that forced me to acknowledge the facet of my learning that was perhaps my most vulnerable: my spirituality. Spirituality was something I rarely shared, particularly in academic circles, because I feared that it might delegitimize my knowledge. I was fully cognizant that this might be rooted in my internalized patriarchal academic biases, but the fear remained. However, if I was truly and authentically to engage with this work, I could not deny how my spirituality informed it. The vulnerability that I felt in doing so did not deter me from explicitly integrating it. Just as I needed to trust the unknowing in my research, I also needed to trust that including the ethereal aspect of my work was integral to the work itself.

Although including spirituality in my research was daunting, I found a growing body of thought that supported it. Not surprisingly, support for this work came from Indigenous, Black, and Latinx feminists. Kimmerer's (2013) *Blading Sweetgrass* was an account of a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and professor of botany and how she found herself unsettled by the disconnect between academic science and Indigenous ways of knowing. Her work connected her spiritual understanding of the earth with her scientific work, even citing how Indigenous ways of understanding nature could inform academic studies, as it did with one of her master's degree advisees.

Taylor et al. (2020) detailed similar ways of knowing in their collection on transdisciplinary feminist research. For example, Nxumalo and Villanueva (2020) made

connections to those of Kimmerer (2013) in exploring Black, Indigenous, and Black-Indigenous

feminisms. They disrupted white feminisms and the facets of identity and marginalization that

they tend to neglect. Pérez and Saavedra (2020) engaged a Womanist and Chicana/Latina

feminism that purposefully centered the spiritual in research, citing Anzaldúa (1987) in her

assertion that everything is connected. These works bolstered my desire to integrate the spiritual

into my academic work, helping me to value knowledges I always had, but more often than not

subverted under more hegemonically acceptable ways of knowing.

Prior to engaging with these Black, Indigenous, Black-Indigenous, Womanist, and

Chicana/Latin feminists, I explored feminist epistemologies more generally, engaging with

scholars such as hooks (1994; 2015) and Ellsworth (1989). I looked to the ethic of care work of

Gilligan (2016) and Noddings (1984) and the feminist emotion-as-epistemology of Forgasz and

Clemans (2014). These authors elevated emotion as a valid form of understanding, bolstering my

shift toward a more holistic concept of knowledge. However, the works of Pérez and Saavedra

(2020), Nxumalo and Villanueva (2020), and Kimmerer (2013) confirmed that I needed to

embody divergent concepts of knowledge–personally, professionally, and academically.

Critically Disrupting the White Patriarchy: Internal and External Considerations

As a white woman, it was critical to the integrity of this work to be explicit in

highlighting the problematic nature of white feminisms. Purewal and Loh (2021) explored how

white women collude with patriarchy due to a proximal location to power. They argued that

white feminist studies have centered upon presumed universal issues, which have allowed the

field to ignore "structural violence" inflicted upon non-white women (p. 1). hooks (2015) also

cited this issue, noting how women can be their own worst enemies. In calling for political

solidarity among women, she explained how sexism is not just perpetuated by social structures,

institutions, and hegemonically dominant individuals, but also "by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo" (p. 43). She also considered how a lack of "extreme restrictions" or overt sexism can allow certain women "to ignore the areas in which they are exploited or discriminated against," or even lead them to believing that women are not oppressed at all (p. 5).

This internalization of patriarchy, also called internalized sexism, was not uncharted territory. Restani (2017) examined her own collusion with patriarchy as a complicating facet of her identity as a feminist. She shared the collusive messages that she received from a young age in order to be successful. By age eleven, she had internalized, "Be pretty, don't stand out too much, make boys like you, and don't be a slut" (p. 3). Years later, she noted the striking similarity to the rules of dating as a heterosexual adult and the rules of women in the workplace, summarizing the implicit "lesson" of "when men approve, you will be liked, possibly loved, and successful" (p. 4). These internalized messages of patriarchy continually reinforce themselves in women's psyches, allowing us to act in ways that collude with these assumptions and reinforce the sexist structures that they uphold.

Purewal and Loh (2021), Restani (2017), and hooks (2015) examined the internalized patriarchy that occurs when we engage with a world that is organized to reinforce hegemonic dominance. Their work is framed within the broader system, noting how our gendered conditioning makes it remarkably easy to default to the norms that maintain hegemonies. Although my own internalized patriarchy was certainly a facet of my study, the internalized patriarchy of my administrative superiors was also a highly relevant consideration. The individual who wrote my summative evaluation in 2017 was a woman, as was my direct supervisor during the data collection phase of this study. There are several women in higher

positions in my district who have enacted patriarchal norms. I have had my emails searched for

evidence of me conspiring with colleagues when a simple question would have elucidated a

given situation. I have had such correspondence used in meetings to coerce me to turn on

colleagues. The actions I experienced created a climate of surveillance rather than one of

collegiality. This collusive behavior was also a tension in various studies of women in

educational leadership, pointing to the presence of it as a broader issue in education (Blackmore,

2013; Brunner, 2000; Kropiewnicki & Shapiro, 2001).

Although this systemic conditioning was certainly resonant within my work, Edwards

(2017) uncovered a more explicit internalized patriarchy with which I also connected. In her

autoethnographic study of her sexist experiences in higher education, she was struck by how

often "she said nothing" in the face of sexist comments and actions. She expressed significant

guilt because she felt her silence implied complicity, allowing "this to happen and for the actors

in these sexist interactions *to get away with it*" (p. 627). She connected this silence to the

psychological trauma response of "tonic immobility" in which a person feels so terrified that

they are unable to move or speak (p. 628). She noted that in most of her moments of silence,

although she would not consider herself traumatized, she did experience a type of "transient

dissociation" which she further described as "a sense of unreality—*this can't be happening*"

(Edwards. 2017, p. 628).

I have had many professional moments of "this can't be happening." I have also

experienced my patriarchal internalizations in not noticing sexist dynamics until after they have

taken place. My internalized patriarchy has manifested as both a subconscious acquiescence to

gender norms and a conscious feeling of tonic immobility as Edwards (2017) described. These

experiences molded my academic and professional engagements, and they were extremely

significant in how I have experienced my existence as a woman in educational leadership and my

identity as a researcher. Yet, as I began to develop a greater awareness in this respect, I was able

to reframe my professional emotional experiences and elevate them, engaging knowledges

previously untapped (Edwards, 2017).

In these considerations, I returned to my examination of my whiteness. I have long tried

to reconcile my deep connection to more spiritual ways of knowing and my position as a white

woman. The irony and problematic nature of a white, middle-class, cisgender woman coming to

this place through the work of marginalized women was not lost on me. Although divergent

forms of knowledge are deeply resonant for me, I could not ignore the concern for co-opting a

knowledge that is marginalized in a system from which I benefit. This tension brought me to the

question: so much is taken from these communities—how could I justify taking from them too?

While sitting in this conflict, I returned to the work of hooks (2015). I had read a lot of

her work, but I had not read *Feminist Theory*. This book, reprinted several times, is a timeless

work of art; one that, interestingly, I finished reading the day before she passed. I found myself

mourning her deeply, carrying her work with me throughout the days that followed. The book

was a medium through which I could examine my whiteness and my connections to Black,

Indigenous, Black-Indigenous, Womanist, and Chicana/Latina feminisms. I repeatedly returned

to the book's final pages to reread this excerpt:

> The formation of an oppositional world view is necessary for feminist struggle. This
>
> means that the world we have most intimately known, the world in which we feel "safe"
>
> (even if such feelings are based on illusions), must be radically changed. Perhaps it is the
>
> knowledge that everyone must change, not just those we label enemies or oppressors,
>
> that has so far served to check our revolutionary impulses. Those revolutionary impulses

must freely inform our theory and practices if feminist movement to end existing

oppression is to progress, if we are to transform our present-day reality. (hooks, 2015, p.

166)

hooks (2015) encouraged us to push beyond the safety of our known worlds. Wherever

we are located inside and outside structures of privilege, we must all do the work. I have long

been ashamed of my whiteness, both that I was unaware of it for so long and that I continue to

have moments of blindness because of it. hooks's (2015) call for change pushed me to evaluate

what I have—what that whiteness affords me and what I can do with it to engage authentically

and holistically in this work.

This middle-class whiteness has provided me access to opportunities that fortified my

privilege. I grew up in a suburban town with a good school system. There was never any

question that I would go to college, and all of my elementary and secondary education was

geared toward that end. I learned the academic language and norms that allowed me to act as a

"good student." I had access to SAT preparation resources and guidance counselors who helped

me select colleges and apply to them. My entire academic experience until now and including

now was because I was able to "pass" as someone who could work within the boundaries of

traditional academia, and I continued to benefit from this "passing." I have a voice that is

privileged because of my whiteness, and it was therefore my responsibility to use that privileged

voice to challenge the norms that have elevated it.

Purewal and Loh (2021) were particularly helpful to me in framing my whiteness. They

criticized white feminisms, noting how they fail to disrupt white supremacy by privileging

Western and Eurocentric views, reproducing colonial power norms, and using the language of

Wynter (2003) who asserted that "the master code persists" (p. 3). Echoing Pérez and Saavedra

(2020), Nxumalo and Villanueva (2020), and Kimmerer (2013), they also emphasized the importance of Black and Indigenous scholarship in providing a foundation for my researcher stance, adding the importance of queer scholarship in disallowing gendered assumptions. They also identified three "frames of thought" necessary to move beyond a collusive, colonized feminism toward "an ethical 'feminist' project" (p. 4). These are a "more critical feminist engagement and interrogation of coloniality" (p. 4), a rejection of the "mythical construction" of the binary withing the "colonial/modern gender system" (p. 5), and a recognition of "how gender has been integral to the continuation of the coloniality/modernity complex and the coloniality of power" (p. 5).

These frames were essential to my dissertation work, as they required a vigilant awareness of my positionality and provided me with lenses through which I could interrogate my own work as I moved through it. Purewal and Loh (2021) also emphasized the necessity of "working across a range of disciplinary backgrounds" to challenge "existing structures of knowledge" (p. 6), reflecting the dynamics of transdisciplinary feminist research of Taylor et al. (2020). These frames all prioritized thinking processes in which there was constant movement among knowing, being, doing, and reflecting, and this movement created an embedded tool for interrogation (Purewal & Loh, 2021). Accordingly, they provided essential scaffolding to my work. Their clear connection to transdisciplinary feminist research also allowed me a sense of alignment in my research and assisted me in disrupting patriarchal conceptions of knowledge in the academy.

Although my whiteness and middle-class standing afforded me a significant amount of privilege, my gender continued to be a lever used within my profession to ensure that I adhered to the gendered sociological, professional, and institutional norms of the education field and

more specifically, our district. It was the filter through which I experienced my job and the lens

through which I saw how I was treated versus my white male counterparts. In this study, I used

feminist autoethnography to provide a personal account of my gendered experiences as an

educational leader and allowed this process to be a source of healing. To provide a foundation

for this work, I explored the current literature, which allowed me a context in which I could

examine my own experiences and how they related to those of other women and reflected

broader systemic dynamics. The literature provided a critical texture to the weave of this study.

Literature Review

Figure 4.

The Adjustment Thoth Deck Tarot Card

Note. This card represents centering energy and the balancing of opposites. From Tarot Card

Meanings by TarotX (2022)

Reading has always been a means of centering for me, and the right text always seems to

come to me when I need it most. The process of researching and reading texts for this study was

no exception, providing my work a sense of balance. With every new article or book that I read, I

became more invested in interrogating myself, my work, and my experiences. As I vacillated

between my data and the literature, I uncovered new insights in my work. Accordingly, the

Adjustment tarot card, shown in Figure 4, represents what this literature review has done for my

work (Ziegler, 1988).

Leavy and Harris (2019) referenced Deleuze and Guatarri's (1987) concept of rhizomatics in describing feminist frameworks. A rhizome is a type of plant that spreads and multiplies underground. Irises and lilies are types of rhizomes. Leavy and Harris (2019) characterized feminist frameworks as "rhizomatic" because they are all "working together and co-evolving at the same time" (p. 77). I found the process of gathering literature for this study to be quite rhizomatic, as it evolved from years of coursework, conversations, and readings that often led me from one text to another in a connected, evolving manner. I frequently found important texts in the reference lists of articles that I read. It was also common for me to mention a text in conversation with a doctoral colleague or friend, only to have that person recommend another text. Another important step in my literature review process was that of initially writing about each piece chronologically. Although this step was seemingly off-track, as the review ultimately needed to be organized thematically, it was instrumental in helping me understand how all of these texts developed upon and among one another.

In the following literature review section, I provide an overview of the historical and political dynamics that have subordinated women in education for centuries, citing authors including Fraser (2007) and Blount (1999; 2000). I then explored how these dynamics continue to manifest in school districts today and how women educational leaders are keenly aware of their gender in professional interactions. This exploration spanned the work of such authors as Brunner (2000) and Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001), who examined how women experience and conceptualize their jobs as school and district leaders. Chase and Bell (1990) offered a critique of hiring practices and of those who are considered "gatekeepers" for educational leadership positions (p. 163), and Blackmore (2013) provided further nuance in disrupting the fallacy of gender neutrality within the context of education.

I then moved into the work of Franklin (2015), Agosto and Roland (2018), and Watson and Baxley (2021) using them as a bridge between the historical subordination of women in education and its present-day manifestations. Franklin's (2015) work detailed an eviscerating experience with male fragility in higher education, which related to how Taylor and Klein (2020) experienced the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court confirmation hearings. Agosto and Roland (2018) and Watson and Baxley (2021) provided some elucidation on how women school leaders, particularly those of color, have navigated intersectional and patriarchal dynamics of their school systems. I followed this exploration with an examination of concepts of power and how they can be reframed into a more care-centered orientation through the work of Gilligan (1982), Blackmore (2013), and Brunner (2000).

From there, I engaged the work of Gilligan and Snider (2018) and their argument that patriarchy operates nearly identically to trauma, citing Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. I connected Gilligan and Snider's (2018) emphasis upon emotional knowing to explorations of emotional epistemologies and other nondominant ways of knowing through Jaggar (1989) and Forgasz and Clemans (2014). Finally, I broadened the context of the literature to include systemic considerations, citing the works of Marshall and Edwards (2020) and Rorrer (2006). This progression allowed me to provide historical context, move that context into the present, examine critical facets of sexism in education today, and consider how all of these elements might inform the disruption of academic hegemonic norms moving forward.

Historical Subordination of Women in Education

In order to understand current gender dynamics in educational leadership, one must first examine how gender has been used to establish cultural norms and set limits on marginalized groups throughout educational history. Blount (2000) offered a feminist critique of the history of

education and women's roles therein. She presented the progression of gendered expectations of

teachers and administrators from the mid-19th century through the late 20th century in the United

States. In the early to mid-19th century, the teaching field was widely viewed as a male

profession. Yet, the "common school movement" that emerged during this time created a

dramatic uptick in the need for inexpensive teachers. Although there was significant societal

resistance to women entering the workplace, the demand for teachers was so great that

communities acquiesced. It was simply an historically logical and capitalist response to an

economic need: we needed more teachers and we could pay women less for this work. As a

result of this increased demand, the number of women teachers increased between the late 1800s

and the early 1900s, and correspondingly, the "gender identification of school-teaching" became

much more feminized (Blount, 2000, pp. 85–86).

Fraser (2007) explained the historical connection between motherhood and teaching.

Given that women bore the domestic responsibility of child rearing, it was not difficult to justify

women teaching as an extension of their innate behaviors. Nurturing qualities have been, for

most of this country's history, exclusively attributed to women, and that attribution allowed a

sociological "bargain" in the mid-1800s between women's role in the home and their

employment as teachers. Additionally, since being nurturers was deemed innate to women, the

field of education could justify paying women teachers less because it was merely an extension

of their unpaid labor in the home (Blount, 2000).

Yet, women in teaching could not stray too far from the hegemonic roles allocated to

them. Female educators experienced a significant narrowing of what behaviors and

characterizations were deemed acceptable. School districts preferred to hire women who were

either considered "'spinsters' or 'old maid' teachers" because they were unmarried and therefore

would "not suffer from dual allegiances to school employers and husbands" (Blount, 2000, p. 87). This dynamic became so common that "schoolteacher" became synonymous with "single woman," with the public highly regarding these women as "high-minded, upstanding pillars of the community who selflessly devoted themselves to their students" (Blount, 2000, p. 87). This gendered expectation was bolstered by economic forces that discouraged two-income families, as jobs were scarce during the first part of the 20th Century, leading school districts to maintain "marriage bans" in their hiring of women—no married women could be hired as teachers (Blount, 2000, p. 91).

Of course, the lauding of single women could only last so long. Young single women who entered the teaching profession were expected to teach for a few years, which would prepare them for marriage and motherhood, and then marry, leaving the profession. Yet, many women in the profession departed from traditional gender expectations and chose not to marry, which sparked a backlash. Many men characterized unmarried women teachers as deviant (Daniels, 1996). These women were often characterized as "spiteful" and "bitter," and were deemed as contributing to a collapse of society as they would not be procreating as expected (Blount, 2000, p. 88). Daniels elaborated upon Theodore Roosevelt's stance on unmarried women, noting Roosevelt's claim that they would contribute to the dissolution of the white middle class.

Nevertheless, a "marriage ban" for female teachers carried on, largely fueled by the economic challenges of the Great Depression, which somewhat thwarted the backlash against single women teachers. Then, following World War II, a teaching shortage emerged, creating a compelling argument to allow married women into the teaching profession. The following years saw a drastic increase in the number of married women entering the teaching field. However, this seeming expansion of gender roles in education actually resulted in a new tool for reifying

gender roles. Many school districts leveraged their increase in married women teachers to oust single women from their teaching ranks, as the "spinster" persona had come to signal a concern regarding homosexuality (Blount, 2000, p. 91).

Moving into the Present: Women in Educational Administration Today

As Blount (2000) explained, men in education distanced themselves, both literally and figuratively, from women in the profession. The advent of the role of superintendent is a sound example of this as it allowed men to take on a supervisory role that distanced them from women structurally and geographically. Yet, these gendered dynamics continue to persist in educational leadership, as the works of Brunner (2000) and Chase and Bell (1990) indicated, and as Agosto and Roland (2018), Peters and Nash (2021), and Watson and Baxley (2021) extended into intersectional analyses. Brunner (2000) offered an analysis of women superintendents' styles and behaviors within their professional roles, and Chase and Bell (1990) examined how individuals responsible for hiring superintendents often operate under the fallacy of "gender neutrality" (p. 163). When considered together, these studies are illustrative of the professional forces that impact women in educational leadership, how they navigate amidst these forces, and what these navigations do to their identities and practices today.

Brunner (2000) examined women superintendents' experiences of inequality and found five themes in how they discussed these experiences: power, silence, style, responsibility, and people. Brunner examined each of these topics in a manner that was useful in framing the participants' responses to show how they grappled with various facets of their professional lives, highlighting the complex nature of their jobs and their identities within them (Brunner, 2000, p. 83). Although Brunner's work was published two decades ago, it provides a nuanced picture of such experiences and how current educational leadership practices can be informed by them.

Yet, this is not its only contribution to the field. Brunner's (2000) work also provides a window

into "individual accounts of the lived experiences of women superintendents" (p. 79).

Agosto and Roland (2018) provided an additional layer of analysis in considering

intersectionality in the exploration of school leadership. As they defined it, intersectionality is a

means of examining "interlocking educational injustices" that "highlight the relational aspects of

human connections and society," including historical contexts and social location (Agosto &

Roland, 2018. p. 259). Rather than taking an individualistic stance, intersectional analyses

consider "uneven power relations that shape structural manifestations of oppression," such as

racism, sexism, and heterosexism (p. 259). Intersectionality takes into account how these facets

of oppression work together to compound marginalizations in different and unique ways.

Accordingly, Agosto and Roland (2018) focused upon aspects of transformational

leadership and how intersectionality has been examined within this leadership paradigm. The

definition of transformational leadership differs slightly among scholars, but essentially, it is a

leadership orientation that considers social relations, including class, race, and culture, and how

they impact power allocations and distributions within schools. Transformational leadership

seeks to deconstruct these power dynamics and build more equitable and just educational

structures (Agosto & Roland, 2018). They found that educational leaders who enacted a

transformational leadership orientation centered the people in their care and viewed themselves

as activists in supporting marginalized students and their families. These leaders also commonly

"led relationally" (p. 268) meaning that they favored a shared "dispersion of power for the

general good of the community" rather than one that centralized power solely within the role of

school leader (p. 269). This transformational leadership orientation not only centers questions of

equity. It also serves as a means for challenging neoliberal education "reforms" that position

schools as producing members of a workforce rather than educating children (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Moos, 2017).

Peters and Nash (2021) highlighted an important nuance to intersectional leadership: it is explicitly anti-sexist, "disrupting hetero-normative, male-centric hegemonic practices, protections, and privileges" (p. 22). Similar to hooks (2015), they asserted that we must address all facets of oppression in an integrated, collective manner. Challenging sexism and heteronormativity is critical in dismantling white supremacy, as they are inextricably linked in power relations. Feminism and anti-sexism should not take precedence over antiracist work, but it should also not be subverted in the intersectional paradigm. Both lenses are critical to understanding how hegemonic systems and practices work and can inform how more equitable school cultures could be built.

Watson and Baxley (2021) also examined intersectional leadership practices, specifically considering the work of Black women educational leaders within this paradigm. In this study, the concept of "motherwork" was examined as a means of "reframing the praxis of school leadership" to dismantle inequitable educational practices and structures (p. 142). "Motherwork" was defined as "the tools and tactics Black women utilize for resistance and survival within this anti-Black world" (p. 144). They framed these considerations within the theoretical framework of "Anti-Blackness," which is grounded in the critique of "society's inability to recognize the humanity of Black people," and within the field of education, specifically referring to those practices and structures that disproportionately target Black children, and more specifically, Black girls (Watson & Baxley, 2021, p. 144). Moreover, Watson and Baxley (2021) highlighted This gender and race intersectionality reflected the considerations of Agosto and Roland (2018) and could inform how school leaders should consider the compounding facets of oppression.

Motherwork offered insight into how school leaders can disrupt constructs within their practice

(Agosto & Roland, 2018; Watson & Baxley, 2021).

The works of Brunner (2000), Franklin (2015), Chase and Bell (1990), and Kropiewnicki

and Shapiro (2001) provided various explorations of gendered power dynamics and

conceptualizations in education. Brunner (2000) offered an analysis of women superintendents'

styles and behaviors within their professional roles, Chase and Bell (1990) examined how

individuals responsible for hiring superintendents manipulate power dynamics to reify male

dominance, Franklin (2015) provided a higher education perspective, and Kropiewnicki and

Shapiro (2001) explored women educational leaders enacting an ethic of care stance in their

work, highlighting the gendered nuances and assumptions therewith. Agosto and Roland (2018)

and Watson and Baxley (2021) added considerations of intersectionality into the discussion.

When considered together, these studies are illustrative of the power structures that impact

women in educational leadership, how they navigate amidst these structures, and how these

navigations shape their identities and practices.

Conceptions of Power. The women superintendents who participated in Brunner's

(2000) study resisted discussing power conceptualized as "power over," preferring to ascribe to

the more collective view of "power with/to." She defined this construct of power as "a capacity

to accomplish certain social goals through cooperation among agents with various interests and

concerns" (Brunner, 2000, p. 86). The women superintendents also enacted this "power with/to"

in their practice and discussed it within the realm of other themes—valuing the views of others,

listening, and working collaboratively with others toward a common goal, reflecting feminist

orientations. Yet interestingly, Brunner (2000) found that although the women were comfortable

discussing this view of power, they expressed discomfort discussing power in more general

terms because of the cultural expectations for women not to want power. She connected these

sentiments to female expectations of being a "good girl," which were also reflected in the women

superintendent's assertions under the "silence" and "style" themes (p. 85).

Gilligan's (1982) explorations of the gendered conceptualization of power reflected

similar discomfort among women. Specifically, Gilligan (1982) studied self-concept and

morality, and she found that young women grappled with their own ambition and reconciling this

ambition with their self-concept as compassionate people. She noted that one woman in her

study viewed "the acquisition of adult power as entailing the loss of feminine sensitivity and

compassion" (p. 97). Tying this tension back to morality, Gilligan (1982) highlighted the

complicated relationship that women have with power. Brunner (2000) offered a more systemic

view whereas Gilligan (1982) offered a psychological perspective.

Franklin (2015) gave further evidence of the gendered ways power works, providing a

related account within the context of higher education. She explained the tension between

women academics recognizing the sexist mechanisms inherent in academia and the need to

collude with those mechanisms in order to survive professionally. This tension reflects what

Brunner (2000) referenced in her study of women superintendents grappling with having to

subvert some of their personae to be viewed as successful educational leaders. The connections

between these texts are indicative that women in places of power and knowledge must

continually grapple between acting authentically and behaving in a manner that does not disrupt

the narrow and rigid roles expected of them, lest they find themselves in professional peril.

Navigating Patriarchal Experiences: Internal and External. Edwards (2017) offered

further insight into women's experiences in leadership positions within the sphere of higher

education. She documented several experiences of sexist microaggressions that she has

experienced as a woman seeking higher level leadership positions in universities in Australia.

She analyzed her journal entries of sexist experiences as a way of disrupting gender norms in

higher education. Moreover, her collection of "vignettes" highlights how "smaller events can pile

up on each other over time," emphasizing the power of microaggressions (p. 627). Edwards

(2017) connected these experiences to Mayock's (2016) concept of "gender shrapnel" (p. 630).

Rather than that of a bullet with a specific, narrow target, shrapnel is a collection of small pieces

of metal that scatter everywhere, well beyond the intended target. Mayock (2016) characterized

gender shrapnel as small incidences of sexism that reach far beyond one individual. They embed

and fester and are difficult to extricate. Edwards (2017) characterized the internalization of

"everyday sexism" as a destructive force that undermines a woman's ability to engage in the

professional sphere wholly, and she connected this personal experience of internalized sexism

back to the broader system of higher education.

Brunner (2000) also shed light on the internalized sexism of women in leadership

positions. The superintendents involved in her study grappled with the dissonance between the

skills needed to meet their professional responsibilities and the cultural expectations that limited

the way in which they were allowed to meet them. It was evident in the participants' common

sentiment to act "ladylike" that they had internalized how society expected them to act, dress,

and present themselves (p. 96). Under the topic of "style," they commonly expressed the delicate

balance between directness and acting "soft and ladylike" in their leadership (p. 95). A certain

level of directness is necessary for any educational leader because they are responsible for

making decisions that impact all of the individuals for whom they are responsible. Yet, according

to the participants, if they were deemed "too direct," they could easily be viewed as "bitches"

(Brunner, 2000, p. 94). They used the terms "soft" and "ladylike" specifically to describe both

the way in which they approached their leadership and the way in which they presented

themselves physically, noting that their respectability was judged by "the way we sit, by the way

we dress, and the way we conduct our business" (p. 96). This dynamic also applied to the way in

which these women expressed themselves. They felt the need to silence their emotions, lest they

be viewed as weak and dismissed as being unable to control themselves.

Interestingly, the women in Brunner's (2000) study seemed to accept the physical and

emotional expectations of them willingly, indicating how deeply this internalized sexism went.

Brunner (2000) connected this concept of "soft" back to the theme of silence, noting that "soft is

a reflection of the normative silence and/or physique expected of women" (p. 95). These women

grappled with tension between the skills necessary to complete their professional responsibilities

and the cultural expectations of them as women.

Einhorn's (2021) psychoanalytical work on internalized misogyny examined how women

impart misogynistic beliefs in their daughters and enact misogyny towards other women. Her

work related to Brunner's (2000) assessment of women needing to enact the persona of "good

girl" in their leadership roles (p. 85). Einhorn (2021) noted that girls "imbibe through their

mother's milk and in their mother's arms, a social context that includes misogyny," which

extends to the persona of "good mother" (p. 489). In encouraging such role continuation from

mother to daughter, women "encourage conformity" in an effort to shield their daughters from

standing out and placing themselves in danger. This ruse of "protection" implicitly places the

fault of violence upon them rather than those who behave violently (p. 489). Moreover, this

dynamic also relieves men of the task of policing the sociological hierarchy; women do it for

them (Einhorn, 2021).

Brunner (2000) gave further evidence to her argument that "silence" was a powerful tool in the systemic marginalization of women educational leaders. In her exploration of both themes of silence and people, her participants noted that they shared a common experience of verbal silencing by male peers—being cut off in meeting discussions. They also expressed how they commonly allowed male colleagues to be "mouthpieces" for their ideas in order to have these ideas be considered more seriously (p. 101). In these situations, the women viewed the most important thing to be that their ideas were heard rather than that they were the ones to express them. The women's actions reflect their cognizance of the gender bias inherent in their workplaces and were willing to subvert their own agency in favor of the collective good, harkening back to their view of "power with" rather than "power over."

However, one cannot deny the hegemonic power dynamics that compelled these women to co-opt strategies of self-silencing in order to do what is best for those for whom they are responsible, demonstrating collusive behaviors with patriarchal norms. Brunner's (2000) participants moved in and out of contradictory tensions, some of which they were aware, and some of which they had internalized unknowingly. Regardless of their level of awareness as to how sexism manifested in their work, they all indicated the need to employ a wide range of modalities to be successful. Their adaptability was paramount to their success, as they needed to change their styles to appease and navigate the power in which they moved. As Klein and Taylor (2023) described it, they were "following the script" written for them (p. 28).

Yet, the women participants in Brunner (2000) did not navigate these dynamics neutrally. Rather, they expressed resentment in their gendered experiences as superintendents. They were keenly aware of how much they needed to know and do to be successful as district educational leaders. They demonstrated professional knowledge that was both wide and deep, noting that

they needed to know and be able to do far more than their male counterparts. One participant

summarized the need for such extensive knowledge in "they have to be almost twice as

knowledgeable about any issue because they're challenged more" (p. 99).

        Gatekeepers and the Myth of Gender Neutrality. Brunner (2000) provided

illumination on the gendered experiences of women superintendents, whereas Chase and Bell

(1990) provided a different perspective of gendered power dynamics in educational leadership.

Chase and Bell explored the perspectives and actions of those who hire superintendents, namely

school boards, recruitment consultants, and other individuals who control access to district

leadership positions, whom they called "gatekeepers" (p. 163). Their work elucidated how these

gatekeepers talk about women leaders and how this talk contributes to the persistence of male

hegemony in education. Chase and Bell (1990) noted the importance in such an examination in

understanding why men maintain positions of power in education despite the overwhelming

number of women in the profession. Their focus upon talk was explicit, and they grounded their

study in the concept that "everyday talk is one essential site through which ideologies are

represented, reproduced, and resisted" (p. 164). This work is important in understanding how

women educational leaders are viewed, described, and positioned in the field.

        Chase and Bell (1990) interviewed a number of "gatekeepers" for their study. Most of

these individuals considered themselves as accepting of women in educational leadership

positions. Yet, it became apparent that although these gatekeepers positioned themselves as such,

their descriptions of women superintendents often focused upon "individual achievement and

gender neutrality," which, as the authors posed, "embody ideological discourses that conceal

relations of dominance embedded in the contexts in which women superintendents work and thus

serve to sustain that dominance" (p. 163). What Chase and Bell (1990) illuminated in this study

is critical to understanding how more subtle processes contribute to the maintenance of sexism in education and only serve to reinforce barriers in women's access to higher-level district positions.

Although seemingly innocuous, "gender neutrality" has an insidious impact upon reinforcing gender norms. In one particular interview, a woman board member shared how a male community member challenged her hiring a woman superintendent. He asked her, "How many women are on the school board now?" There were two, including her. His questioning implied that only women would hire a woman. The woman board member responded that they "hired the best person for the job," attempting to remove gender from the equation (Chase & Bell, 1990, p. 169).

Rather than challenge the assumption that the act of hiring a woman is a gendered act (but the hiring of a man is not), the woman board member attempted to remove gender from the discussion completely. Chase and Bell (1990) argued that this tactic of "gender neutrality," albeit one intended to challenge the assumption in the man's question, actually reified the sexism it attempted to challenge (p. 169). The board member's response that they hired the best individual for the superintendency failed to address the fact that the man who was challenging her decision was actually employing a very gendered perspective in doing so. Chase and Bell (1990) elucidated this point: "He is the one who speaks from assumptions about women's place and women's biased subjectivity. It is hard to imagine this man asking whether previous boards hired men because the boards were composed mostly of men" (p. 170). They used this example to address how the discourse of gender neutrality "precludes a conception of gendered subjectivity that is not understood as gender bias" and how "gender either biases one's subjectivity or it doesn't" (p. 170). Whereas the female board member had to defend herself against the

implication that she chose a woman candidate for the superintendency, her past hiring of men for leadership positions garnered no such questioning.

Gender bias and the myth of gender neutrality can also be seen in the work of Blackmore (2013). In her explorations regarding educational leadership, she critiqued the focus upon "emotional intelligence," noting that whereas feminists have long argued for the legitimization of emotion as a way of knowing, it was not until Goleman (1995), a man, brought the concept into prominence under the heading of "brain science" that it gained any traction (Blackmore, 2013, p. 144). Beyond the obvious sexism in such legitimization only occurring once men support it, Blackmore (2013) highlighted the problematic nature of focusing upon emotional intelligence in the realm of leadership, as it denies the importance of context and completely ignores systemic inequity in education. No amount of emotional intelligence can mitigate such inequities.

Blackmore (2013) further critiqued Goleman's (1995) assertion that individuals can acquire emotional intelligence, challenging its neutralization of emotionality "by treating it as an individual attribute that some possess and others do not while ignoring the (public/private) division of emotional labour and display that is judged in highly gendered ways" (p. 145). Goleman's assertion failed to recognize the politicization of emotionality. Rather, it is a highly gendered[2] construct, and to deny this is to deny how it is used to marginalize women. Blackmore (2013) summarized Goleman's co-opting of feminist understandings: "The paradox therefore is that leaders (predominantly white and male) who have been advantaged by the unequal social relations of gender in organizations have not in the past had to deal with the emotions of others"

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[2] Blackmore (2013) also acknowledged that emotionality is racialized in a similar manner, as the only individuals allowed to demonstrate emotion are white men.

(p. 145). Now that empathy and interpersonal skills are becoming more valued in educational leadership, they are deemed easily accessible to these white men.

Blackmore (2013) also highlighted how gender neutrality is anything but neutral because it assumes that male is the norm, the default. Blackmore (2013) quoted Goleman (1995) in describing women as "possessing 'more empathy and being more adept interpersonally. Men on the other hand are more self-confident and optimistic, adapt more easily and handle stress better' (p. 7)" (Blackmore, 2013, p. 144). Although he claimed that people (men) can acquire emotional intelligence, he makes no parallel claim that women can acquire self-confidence, optimism, and adaptability. His essentialist view of gender and his assertion that men can acquire emotional intelligence reifies gendered social structures: men innately have all of these qualities deemed advantageous and they can acquire those that are not innate. Women, although possessing empathy and interpersonal acumen innately, are left to fend for themselves when it comes to any other hegemonically valued traits. There is absolutely nothing "gender neutral" about his assertions (Blackmore, 2013).

Blackmore (2013) shifted this neutrality concern back to the broader systemic dynamics that reinforce hegemonic structures. She noted that the problem of centralizing educational issues upon individuals and how their choice in behaviors and leadership styles can fix these issues is that it minimizes, or outright ignores, "any historical legacy of past or collective injustices based on race, gender, or class" (p. 145). She characterized claims of systemic neutrality as "symbolic violence" that "is perpetrated when difference is treated as only an individual, and not also as a collective attribute that is socially constituted historically within systemic relations of power" (pp. 145–146), similar to what Agosto and Roland (2018) found in their exploration of intersectionality and transformational leadership. Moreover, Blackmore (2013) stated that

portrayals of teaching as a set of skills "leads to the disembodiment of the human capacities such as emotions" that are essential to teaching (p. 146). The separation of emotion from the being who has the emotion commodifies it and this commodification can only be accessed by men. According to Goleman (1995), men have the ability to access and learn emotional intelligence yet do not bear the burden of its negative gendered implications; however, women do not reap the same benefit. In fact, women are penalized for it, as they are routinely criticized for demonstrating emotionality (Blackmore, 2013).

These explorations of gender neutrality and bias highlighted an important facet of dominant discourse: individuals in power tend to claim bias when a non-dominant individual disrupts the dominant narrative (Blackmore, 2013; Chase & Bell, 1990). A woman hired for a position that is overwhelmingly filled by men must have been due to the women on the board with a sexist agenda. A man can learn to be emotionally intelligent, but women are not assumed to be able to acquire traits deemed masculine.

In these respects, implicit and explicit language become quite important. Chase and Bell (1990) expanded upon their exploration of subtle language in analyzing how gatekeepers perceive women's choices within the context of structural constraints. One participant shared that women are "more placebound," meaning they have children and families that tie them to a particular location, disallowing them from moving to take a superintendency. In the same interview, he noted that because he was the "male breadwinner," mobility was possible for him. He continued, "until women place profession above marriage or think of some other kind of arrangement, house-husbands or something like that, basically women are going to be placebound" (p. 171).

These statements communicate a number of things that reinforce male hegemony and are in no way neutral. The consultant implied that women are wrong in prioritizing their families over professional endeavors—as if this dynamic would be remedied merely by women shifting their priorities. Yet upon further analysis, his words also connote the assumption that women are the issue, not the structure of the broader social system. Rather than challenge the societal expectations that women shoulder the lion's share of home responsibilities, he placed the onus on women to "re-arrange their lives," assuming the issue is within the individual rather than within the broader system (Chase & Bell, 1990, p. 172).

It is important to restate that the individuals interviewed in Chase and Bell's (1990) study positioned themselves in support of women educational leaders because it highlighted the lack of awareness gatekeepers have in power dynamics, specifically how men hold onto positions of power in education. They summed up their position:

> In our view, the persistence of men's dominance is not only the result of resistance by those in positions of power to sharing their power. It also is reproduced in the ideological discourses that focus on women as individuals who must overcome obstacles set in their way, and on gender as a bias that can be eliminated. (p. 174)

This resistance to sharing power can also be seen in the implications of Goleman's (1995) work. Whereas he fully embraced the male ability to acquire emotionally centered skills, they make no assertions that women are able to adopt those considered masculine. The default norm is always male.

Chase and Bell (1990) continued to home in on the crux of this issue by emphasizing how, from their positions of power, gatekeepers influenced how women are perceived. When they highlighted obstacles women face as impediments to their individual achievement, these

gatekeepers obscured the systems of dominance that sustain male power. Chase and Bell (1990) concluded their study by connecting their work to how women can be drawn into discourses that reproduce "the very relations of dominance that they are trying to resist" (p. 175). This inadvertent collusion manifesting from internalized sexism is reflected in Brunner (2000) and Franklin (2015) and is not at all uncommon.

Male Dominance and Fragility in Education

The historical, systemic, and pervasive subordination of women in education cannot be discussed without addressing the forces that compel it to occur. It is evident throughout history that that the field of education has leveraged hegemonic gender norms to reinforce the dominance of men and masculinity. As previously noted, as women became more prominent members of the educational workforce, men began to assert their dominance, concerned with being equated with women in the social hierarchy. Male educators could either acquiesce their social power and privilege or develop structures and roles within the profession to reify their dominance (Blount, 2000).

Accordingly, men in the profession began to build structures that reinforced this dominance. Such efforts included the creation of "male-identified niches" that involved acceptable male educational roles such as teachers of science and mathematics, vocational studies, coaching, and of course, administration. Administration in particular offered an additional layer of structural dominance because the work was supervisory, which was well within the parameters of traditional gender roles. Unsurprisingly, superintendencies became the most desirable positions in education for men, as they offered the greatest power and authority within a school district, as well as the highest salaries. The common locations of central offices also geographically positioned superintendents away from classrooms, where the work was

largely done by women. School districts' central offices tended to be closer to the area's commerce and governmental hubs than near school buildings. The distanced central office created a deliberate "separate male sphere," reifying the subordination of women (Blount, 2000, p. 86).

Blount (1999) delved specifically into the development of the school administrator role and its contribution to upholding male hegemony in education. Building upon the assertion that schoolwork has been "gender differentiated" (p. 56) for centuries, she noted the perceived need for "masculine havens" (p. 55) for men in schoolwork so as not to place them in a marginalized position. Whereas women were deemed as individuals who should "take orders and remain quiet," men were not sociologically expected to do so. Yet, their position as teachers and their proximity to women placed them in a lower social caste. As a result, their masculinity was called into question (pp. 59–60).

In the early 20th century, this feminization became so apparent that male teachers of young children were deemed "effeminate and submissive" (Blount, 2000, pp. 85–86) leading male educators to grapple publicly with their masculinity. The effeminate characterization of male educators who worked with younger children reified the concept of teaching as women's work, and men of this time could not tolerate their affiliation therewith. Fearing their manliness was in question, these educators launched various recruitment campaigns in hopes of regaining gendered sociological clout by increasing the number of male teachers in the profession (Blount, 2000).

The aforementioned attacks on male educators' masculinity intensified in the mid-20th century, resulting in many male teachers being accused of homosexuality. School districts deemed homosexuality in teaching as a problem to be eliminated, modeling their efforts to this

end after Senator Joseph McCarthy's radical congressional inquiries regarding communism and

homosexuality. Unsurprisingly, lesbian and gay teachers struggled to hide parts of their personal

lives in fear of losing their jobs and being cast out of their profession as deviants. Blount (1999)

noted that it was of no coincidence that marriage rates for those in education increased, as

marriage status offered some protection from school districts questioning one's sexuality. The

homophobic assumptions inherent in these dynamics continued throughout the rest of the 20th

century and are arguably still quite present today. Although accusations of homosexuality

haunted both women and men in teaching, these accusations placed men in particular

professional peril, as the narrative regarding male homosexual teachers was that they were

deviant pedophiles, criminals of the worst kind (Blount, 1999).

Yet, male concerns of subordinate social positioning are only part of the issue at play in

education. Male fragility also merits consideration, as it highlights how much men are invested

in their hegemonic dominance and what happens when their position is called into question, even

innocuously. DiMuccio and Knowles (2020) defined fragile masculinity as a response cisgender

men have in response to feeling that their manhood is "precarious" and that societal expectations

dictate that men must actively defend their "high-value status as men" (p. 25). They further noted

that fragile masculinity is driven by anxiety, and the behavioral response men have to this

anxiety is to behave in stereotypically masculine ways that include demonstrations of aggression,

assertions of confidence and competitiveness, and a subjugation of emotion. Yet, fragile

masculinity also contains a fear that if he does not measure up to masculine gender norms, his

membership in the "privileged gender group" will be revoked (DiMuccio & Knowles 2020, p.

25).

Franklin (2015) offered an account of such a behavioral response. Through sharing and analyzing a specific personal experience as a doctoral student, she examined how sexism is "reproduced" at the collegiate level, noting how sexist paradigms are reinforced in the normative presumptions within institutions, how much the unspoken contributes to this reinforcement, and how hegemonically dominant (white men) demonstrate marked reactivity to anyone challenging these presumptions (Franklin, 2015, p. 14). Franklin's (2015) experience showed how a female student's feminist interpretation of a text could trigger a disproportionately negative response from a male professor with established academic standing. This professor was someone who presumably held enough power not to be intimidated by a female doctoral student, and yet, his reactions detailed below demonstrate quite the opposite.

Franklin (2015) was a doctoral student in the 1980s, a time in which there were very few, if any, gender or women's studies programs in higher education. She noted her struggles with the lack of feminist perspectives in the academy, and how, in over 30 years, little has changed in this respect. The critical incident that she documented in this piece involved her writing a short paper analyzing the work of a social theorist, Charles Durkheim, for a male senior professor ("Professor P," as she calls him) who asked that she write a "thought piece" to "stimulate discussion" (p. 17). Durkheim's stance was that humans are joined by social classifications and rules, and the process by which humans are sorted into these categories tends to be binary, and as he admitted, serves to reinforce hierarchies. Franklin (2015) offered a feminist critique of this stance in a paper, suggesting that Durkheim's classification process might be better received if it was explored in a more pluralistic manner rather than a binary through which existing hierarchies are reproduced.

In writing this "thought piece" for Professor P, she was cognizant of "the hierarchical nature" of her position as student in relation to this male professor and tried to strike an "ameliorative" tone in her paper (Franklin, 2015, p. 18). She did as she was instructed by many of her professors, including Professor P, to not just describe other scholar's arguments but "develop critical positions" of her own. Even within that guidance, she recognized that she should be relatively delicate in her analysis. She submitted the 4-page paper to Professor P, and when the paper was returned to her, it was completely covered in red ink—a scathing critique covering all blank spaces on those four pages, with index cards tacked onto them with further critique. Franklin (2015) included photos of the paper and the scrawling comments from the professor, including such quotations as "I DID NOT LIKE THIS AT ALL" and "WRONG" and "Dreadful" and "slovenly reading of book" (p. 19). Professor P used different pens, and the ink was smudged in places, the photos providing a visual as to how extensive Professor P's missive was. It was eviscerating, wholly unproductive, and not at all aimed at promoting student growth despite the presumed goal of any student paper as such. His tirade was about him, not Franklin.

When Franklin (2015) spoke with her supervisor regarding this experience, she was assured that her scholarship was not in jeopardy, as the concern did not involve the quality of her work. Yet, the supervisor told her that she had to "put [her] scholarship before [her] feminism," or she would not be allowed to progress in the doctoral program (p. 21). This paper and its aftermath had positioned her as a troublemaker in her department. Moreover, Professor P's egregious response to her paper was not questioned. Franklin (2015) elaborated:

> The protection shown toward Professor P confirms what we already know about the
> often surprisingly high level of institutionalized tolerance and protection offered to
> certain 'awkward' individuals—many of whom are older, male academics nearing, or

past, retirement, whose systematically dysfunctional behaviour is frustratingly

condoned. (p. 23)

Franklin's (2015) detailed description of Professor P's response, particularly with the

photographs included, is a resounding example of male fragility. She merely noted in her 4-page

paper how a certain paradigm is used to reinforce a dominant norm, and he responded in a

manner so extensive, visceral, and cutting as to have her returning to the paper itself to reread it,

questioning her own work. Professor P's behavior is illustrative of the aggressiveness that

DiMuccio and Knowles (2020) noted when men's masculinity is challenged (p. 26).

Taylor and Klein (2020) also touched upon aggressive male responses in their discussion

of the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court appointment hearings. Whereas Dr. Blasey-Ford testified

in an extremely composed and measured demeanor about Kavanaugh's assault on her in high

school, Kavanaugh's testimony was rife with outbursts, yelling, and protestations far beyond

what would be considered to be professional behavior. And yet, he was not chastised for it, even

though judges' behavior is touted as a bastion of clear-headedness and temperance. Rather, he

was appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States. His egregious behavior in those

hearings was never addressed by those in power, nor was Professor P's.

After her analysis of Professor P's behavior, Franklin (2015) posed the question of "how

and why such behaviors are institutionally reproduced, and correspondingly, what does not get

reproduced as a result?" (p. 23). She asserted that feminist critiques are commonly shunned

because they disallow the reproduction of patriarchal structures and assumptions entrenched in

academia, and she challenged us to dissect the mechanisms that allow hegemonic reproduction to

occur. Moreover, she noted the complicit silence in this reproductive process, characterizing

"everyday institutional sexism" as "unchecked, unacknowledged, and indeed largely unchanged because it is ignored" (p. 26).

Franklin (2015) also referenced the issue of the "double standard" whereby a challenger of sexism is characterized as a feminist who is biased, and also "derivative of a specific kind or type of character," while those who reenact and reproduce sexism are not subject to the same scrutiny (p. 26). This echoes the problem of perceived "gender neutrality" highlighted in the work of Chase and Bell (1990) and Blackmore (2013). Hegemonic norms of any type—those of gender, race, culture, class, or ability—are not the default neutral; they are decidedly not neutral. Accordingly, as Franklin (2015) noted, hegemonic academic norms are continually reified and male egos protected. One merely needs to consider the predominance of white men in curricula, faculty, and positions of higher leadership to see this continually perpetuated dynamic.

As Blount (1999; 2000), Brunner (2000), Chase and Bell (1990), Blackmore (2013), and Franklin (2015) established, sexism is a systemic issue rather than merely an interpersonal one. Yet, the interpersonal serves to reinforce hierarchical gender norms and reifying systemic marginalization. Daily interpersonal interactions inform the system, and the system dictates what is and is not allowed in their daily interactions. Women in educational leadership must walk many tightropes designed to make it all but impossible to engage with their work in an authentic manner. They must police their clothing, their speech, their tone, and their tactics to ensure that they are not seen as too weak or too strong. They must navigate around fragile male egos, never being completely certain what will cause a backlash. Their daily labor is far greater than their male counterparts, as they must do their jobs with the added burden of vigilance about potential backlash—something with which men need not be concerned. This gendered labor is similar to Mayock's (2016) concept of gender shrapnel, as it is not a single facet of it that is noticeably

burdensome. Rather, it is the totality of the small pieces of women's additional labor that push them to exhaustion. This exhaustion becomes a source of trauma, one that is continually fortified by the patriarchal norms that create it.

Trauma, Patriarchy, and Emotional Knowing. Gilligan and Snider (2018) extensively explored the connection between sexism and trauma response. Using Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory as a foundation for their work, they asserted that the human response to patriarchy mirrors the human response to trauma. According to Gilligan and Snider (2018), Bowlby equated irreparable loss of relationship with significant physical trauma and asserts that this loss of relationship can lead to defense mechanisms that can become "maladaptive and destructive" (p. 47). Bowlby delineated human response to loss in three phases: protest, despair, and detachment. A child exposed to a sustained dynamic in which his/her needs are not being met initially protests in an attempt to getting those needs met. When this protest becomes ineffective, their needs still unmet, the child moves toward despair, developing a sense of futility. Over time, this despair turns into detachment as a means of protecting themselves from further emotional pain. Gilligan and Snider (2018) defined detachment as "a dissociative defense that seeks to eliminate the potential for irreparable rupture by splitting parts of the self, notably the longing for relationship, off from awareness" (p. 52). Essentially, if an individual is not emotionally attached to anyone, s/he cannot be hurt by them. A child in this detachment phase will behave as if human connection is of little significance to her, no longer appearing to care for anyone other than herself, nor needing anyone else. Bowlby (1969) characterized this coping strategy as "compulsive self-reliance" (Gilligan & Snider, 2018, p. 53).

Compulsive self-reliance is attributed to detachment, yet in his later work, Bowlby (1980) found that detachment can take "an inverse form" called "anxious attachment" (Gilligan &

Snider, p. 61). Rather than avoiding relationships, these individuals "cling to others" and engage in submissive behaviors that Bowlby termed "compulsive caregiving" (p. 61). An anxious attachment response involves subverting one's needs to be compliant toward others and connotes a fear of being rejected or neglected. Individuals who demonstrate this response relinquish their own autonomy—their thoughts, feelings, and needs—in an attempt to serve those of others and prevent rejection (Bretherton, 1992).

Gilligan and Snider (2018) connected detachment and anxious attachment responses to the gendered responses to patriarchy. They noted the similarity of detachment response to the ideal patriarchal man—emotionally stoic and needing no one, and the anxious attachment response to the ideal patriarchal woman—selflessly giving and voiceless. They further argued that patriarchy acts as the phases of trauma do. When a male or female challenges the gendered expectation for them (what is unmanly or what a "good woman" would do), they are met with resistance. Men exhibiting emotion or concern are met with contempt and accusations of weakness. Women exhibiting autonomy and a voice are accused of being nasty, shrill, or selfish (p. 80). Gilligan and Snider (2018) referenced hooks's (2015) characterization of this process as gendered indoctrination. Boys are forced to feel pain, then denied their emotional response to pain. Girls are forced to feel anger, then denied their right to that anger. This denial leads them to despair; they feel that they cannot exist authentically and wholly and begin to distrust the "reparability of connection," which leads to a psychological resistance. Men subvert any desire to connect emotionally, channeling their energy into achieving materialistically and gaining prestige and power. Women subvert their connection to their own anger, channeling their energy into serving others. Detachment and anxious attachment result (Gilligan & Snider, 2018).

It is interesting to consider Blackmore's (2013) critique of Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence work within this context as well. Goleman's assertion that men can acquire emotional skills commonly ascribed to women becomes even more problematic when considered with the context of Gilligan and Snider (2018). Merely the characterization of emotional intelligence as a set of skills without consideration for the gendered dynamics within which they exist demonstrates hegemonic dominance. Goleman (1995) gave no consideration to why men do not commonly show emotional connection, nor does he give any consideration to the fact that women are routinely criticized for being too emotional. He grossly oversimplified emotion within his conceptualization of emotional intelligence.

Gilligan and Snider's work (2018) serves as means of connecting the experiences of trauma that Franklin (2015), Edwards (2017), and Taylor and Klein (2020) expressed with the actual structure that produces it: patriarchy. Their work provided a compelling argument that sexism and patriarchy—the entity that creates, reifies, and perpetuates sexism—are inextricably linked to trauma, on both deeply personal and pervasively systemic levels, underscoring the dual impact that sexism has upon both the individual and the environment in which the individual exists. This symbiosis of personal and systemic is critical to understanding the connection between logistical and interpersonal experiences and how an individual internalizes and metabolizes those experiences emotionally.

In the work of Forgasz and Clemans (2014) related to the work of Gilligan and Snider (2018) in its establishment of emotion as epistemology, they explained that the knowing that occurs from such emotional response is a valid form of understanding. This legitimization of emotion serves to disrupt the sexist norms that categorize women as "too emotional" (Forgasz & Clemans, 2014, p. 61). They summarized their stance:

We (re)consider emotions within a feminist sociological tradition that argues for a need

to reorient those abstract and traditional knowledge forms that have tended to alienate

women as subjects through a failure to attend to their local and embodied knowledge

and material experiences. (p. 63)

Forgasz and Clemans (2014) also brought their stance explicitly into the political realm, characterizing the act of centering emotion as epistemology as a "form of decolonization, making way for the liberation of subjugated knowledge" (p. 63). Traditionally, emotions are seen as "undesirable" in professional and educational environments and are positioned as of lesser value than rational, scientific, reasoning-based knowledge. They addressed the common gendered binary of knowledge and the hierarchy that it reinforces: masculine-positioned knowledge that values emotional stoicism versus feminine-positioned knowledge that embraces embodied experiences. The latter is traditionally seen as a lesser, if not completely dismissed, form of understanding. Citing Jaggar (1989), Forgasz and Clemans (2014) explicitly challenged the binary itself as well, noting that exploring emotion as epistemology allows us to demonstrate "the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional relation between reason and emotion" (Jaggar, 1989, pp. 156–157).

It is useful to consider Forgasz and Clemans's (2014) legitimization of emotion as epistemology with the context of Gilligan and Snider's (2018) connections between trauma responses and our response to patriarchy. When emotion is established as a legitimate way of knowing, emotional responses to patriarchy become valid forms of knowledge. Gilligan and Snider (2018) cited emotional knowing as the path back from detachment to one of engagement and offered this as a potential means of moving away from patriarchal norms. Given the human desire to connect, as Bowlby (1969) contended, this desire for connection is far more powerful a

force than that of patriarchy because everyone has it, regardless of one's identity. Furthermore,

Gilligan and Snider (2018) posed that the human voice—a voice that is deeply connected to

emotion—is a means of resistance. Not only did they support the legitimization of emotion as

knowing, but they also pushed the concept further by establishing it as a tool in dismantling

patriarchy[3].

It is important to note that although emotional knowing is essential to learning, it also

cannot and does not exist in a vacuum. Certain environmental dynamics must be valued and

protected, explicitly and implicitly. Those enacting this pedagogy must provide the space for

individuals to feel vulnerable and act vulnerably. They must understand that exploring emotions

can be uncomfortable and that each individual will engage in such explorations to varying

degrees. Moreover, Forgasz and Clemans (2014) openly expressed their own anxieties about

engaging their emotions in their research, as they noted that the traditional norms of knowledge

are so ingrained in us that in order to embrace emotion as epistemology, we must unlearn these

norms. Yet, as they concluded, we can foster greater levels of emotional connection with others

and replace "a transmissive and passive orientation to teaching" with "one of empathy and

engagement" (p. 73). This facet of their work connects back to that of Gilligan and Snider's

(2018) call for emotion as a means of connection and liberation.

This exploration of Forgasz and Clemans (2014) also harkens back to Blackmore's

(2013) critique of Goleman's (1995) oversimplified emotional intelligence. Emotion as

epistemology reaches far beyond the identification and acquisition of discrete social skills that

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[3] Gilligan and Snider (2018) took an intersectional stance in their work, acknowledging the importance of considering all facets of identity when critically examining patriarchy. They noted how all facets of marginalization "undercut human relationality" and "subvert our ability to repair ruptures and resist injustice," and although they specifically targeted patriarchy, they considered it more of a framework that operates to maintain the power of hegemonically dominant males (p. 102)

are considered feminine, and it cannot be considered without also discussing its marginalized

positioning in knowledge hierarchies. As Blackmore (2013) noted, Goleman (1995) failed to

consider this, instead positioning Emotional Intelligence as a revolutionary concept when in

actuality it is a homogenized, shallow interpretation of emotional epistemology with no

contextual nuance.

Women's Labor and Anger. Ahmed's (2017) "sweaty concepts" connoted the effort

that it takes to be a feminist. She defined this term as "another way of being pulled out from a

shattering experience," and acknowledged the labor in grappling with concepts "at work in how

we work" (pp. 12–13). This distinction is subtle but important. Enacting feminist work is

difficult, but there is also difficulty in engaging with the concepts that impact and influence the

work. Ahmed (2017) asserted that we must "stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and

exposing this difficulty" and resist the urge to eliminate the tension and "strain" that feminist

work invariably involves (p. 13).

Morley (1998) explored similar conceptualizations of labor, specifically the emotional

labor of women educators within a feminist pedagogical paradigm. She described emotional

labor as "employees being paid to smile, laugh, be polite, or 'be caring,'" and characterized this

labor as "stressful and alienating, as it involves the suppression of workers' own needs and

feelings" without recognition or compensation (Fineman, 1993, p. 3; as cited in Morley, 1998, p.

22). Accordingly, Morley (1998) questioned how we can enact a feminist pedagogy in a manner

that does not strain those it seeks to liberate. She also examined how the blurred lines between

personal and professional spheres that are integral to feminist pedagogy can also be problematic,

as women's work as educators can be viewed as an extension of their propensity toward caring

and therefore not considered labor. She referenced Nicolson (1996) in calling this dynamic "sex

role spillover" (Morley, 1998, p. 24). This tension harkened back to Ahmed's (2017) "sweaty

concepts" (p. 12). Caring and emotionality are centered in feminist pedagogy but we also must

acknowledge how these facets of the work can be weaponized against women, both in

diminishing the value of our labor and in creating a standard of "what a woman should be" to

which we must adhere. This tension is certainly something in which we must continue to dwell

and be aware of how it is both something that we value and something that we recognize can be

used against us (Ahmed, 2017).

Morley's (1998) conceptualization of emotional labor connected to Traister's (2018)

explorations of women and anger and Taylor and Klein's (2020) analysis of the cultural

expectations of women versus men. Not only do women educators bear greater emotional labor

burdens, but we also must do it within the confines of narrow behavioral parameters. Traister

(2018) looked at how women are enculturated to subvert any emotion remotely related to anger

and how much work it is to do so. She cited countless ways in which this subversion can be seen

in our culture, stating plainly,

> Do a Google search on any powerful women in politics or public life, especially those
>
> who threaten white male power . . . and you'll turn up scores of photos of [Maxine]
>
> Waters and [Nancy] Pelosi and Senators Kamala Harris and Elizabeth Warren with their
>
> mouths open, unrestrained: mid-yell, spittle-flecked, the very act of making a loud noise a
>
> sign of their ugly and unnatural personalities. (Traister, 2018, p. 54)

In their analysis of the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court confirmation hearings, Taylor

and Klein (2020) noted the stark difference between Kavanaugh's flagrant outbursts versus Dr.

Blasey-Ford's "calm, professional, and composed" countenance throughout her testimony (p.

61). Moreover, they noted that whereas Blasey-Ford's demeanor demonstrated her understanding

that any credibility given to her testimony was contingent upon her lack of emotionality,

Kavanaugh did not need to consider this factor at all. He was free to express rage without any

consequence, and as indicated by his relatively swift confirmation as a Supreme Court Justice,

his tantrums did absolutely nothing to diminish his credibility.

Ahmed (2017) also explored women's anger in her advocacy in becoming "feminist

killjoys" (p. 172). Ahmed (2010) defined "feminist killjoy" as an individual who eschews her

own comfort and the comfort of others to address oppressive structures and inequities. She

lovingly embraces her role as a "spoilsport" in disallowing sexism, racism, and other tools of

marginalization to go unchecked (p. 581). She resisted the idea that "maturity is becoming less

volatile," as it implies that women should become "less bothered" by systems of inequity and

equates maturity with "giving up" (Ahmed, 2017 pp. 172–173). However, Ahmed (2017) did not

minimize the consequence of being a feminist killjoy, noting that in fostering this identity, we

must also be aware of "the consequences of being oppositional," including the weariness that can

come from it, echoing the sentiments of Morley (1998) and certainly reflecting the "sweatiness"

of her "sweaty concepts" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 12).

Feminist Critique, Feminist Leadership

Although it is evident that women in educational leadership face significant systemic

challenges, several authors provided examples of hope—both in the form of what can move us

toward a feminist leadership paradigm and how we can leverage various fields of study to do so.

Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001) provided insight into the experiences of women in educational

leadership and informed areas of potential paradigmatic shifts. Their study focused upon female

principals and their enactment of Gilligan's (1982) ethic of care in education. Gilligan (1982)

asserted that women tend to value a stance in which the caring of others is held as paramount.

Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001) offered a "thick description" of three women principals and how this ethic of care guided the way they acted and made decisions. Although their study focused upon the enactment of an ethic of care stance in their professional lives, Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001) importantly noted the integration of the personal into this stance. The women in their study did not delineate a clear boundary between the professional and the personal but rather acted and thought in ways that integrated them.

Kropiewnicki and Shapiro's (2001) study revealed that these principals valued and promoted student-centered learning, and they encouraged teachers to enact respectful classroom management strategies and to interact with students and staff in a caring manner. Each of the principals connected their roles as mothers and grandmothers to their work with students, linking their personal and professional lives explicitly. They also demonstrated "caring for ideas and causes" that on a broader plane advocated for the care of others (p. 21). Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001) concluded that caring was "an ongoing activity and ethic in their lives" (p. 21). Brunner (2000) noted similar dynamics in her study. Her participants enacted a "philosophy of caring" in their work, citing the work of Noddings (1984) in characterizing this belief system as "the feminized moral responsiveness of human caring (Brunner, 2000, p. 104). Her participants' conception of "power with" also evidenced this caring stance, as they expressed the importance of "supporting people's voices" in their districts (Brunner, 2000, p. 103).

It is important to note that Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001) recognized that an ethic of care stance is not gender-specific and that "caring administrators" are not exclusively women. Yet, they asserted that the traditional education structures and norms are "derived from observations of white male leaders" and these dynamics "frequently interfered with the enactment of caring and devalued caring behaviors in administrators" (p. 5). It is also important

to challenge the assumption that women are by nature caregivers and that this facet of our

gendered identities devalues the complexity of our work. Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001)

elucidated how the women principals navigate these dynamics to maintain an ethic of care stance

in their professional lives.

However, as Morley (1998) analyzed, this ethic of care stance involves emotional labor.

Although she agreed with the importance of care-centered work, Morley (1998) insisted that this

work does not come without a cost and that cost, most often shouldered by women, is overlooked

in patriarchal paradigms. As stated by Blount (1999) in an historical sense, traditional

assumptions of women allowed teaching to be viewed as an extension of feminine nature rather

than actual labor, justifying women teachers' paltry wages. Morley (1998) extended this

consideration to the particular concern of how feminist educators tend to operate within a "quasi-

therapeutic discourse" (p. 25). This discourse, providing therapeutic and emotional supports to

students "without resources to replenish them," places an added labor upon feminist educators

(p. 24). They are not only expected to provide comprehensive academic instruction to students;

they must also provide emotional support to them. Because society characterizes women as

innately nurturing, this emotional labor is not recognized nor compensated (Morley, 1998, p. 24).

Blackmore (2013) analyzed various leadership styles and called for a shift toward using a

critical feminist perspective "to problematize the nature, purpose, and capacities of educational

systems and organizations" in an effort to "reform and re-think their practices in more socially

just ways" (p. 139). She explained that there is no dearth of research in the realm of educational

policy and leadership, but there is scarcely any attention paid to the theoretical and political

positions from which they are derived. She examined how this lack of systemic consideration

impacts school leadership and how the assertion of common educational leadership stances have

been introduced in very gendered ways.

Blackmore (2013) deconstructed recent discourses on visionary, transformational, and

distributed leadership. She explained that although they each alluded to common theoretical

paradigms, they did not ascribe to shared interpretations of common educational concepts such

as collaboration. She also noted that more problematically, these discourses tended to

depoliticize leadership. Correspondingly, she argued that these leadership paradigms do not do

enough to challenge the systemic marginalization of students and staff, and as a result,

educational and professional inequities are rampant. Blackmore (2013) also critiqued social and

emotional learning and the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) with regard to students, citing

their lack of recognition of inequities, both systemically and among students.

Blackmore (2013) exposed the inadequacies of these leadership paradigms in her

overview of how they emerged in the field of education. She posed that visionary leadership

"imparted all power and capacity" upon the school leaders, which maintained a top-down power

structure (p. 141). Transformational leadership emerged in response to this stance, focusing upon

the individual, calling for leaders to position themselves as servants and act from a morality-

based stance. Yet, transformational leadership also did not address the centralization of power

that remained with the leader. Distributed leadership offered a decentralization of power, opting

for a shared leadership model among teachers, staff, and administrators. However, Blackmore

(2013) deemed this leadership model to be problematic as well. Although it disrupts traditional

educational power structures, distributed leadership still requires teachers and students to fit into

the system rather than requiring the system to adapt to their needs. It broadens the number of

individuals leading, but it does not completely eliminate the hierarchical top-down structure of the organization.

As a counterpoint to her dire assessments of education leadership, Blackmore (2013) offered feminist leadership as a path toward more equitable school structures. She connected feminist leadership to antiracist leadership, as they both require the explicit naming of their "political, epistemological, and indeed normative position upfront" (p. 146). This connection was an important one, as intersectionality is critical to understanding oppressive structures and how the multiple facets of identity (gender, race, culture, and class, among others) compound and complicate hegemonic marginalization. Blackmore (2013) defined feminism as "shared understandings as to the significance of focusing on gender as an analytical category with the aim to achieve social justice" and a stance that rejects "the positioning of emotion in political, social and economic theory as being weak, personal, dangerous, bad and restricted to the private domain (and therefore of women)" (p. 146).

Blackmore (2013) further reflected upon the intersectionality inherent in a truly feminist stance in asserting that it is not enough to recognize students' cultural diversity, as doing so denies the "dominant whiteness and maleness of educational leaders" (p. 147). Rather, the organizational context of education must be considered as well. Teacher frustration does not merely come from the stress of the logistics of their jobs, but from a far deeper source: their sense of agency, both individually and collectively, to do what is best for students in the face of systemic inequities and "neoliberal reforms" (Blackmore, 2013, p. 147). Feminist leadership extends this agency by including students and families in decision making as to what is prioritized academically, socially, and emotionally. This orientation is reflective of the intersectional feminist stance apparent in other previously cited works.

Marshall and Edwards (2020) supported a similar view using an analysis of feminist frameworks as a means of critiquing educational leadership structures, practices, and policies. They called for educators to use critical feminist theory to "out" hegemonic norms and show how dominant discourses retain power through "arenas of power and dominance" (e.g., boards of education and legal systems), "powerful policy artefacts" (e.g., licensure requirements, curriculum, and budget allocations), and "unobtrusive policies-in-practices" (e.g., deference to male voices in meetings) (p. 6). They critiqued these facets of educational leadership to highlight the positioning of women as the locus of the problem, echoing the issue of individualizing the grossly systemic problem that Blackmore (2013) and Chase and Bell (1990) identified as well.

Marshall and Edwards's (2020) evaluation further contributes to this critique in asserting that systemic sexism has not seen much improvement in thirty years, citing statistics that show this stagnancy. Between 1993 and 2004, the percentage of female elementary school principals increased from 41% to 56%, and at the secondary level, it rose from 14% to 26%. They summarized, "Women are still doing most of the teaching and interacting with children while men, predominantly, have the power to decide what are the values, priorities, and power arrangements in schooling" (p. 18). Marshall and Edwards (2020) provided a continuation of the historical context that Blount (2000) gave and that the 2022 New Jersey Department of Education statistics reflected. When these studies are viewed together, it is arguable that education continues to be a field in which gender equity is elusive despite its overwhelmingly female workforce.

Blackmore (2013) urged the movement toward feminist leadership from which a more democratic educational structure that moves beyond shared leadership can emerge. She called for "inclusive leadership," which is based upon democratic processes and embodies representational

justice, demanding that marginalized groups gain greater representation in leadership positions

(p. 148). Blackmore also echoed the concerns of Blount (1999) regarding social, political, and

systemic reproductions of gender norms and how a feminist stance can serve to challenge this

reproductive process: "This focus on the social and political relations of organizations means

moving away from viewing women's disadvantage as an individualized problem addressed by

changing women" and toward a focus upon "how privilege is gained and retained by dominant

perspectives and groups" (p. 149). She connected this work back to the concept of

intersectionality by referencing recent pedagogies involving the "ontology of whiteness" and

how it is continually reified in education (p. 150).

Edwards (2017) offered Marxist concepts as a means to examine such power dynamics

(p. 631). Marxism highlights how inequality is perpetuated by institutional reproduction. She

applied Marxist theory to sexism in higher education, asserting that it allows us to see how

institutional norms are preserved and honored. Although she admitted that intersectional

marginalization complicates this application, she deigned Marxism useful in re-centering the

discussion upon the system rather than the individual. Her work in this respect connected to the

study of institutional change. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) provided elucidation of this

connection as well as the broader field of organizational theory. They posed that when

professional fields become established, they move toward greater homogenization through the

process of institutional isomorphism. This process involved coercion from the political climate in

which the institution exists, institutional behaviors that are mimetic, and norms associated with

professionalization of the field. Essentially, an institution continually reproduces and legitimizes

existing norms and behaviors, leaving little consideration as to whether or not these norms and

behaviors are what is best for the institution.

More specifically, examining institutional isomorphism may help explain the acts of sexist reproduction to which Blackmore (2013), Franklin (2015), and Edwards (2017) referred. The field of education, at all levels, has entrenched norms that have been continually reproduced for centuries. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) work not only illuminated how schools and universities homogenize, but also how difficult efforts toward change are. However, scholars such as Rorrer (2006) offered insight into possible ways of de-legitimizing existing norms and promoting greater equity in education. Rorrer (2006) called for schools to straddle "the margin of tolerance" within the school community, finding the space "somewhere between innovative and familiarity" where norms can be challenged in a manner that allows for a certain degree of familiarity and thereby lessen the discomfort of the unknown to its community members (p. 228). This degree of familiarity might be found in a maintenance of certain school traditions or structures while also examining how the school might amend them toward a more inclusive, equitable paradigm.

Although Rorrer (2006) offered some hope as to how we can create more equitable schooling systems, her work failed to address the emotional impact of inequitable dynamics upon those who are marginalized. As stated earlier, Edwards (2017) connected her reaction to many of the sexist microaggressions she experienced with trauma response. She noted how, in many instances, she had "not been able to find a way to respond" and expressed a sense of guilt in saying nothing. She asked herself, "Why would a champion for equity in the workplace be so silent in the face of sexism?" (p. 627). She referenced the "well-researched" trauma response of "tonic immobility" that occurs when a person feels "trapped and terrified" in a given situation. Tonic immobility is connected to the survival mechanism of "feigning death" in that it renders the person verbally still, which has a dissociative effect upon that person (p. 628).

Clear connections lie between tonic immobility and Bowlby's (1969) concept of

detachment. In order to function within the workplace, Edwards (2017) emotionally detached

from the microaggressions she experienced. Yet, as Gilligan and Snider (2018) noted, this

detachment comes at a cost: it disallows the individual from making emotional connections with

those who might be allies to her and cuts off a potential resource for support. Franklin (2015)

proposed a viable, if challenging alternative, calling for each of us to be a "degenerative agent"

who resists the reproduction of sexism. To this end, we can reflect upon our own practices,

encourage others among us to do the same, and infuse feminist concepts into our work, citing

feminist authors frequently and openly (p. 32). Although they did not use Franklin's term,

Gilligan and Snider's (2018) emphasis upon emotional connection and reengaging the human

voice as a means of resistance was similar to it. It seems productive to enact both degenerative

agency and emotional connection to ensure that we engage all tools at our disposal to dismantle

patriarchy and its norms.

This literature review provided historical context for sexism in education and how this

sexist foundation continues to prevail in current educational paradigms. Analyses of personal

accounts of women in educational administration and examinations of systemic norms that

perpetuate themselves through such fallacies as gender neutrality provided insight into how

women educational leaders navigated structural and systemic hierarchies that were rife with

gender bias. These navigational considerations were further elucidated by considerations of male

fragility and women's collusion with patriarchy within the field of education. Yet, authors such

as Agosto and Roland (2018), Blackmore (2013), Brunner (2000), and Watson and Baxley

(2021) provided promising practices and orientations that could inform more feminist ways of

leading. The work of Gilligan and Snider (2018) connected responses to patriarchy to trauma

responses, which also centered emotional ways of knowing akin to the work of Jaggar (1989)

and Forgasz and Clemans (2014). Within the more systemic orientations of Marshall and

Edwards (2020) and Rorrer (2006), these authors collectively provided a nuanced context to this

study and a valued weave in its fabric.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the facets of this healing feminist autoethnography. It details how I centered spirituality and emotional ways of knowing to examine how personal accounts of my sexist experiences could disrupt gendered norms in educational leadership and how I could do so while balancing truth with professional safety. It provides an explanation of my use of major arcana tarot cards as symbolic touchstones and representations throughout the study and how I collected my data through a series of journal entries for the 2021–2022 school year, which I shared with a critical friend for reflection and analysis. I explain how I analyzed these entries and moved in and out of intuitive and theoretical realms in doing so. I connect this movement to Ulmer's (2020) transdisciplinary feminist research term of "rusty," which likened the oxidation process to research that is both constant and irreversible (p. 237), and I explain how I used Richardson's (2000) criteria for "trustworthiness" as a way of ensuring integrity in the work.

Creating a Space for Internal and External Worlds to Dialogue

The format of this dissertation was a deliberate choice to build an unconventional academic space. The study was not structured traditionally nor was it written in a traditionally academic voice. Rather, I built this study as both autoethnographic and co/autoethnographic, creating a new research space for my dissertation that lies between them. In her novel, *Delusions of Grandma*, Carrie Fisher's (1995) character Cora referred to her friends with whom she discussed all important decisions as her "committee." This concept has resonated with me for decades because similar to Cora, I have found that discussing things with trusted friends and colleagues helps me to process them. I listen to their insights and integrate them into my own for further elucidation. My "committee" has always provided me with multiple perspectives,

allowing me to tease out nuances. I trust them to challenge me when they think that I am wrong or misguided.

In this study, the role of my friends and colleagues, "my committee," provided a "co/autoethnographic" means of reflecting and processing. Taylor and Coia (2019) described co/autoethnographies as studies in which data are generated through relationships that engage in a process of dialogue through writing, discussing, sharing stories, reflecting, and contextualizing the data within relevant theory and research. Similarly, I generated data by journaling about my personal and professional gendered experiences, and these journal entries often detailed discussions with colleagues and friends about what I was feeling and experiencing in the moment. I then shared these entries with one specific friend and colleague, Alice, to process them. I describe my relationship with Alice in more detail in the data collection section of this study.

As I transitioned into the writing phase of this dissertation, my work departed from the collaborative aspect of co/autoethnography. Although Alice's insights and comments were instrumental in processing my journal entries, the data were of my own experiences. I analyzed the data and wrote my findings and implications alone, ultimately taking an autoethnographic stance in writing this dissertation document. Accordingly, I characterize this study as autoethnographic.

The necessity of a nontraditional orientation and structure was one that originated in my appreciation for co/autoethnography as described in Taylor and Coia (2006), Taylor and Coia (2019), and Taylor and Klein (2020). I appreciated the reciprocal movement from the personal, professional, and cultural as "a form of self-representation that complicates cultural norms by seeing autobiography as implicated in larger cultural processes" (Taylor & Coia, 2006, p. 278).

They drew from the work of Reed-Danahay (1997) who explained that "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).

Additionally, I chose to break from traditional academic writing to elevate personal experience in research as Kitchen (2014) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasized in their work. Kitchen (2014) highlighted the complicated relationship between theory and experience. He was suspicious of theory that contradicted experience, but he also valued theory's ability to "deepen understanding, uncover unexamined elements of practice, and enhance one's pedagogy" (p. 128). Similar to Kitchen (2014), I found that my personal and professional experiences made more sense through the theory, and the theory was more embodied through my experiences. Theory and experience became inextricably connected, and rather than fight this connection, I chose to embrace it. This embrace aligned with feminist practice, as the personal is professional, and we engage in our work as fully embodied beings (Taylor & Coia, 2019).

As I began this study, I was drawn to the term "weave" to describe how I moved through the work. "Weave" has four definitions, all of which described how I felt myself within this study. Weave, as a verb, has three meanings: to zigzag and meander, to intertwine and knit, and to create and construct. I enacted each of these meanings as I moved through this study. I zigzagged and meandered through writing my journal entries, not always knowing where I was going with them. As I examined them critically, I began to intertwine and knit them into the broader fabric of the literature, and in doing so, I developed deeper understandings of my experiences as a woman in educational administration. Yet, "weave" is also a noun, one that

refers to the texture or nap of a fabric. It is this definition that I appreciate most, as it refers to

how the weaved material *feels*. In writing and analyzing my journal entries, I began to feel the

texture of my work in all of its nuances and imperfections (Oxford, 2023).

Tarot: Creating Space for Spirituality

As I began to prepare for this study, it became abundantly apparent that in order for me to

take a truly embodied stance, I needed to include my spiritual practice in my research. Although

I was raised by liberal Christians and attended church weekly while growing up, I bristled at the

idea of sin, and I never felt at home at church. As I moved into my late teens, I resisted attending

services and my parents ultimately relented. Despite my feelings toward organized religion, I

always had a curiosity about Wicca and more pagan orientations. During the summer before

college, I worked at a Girl Scout resident camp, and it was there that I met a group of women

who would become some of my closest and dearest friends, my "Tribe" as I now refer to them.

Many of these women considered themselves to be Wiccan, and through them, my connection to

a more female sense of spirituality began to emerge. This connection to the feminine has only

strengthened and deepened as I have aged.

Symbols have always helped me to make sense of the world around me and within me.

For more than three decades, I have embraced the art and craft of tarot reading. I schedule a

reading every six months, and each reading has provided me guidance as to what I need to notice

in my life at the time, where I need not to worry, what or who might need attention, and where it

all has the potential to lead me. In between my six-month readings, I have often asked my own

deck what I need to know in a given situation, or where I need to focus my energy. These small,

short readings have provided me with a spiritual perspective that I then integrated into my

thought processes in dealing with a problem or concern.

According to Arrien (1997), metaphysics historians posited that tarot dates back to ancient Egypt, and tarot decks have been used for centuries as a way of integrating the spiritual into everyday life. As a young artist in the 1990s, I was drawn to Aleister Crowley's Thoth tarot deck. Designed by Crowley and painted by Lady Frieda Harris, it is both beautiful and rich in symbolism. Arrien (1997) defined Tarot as "a visual map of consciousness and a symbolic system that offers insight into professional contribution, personal motives, and spiritual development" and a means of seeing the process of life within a mystical paradigm (p. 12).

Tarot is my way of making connections between my experiences and my spirituality, and its symbolism is essential to my doctoral work. The major arcana, one of two sets of cards in the tarot, represents a mythical journey, starting with The Fool and ending with The Universe. As I experienced this study was a journey, I felt that it required symbolic acknowledgement and connection. Accordingly, I connected a major arcana card to various parts of the study as a symbolic reflection of that particular facet of the study (Arrien, 1997).

Figure 5.

The Aeon Thoth Deck Tarot Card

Note. This card represents critical self-analysis through spirit, body, and soul. From Tarot Card Meanings by TarotX (2022)

The nontraditional stance of this dissertation extended to how I moved through the study itself. It explicitly included explorations and considerations that embraced embodied ways of knowing, and this study moved in and out of theoretical, spiritual, and intuitive realms. The

Aeon tarot card represents critical self-analysis, which is the cornerstone of autoethnographic

work. Accordingly, The Aeon tarot card, shown in Figure 5, anchors this Methodology section

(Taylor & Coia, 2019; Ziegler, 1988).

    Right before I learned of my healthy workplace investigation in 2017, I had a tarot card

reading by a skilled reader in New Mexico. The reading had "The Tower" card in a prominent

spot, indicating that over the following months, I would experience an enormous upheaval in my

life—one that would ultimately result in wisdom and insight, but one that would not be easy.

Now, I cannot think about the investigation without thinking of that card, shown in Figure 6. The

image is of everything burning and falling to the ground. Yet above the ruin, there is an eye,

radiating through the chaos.

Figure 6.

The Tower Thoth Deck Tarot Card

Note. This card represents upheaval and the pain of creating new things. From Tarot Card
Meanings by TarotX (2022)

    This is exactly how I experienced my investigation and all of the subsequent events that

led to this study: a tremendously painful upheaval that yielded remarkable insight and new

personal growth. Through collecting journal entries, I was the data—my experiences, my

feelings, my reflections, and the connections that I made among them, and I grounded these data

within my spirituality, which made the experience feel more embodied. This spiritual grounding

also gave me the sense that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. My spirituality was

the connective tissue that wove all of the parts together.

So much of my gendered experiences prior to and during the 2021–2022 school year

were emotionally painful, and weaving spirituality into this study provided a means of healing.

As Pérez and Saavedra (2020) noted, spirituality has a curative power. They characterized this

type of research as the "coalescence of outer work and inner work to heal wounds of self,

culture, patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, and linguicide" (p. 130). Through a

transdisciplinary feminist lens, I explored how this work located realms of potential feminist

disruption within my own educational leadership practice, which allowed me to consider how my

own experiences might inform more feminist orientations in the field on the whole.

This study was a transdisciplinary healing feminist autoethnography that centered

emotional, embodied, spiritual, and intuitive knowledge and engaged these knowledges in an

interplay with theory and research. Feminist autoethnography is a type of self-study that

considers the self within the context of cultural norms. It allows the researcher to investigate

herself within broader social contexts and engage in a process that "blurs identities" in an effort

to create a more embodied, integrated understanding of her personal, professional, emotional,

and spiritual experiences. This study was grounded in feminist ways of knowing and being in an

explicit effort to validate my experiences as a female elementary school principal and the

knowledge I have built in that capacity (Taylor & Coia, 2006).

This study was also in an explicit effort to disrupt academic assumptions of knowledge

hierarchies. As noted by Forgasz and Clemans (2014), any challenge to conventional ways of

knowing—those "considered balanced, reasonable, and restrained," is considered dangerous (p.

63). They continued, "[w]ithin the masculine professional paradigm, emotions are seen to signal

the uncontrollable and to contaminate reason and judgment" (p. 64). This assessment is nearly

identical to how I was portrayed in my 2017 summative evaluation. I was told that my emotions

needed to be regulated, and their presence called into question my ability to be balanced,

reasonable, and restrained in my leadership practice. I connect deeply to the characterization of

emotional knowing as something to be feared because I felt that so much of my sexist

experiences as a female educational leader had been rooted in fear, my own and that of others

around me.

It is important to be clear that I do not consider reason to be contrary to emotionality.

Rather, in this study, I wanted to reconsider the relationship between the two, embodying

Jaggar's (1989) work in "rethink[ing] the relation between knowledge and emotion and to

construct conceptual models that demonstrate the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional

relation between reason and emotion" (pp. 156–157). I also wanted this study to encompass

knowledges that grew from and beyond emotion. It was critical to this work that I continually

oscillated among being, doing, reflecting, and building knowledge, as Purewal and Loh (2021)

prioritized in their work. This oscillation was one of continual movement. I wrote, shared,

reflected, and integrated my reflections into the current literature, embodying the "motion" to

which Ulmer (2020) referred in transdisciplinary feminist research (p. 237).

Ulmer (2020) likened transdisciplinary feminist research to the process of oxidation. This

rusting process occurs at different speeds, as "rust effectuates gradual, uneven changes over time

that can be all too easily dismissed or wiped away," and yet is also "a chemical change,"

connoting an alteration that cannot be reversed (p. 237). This irreversibly altered state is exactly

how I experienced my investigation, my subsequent examinations of it, and this entire study. The

change in me was indeed chemical, creating a new state of being from which I could consider the

past and present and how I have been altered as a woman—professionally, personally, and academically.

I modeled my methodological process upon the work of Edwards (2017). Her critical feminist ethnographic study examined "discrete stories" that she had gathered of her experiences in academia to "reflect upon and interrogate the interpersonal and institutional origins of sexism" (p. 622). Rather than employ a more traditional qualitative analysis of these stories to elicit a "meta-narrative," she used them to "develop and reflect on their meanings," and contextualized them within other works of research and more broadly, within political and social contexts (p. 623). By deviating from the goal of a "meta-narrative," Edwards (2017) seemed to posit if a feminist meta-narrative *should* be a goal at all. Instead, Edwards (2017) centered her work on the analysis of her own experiences, seeking to create contextualized narratives and analysis that could inform feminist thought but would in no way imply that they could be, or should be, universalized. This emphasis upon her own contextualized experiences reflected hooks's (2015) and Purewal and Loh's (2021) rejection of universal feminist truths.

In taking this research stance, Edwards (2017) enacted feminist research that recognized her positionality as a white woman and the problematic nature of ascribing her own experiences to all women, while also contributing to the exploration of sexism in education in a rich manner. Additionally, Edwards's (2017) location within her work informed how I located myself in this study. She explicitly stated that she found it inauthentic to position herself as a "marginalised victim," instead thinking of herself as "a survivor" of a system that "continues to be rife with sexism, but is much more successful at hiding it" (p. 624). She cited Bochner (2012) in asserting the richness that "the struggles of ordinary people coping with difficult contingencies of lived experience" can provide (p. 160). It is this exact stance that I inhabited in my study, one that

examined "discrete stories" of sexism that I experienced in my role as a female elementary school principal. I openly and explicitly recognized my specific positionality and in no way implied a universality of experience, nor did I ascribe my position to that of a victim. I examined my lived gendered professional experiences as I recalled them and analyzed them in an effort to contribute to the growing body of research that considered personal narratives to be a "vital force for collective, transformative politics" (Franklin, 2015, p. 14).

However, I diverged slightly from Edwards (2017) in one respect. Edwards (2017) did not feel that her detailed experiences were traumatic, and in a clinical sense, this is true, as it was also true for my own gendered experiences in education. Yet, my investigation was in and of itself eviscerating, and it brought up many aspects of my childhood dynamics involving feelings of inadequacy, shame, and a lack of safety. Accordingly, I needed to process these experiences with my therapist. The role of my adverse childhood experiences in my work is also why I found Gilligan and Snider (2018) and their connections between patriarchy and trauma dynamics so remarkably resonant. Although I was cognizant that experiences of sexism are compounded exponentially by other aspects of marginalization, resulting in more significantly oppressive dynamics for others, I did not want to minimize my own emotional experiences. This minimization would only have served to bolster the patriarchal expectation of being "balanced, reasonable, and restrained" (Forgasz & Clemans, 2014, p. 63).

My adverse childhood experiences were important to this discussion for the purpose of contextualization. Although my parents were both educated, and loved me, my childhood was in no way easy. My parents had a difficult relationship from the start, and when I was ten, they decided to divorce. The separation immediately grew acrimonious, and as an only child, I was placed into the role of go-between. My mother would give me a message to share with my father,

and I would do so. He would invariably become incensed by the message, and he was rarely able

to quell that in front of me. He would then give me a response to share with my mother, and my

mother, upon receiving the missive through me, would say something disparaging about him.

This dynamic did not abate throughout my childhood and adolescence. To make matters worse,

my mother, who had a childhood rife with alcoholism and emotional neglect, became

emotionally manipulative with me through guilt, shame, and criticism when I did not serve her

emotional needs.

Decades later in therapy and after many incidents of emotional berating and

manipulation, I came to the conclusion that my mother had significant narcissistic tendencies that

caused her to be emotionally coercive toward me. From an early age, any time that I displayed an

emotion that she did not like, she would convince me that my emotional response was

unfounded, unnecessary, and wrong. She would challenge my experience of any and all

situations in which we disagreed to the point at which I believed that my perspective was

inaccurate and unreliable. The clinical term for this is "gaslighting," which is defined as "a form

of psychological manipulation in which a person or a group covertly sows seeds of doubt in a

targeted individual, making them question their own memory, perception, or judgment"

(Awareness Centre, 2022). In my personal therapeutic work, I learned that I internalize

gaslighting, resulting in me questioning my perception of situations, often defaulting to others'

perceptions over mine. This particular internalization invariably impacted how I processed

situations and exacerbated any feelings of shame and guilt that I had. These dynamics

significantly factored into my gendered professional experiences and often contributed to

moments of the tonic immobility to which Edwards (2017) referred.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection for this study involved writing narratives about my professional and personal experiences, much like Edwards's (2017) "discrete stories" (p. 14). It is important to note that I used the term "narrative" as Taylor and Coia (2019) did, referring to written journal entries, comment exchanges on those journal entries, as well as a few recorded audio and video conversations. In some entries, I included text message threads. Building from the narrative that I wrote about my investigation in 2017 and starting in early July of 2021, I wrote about my everyday professional experiences. I collected a total of 62 journal entries from July 4, 2021 to June 30, 2022. Some entries describe critical incidents and encounters that I have had at work, some involve discussions that I have had with friends and colleagues, and some detail realizations or connections that I made that felt important to this study.

These narratives also varied in the way they were recorded. I wrote some by sitting down to reflect upon a given situation or experience, but others have come to me at times when I am unable to write. Through the course of this study, I found that some of my most important insights came to me while driving to and from work, on a run, or while doing housework. So that I did not lose the thought, I used the Otter recording application on my phone to record and transcribe my audio into a text document that I could edit for clarity at a later time. These personal accounts were dated and filed with the other journal entries. They were what Ulmer (2020) considered to be "rusty" in that they are reflective of various points in time and "relational" to one another (p. 244).

Critical Friendships Foment Critical Examination

An integral, rich addition to these accounts is the critical friendship that I developed with a colleague and trusted friend, Alice. Alice is a fellow doctoral student whom I have known and grown to love over the past six years. She is a speech and language specialist in a small school

system in the northeast. Through our doctoral coursework, we came to understand that we have

childhood histories that manifest in similar ways as we interact with the world around us. We

fostered a deeply emotional bond that is rooted in our feminisms and our desire to grow as

women, as educators, and as researchers. As our friendship grew, I began to feel that sharing my

experiences and discussing them critically with her would be integral to my dissertation work.

This sense was explicitly recognized by Monica, who stated plainly, "I think your relationship

with Alice is going to be so important to both your work and hers" and encouraged us to engage

with each other as we moved into the dissertation process. Alice's insight proved to be such a

vital source of strength and understanding for me specifically in processing my journal entries

throughout the 2021–2022 school year and throughout this entire dissertation process.

As I wrote my reflective journal entries, I shared them with Alice in a Google Document.

Over the course of a week, or sometimes multiple weeks, she and I engaged in a discussion via

commenting within the document. We were not explicitly conducting research together in the

traditional sense. Rather, we entrusted each other in our own work and committed to supporting

one another as we grappled with the difficult emotional labor of our respective studies. Although

we did not work on the same research project, our relationship reflected the co/autoethnographic

research of Cann and DeMeulenaere (2012), Taylor and Coia (2006), and Taylor and Klein

(2020). Alice and I have a relationship akin to Cann and DeMeulenaere (2012), as it embodies

"the tempo, uncertainty, and complexity of research relationships that cross boundaries into more

personal spaces such as friendships" (p. 146).

Tillman-Healy (2003) further elucidated "friendship as method" as a means of qualitative

inquiry (p. 729). She noted the importance of friendships as emotional resources as well as

"identity resources" through which "[c]onceptions of self and others are formed, reinforced, and

altered in the context of ongoing relationships" (p. 731). In sharing my reflections with Alice, I

engaged in critical examination of how my experiences informed and altered my sense of self.

Through this process, I was in a constant state of movement among being, doing, reflecting, and

building knowledge. Once I wrote each entry and dialogued with Alice about it, I tried to

integrate the knowledge that I gained from these dialogues into my work and life. Her thoughts

and comments often opened up new areas to explore and new concepts to consider. As this

whole study was generative, so was my processing with Alice.

      It was also important to note another relationship from which I gained a great deal of

insight, solidarity, and comfort. I frequently run with a dear friend, Iris[4], who is head of a

successful company in the film industry. Throughout the 2021–2022 school year, our talks,

sometimes spanning hours of distance running, wove in and out of our respective therapy

experiences, professional experiences, and similar childhood psychosocial dynamics. Although

our fields are quite different, our experiences as leaders tend to be remarkably similar,

particularly how we experience them emotionally. I always learned from our run talks, as she is

remarkably bright and insightful. Yet, the dynamics of her field are quite different than mine, and

correspondingly her analysis of scenarios that I shared with her offered a completely different

perspective than one from within the field of education. She rarely had to have decisions

approved by others, and although the film industry is a heavily regulated one, she did not often

feel hamstrung by seemingly unnecessary parameters imposed upon her. Her perspectives often

disrupted my acceptance of educational bureaucracy and challenged me to consider ways to

frame it.

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[4] A pseudonym.

I referenced my conversations with Iris in several of my journal entries, which provided an additional facet to them as I shared them with Alice. Although it did not originate from common educational experiences, my friendship with Iris is integral to my understanding of gendered situations and how I experience them. Our relationship reflects how the "ebb and flow of everyday life" can become a rich source of knowledge (Tillman-Healy, 2003, p. 735).

Another important relationship in my work is with a district colleague. This colleague is male and experienced different facets of marginalization than I did, which provided our conversations with a richness of perspective. He is remarkably bright and insightful as well, and his understandings of work dynamics were extremely validating to me. We have navigated difficult situations and conversations together, and we have shared our vulnerabilities with each other. His insights throughout the 2021–2022 school year proved to be instrumental in my data analysis, deepening my understandings, as he often elucidated nuances that I overlooked. Our discussions always left me in a space of both feeling seen and wanting to push my research further. Our relationship is reflective of Tillman-Healy's (2003) "friendship as method" as well (p. 729).

Engaging in Ulmer's (2020) "rusty" transdisciplinary feminist research process, I continually moved between past and present as I gathered data, considering previous journal entries as I wrote new ones. I originally felt Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) concept of "saturation" best served this study, as it embraced impermanence and fluidity, but upon consideration, it did not give me enough structure in knowing when to transition out of the data collection phase. I could have collected narratives indefinitely, but isolating this study to the narratives gathered over one school year mirrored the pattern and structure of a school calendar and established a specific endpoint to the collection phase. This finite endpoint allowed me to

transition to the analysis phase more easily so that I could delve more deeply into the narratives I

wrote during the designated school year.

Data Analysis

As I proceeded through the data collection process, I continually revisited previous

journal entries to identify and note common themes as they emerged among them. My critical

friend, Alice, was important in this process, as we engaged in a dialogue from which themes

emerged somewhat organically. At the beginning of July 2022, I started the process of sorting

through the entries, organizing them in chronological order and assigning each one a number. I

placed them in a spreadsheet and took notes on each entry to glean thematic patterns. This

process continued through August of 2022, with a total of three full passes through the data set.

With each pass, I attempted to write fewer notes to hone the data down to essential themes. This

process unveiled several themes and sub-themes, and as I began to consider these themes within

the context of the research literature, I was able to sort these themes with greater lucidity.

My work at this stage reflected a critical bifocality of sorts, vacillating between looking

at small thematic dynamics and considering broader themes that yielded connective insights.

This movement between zooming in and zooming out helped tease out the intricacies of the work

and its location within broader contexts. I also used this zoom in/zoom out movement to organize

my themes and sub-themes (Weis & Fine, 2012).

I intended this analysis process to be generative, reflective, and transdisciplinary,

weaving past and present and considering the texture of the research itself as I moved through it.

Fortunately, I was able to adhere to this intention, moving through this phase openly, dancing

between my journal entries and the literature. The literature allowed me to deepen the analysis of

my entries, and my entries provided me a personal connection to the literature. As I wrote, I

conducted periodic member checks with Alice and other colleagues and friends whom I

referenced in journal entries to ensure that I had characterized situations in a manner that felt true

to them. I took great care to ensure that they were comfortable with how I had written about

them and about conversations I referenced in entries, and I adjusted my writing based upon their

feedback (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In September of 2022, I began writing my findings autoethnographically. Although I had

initially anticipated that I would be writing until the summer of 2023, the writing phase of this

study developed far quicker than I thought it would. Once I began writing, I could not stop. The

work compelled me to move forward with it, delving deeper into my findings and deeper into the

literature. Whereas the spirit of this work remained nonlinear and generative, it was hastened by

my investment in it, its oxidation process accelerated. Yet, this study remained a compelling

force in challenging me to move in the world differently and allowed me to heal, the fabric of it a

protective, worn blanket that enveloped me more as I weaved it. The process enveloped me in a

stronger sense of the work and compelled me to consider how it might contribute to the "rusty

futures" of transdisciplinary feminist research that Ulmer (2020) referenced (p. 238).

Trustworthiness

Coia and Taylor (2013) asserted that individuals who embark upon an autoethnographic

journey do so "to understand and improve our practice," characterizing the work as "about and

for us" (p. 12). This type of study could easily be considered narcissistic, but it is not. Rather, it

is a means for the researcher to elucidate her identity and the ways in which she engages with the

world. Additionally, Coia and Taylor (2013) used the qualitative concept of "trustworthiness" as

a means of evaluating their own work. They cited Richardson's (2000) criteria as a useful tool of

assessing the trustworthiness of their work. Richardson (2000) first required that the work is a

substantive contribution to the broader field of study and can be easily accessed by those who might garner insight from it. Second, the work must also have aesthetic merit. The third criterion is reflexivity, requiring the author to note explicitly that the research is both process and product and ultimately results in new self-knowledge. The fourth criterion is that the work will have an impact upon its readers and will move them to ask new questions, compel them to reconsider their own work, and spur them to action. The final Richardson (2000) criteria for trustworthiness is that it "expresses a reality" and provides an account of a "lived experience" transparently (p. 13).

I used these criteria for trustworthiness in my study, as they reflected the nature and spirit of the work. I made an explicit effort to make this work accessible in the way it was written and organized, and in a manner that would be engaging to the reader. It was not my goal to prove a hypothesis or answer a question definitively so that I could move toward resolution. Rather, the purpose of this study was to elucidate my gendered experiences as I perceived and processed them, ultimately sharing them in hopes that they might compel others to rethink how gender impacts us internally, interpersonally, and systemically. It was also in hope that others may take on similar research projects that give voice to their own experiences of marginalization and contribute to a growing body of autoethnographic research.

A critical facet of this study's trustworthiness rested within my engagement with Alice. My work with Alice was grounded in an emotional and spiritual trust. As a critical friend, she validated my feelings and reactions to situations that I documented, and she challenged me to think deeper and more broadly, applying what I was learning to my own sense of self and to my work, as well as considering how my work could disrupt the systems that we inhabit. Yet, our differing positionality within the public school system was critically important to the

trustworthiness of this study as well. As a speech and language specialist, Alice's hierarchical

status within traditional education structures is that of a teacher, whereas mine is that of an

administrator. If we were working within the same school, I would be her supervisor. Her insight

offered me the perspective of those who, in the systemic sense, work "under" me, and it allowed

me to consider not only my own view of a given situation but also potentially that of one of my

staff members. Her engagement in and of itself disrupted the hierarchical structures I sought to

challenge.

CHAPTER 4: WEAVING NARRATIVES, EMBODIED KNOWLEDGES, AND

RESEARCH FINDINGS

To be a writer and a knitter, one has to be willing to take things apart and put them back

together again. It's hard work to do so, and it takes courage. Patience is required, and the

willingness to start over if need be, to write rewrite or unravel. (Hoffman & Hoffman,

2018, pp. 11–12)

I am not a good knitter. I can only follow the simplest of patterns, and I often have to

unravel and restart, sometimes repeatedly, before a scarf or hat begin to take shape. Yet, knitting

calms me, allowing my brain to focus upon counting of stitches and nothing more. I knitted at

least four pussy hats for the 2017 women's march on Washington, and the 2016 election

certainly necessitated any and all sources of calm. Writing has a similar effect upon me. I make

sense of my what I am thinking through writing, and it can be such an immersive experience that

I often need transition time between a writing session and the simplest of interpersonal

interactions. I cannot be trusted to have a coherent conversation or even order take-out for at

least an hour after I write, and although I may seem out of it, I feel quite the opposite.

It seems fitting that it was one of my favorite authors, Alice Hoffman, who illuminated

this connection between writing and knitting for me. In this chapter, I write, knit, and weave.

Similar to Hoffman and Hoffman's (2018) sentiment, the process of constructing this chapter

required me to unravel my words, thoughts, and emotions, knitting them into a fabric of

narratives, embodied knowledges, and research findings. It might not feel or sound like a

traditional academic chapter four, but it is a textured, autoethnographic version of one.

I start the chapter by explaining my research and weaving process as a means of

contextualizing the ways in which I represent my findings. As I described in the methodology,

the process of discovering my dissertation study was one that wove the emotional, mental,

academic, and spiritual aspects of my identity. It did not follow a traditional academic

dissertation path. Rather, it reflected Taylor's (2020) concept of "feminist indiscipline," which

challenged feminist researchers to decenter dominant ways of knowing and the structures and

systems that uphold them (p. 11). I allowed myself to move through moments of not knowing

where I was going with my study, moving away from any certainty that this study would involve

"finding out 'exactly' what's going on" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 477).

A particularly resonant aspect of Taylor's (2020) work was her use of the term "walking"

to refer to how she approaches research in a transdisciplinary manner and called for this research

to be engaged through "serendipitous walking" to find "different ways of knowing—and

mattering—that are more multiple, complex, and discontinuous than the master narratives of

White, Western, colonialist patriarchy have allowed" (p. 5). I found myself frequently feeling as

if I were on a walk in the woods, not exactly knowing where I was going but trusting that the

path on which I walked would lead me to where I needed to be in the next moment. The

transdisciplinary feminist research work of Taylor, et al. (2020) was instrumental in validating

how I experienced the journey from my summative evaluation experience in 2017 to the creation

and implementation of this study.

In the proposal phase of this autoethnographic research study, I was excited and proud to

engage in work that centered myself, disrupting academic and professional norms that never

really felt "right" to me. Moreover, as someone for whom the terms "selfish" and "self-centered"

are very loaded—during my childhood, "selfish" and "self-centered" were terms my mother used

coercively when I was not meeting her emotional needs—it was internally disruptive to choose a

research methodology that explicitly centered my experiences, emotions, and reactions. It was

liberating to take an entire school year and journal about it, and throughout the 2021–2022

school year, I felt more emotionally connected to my academic and professional work than I ever

had. I felt integrated and more myself in all aspects of my life. I wrote prolifically, at times

forgoing other responsibilities just to sit with and write about what I was experiencing. The

process was remarkably therapeutic, despite it frequently being emotionally eviscerating. The

connectedness that I felt in journaling was more than worth enduring the moments that were

emotionally difficult.

I was not surprised by how the autoethnographic "data collection" journaling process

affected me emotionally, especially given the professional experiences that fomented the study

itself. Yet, I had no idea how intricate, complex, and emotionally layered the analysis process

would be. Extrapolating themes, contextualizing them within current research, and attempting to

make sense of it all, all while holding the emotional weight of the year's experiences, was far

more difficult than I anticipated. I began to understand deeply what Taylor and Coia (2006)

meant by autoethnography being "dangerous," as it "blurs genres; it blurs the disciplines" (p.

278). The entire analytical experience made me feel "blurry," constantly moving among my

story, my emotional experiences, and research literature. Moreover, this "blurry" movement

itself was emotional, further complicating the experience metacognitively. I developed a much

more nuanced, embodied sense of Taylor and Coia's (2019) description of autoethnography as an

"unknowing" process (p. 12).

In December of 2022, during a well-needed holiday break, I read a novel entitled *Other

Birds* by Sarah Addison Allen (2022). The epigraph Allen (2022) included was a quotation from

a fictitious author, Roscoe Avanger, who was a character in the book. The epigraph read:

Stories aren't fiction. Stories are fabric. They're the white sheets we drape over our

ghosts so that we can see them. – Roscoe Avanger, *Sweet Mallow* (Allen, 2022,

Epigraph)

I had such a visceral response to this epigraph that I had to put the book down even

before I started it. I found it remarkable, both in its truth about what stories allow us to

experience and in her characterization of stories as fabric. Stories can uncover things we did not

know were there. They allow us to see things that might be painful, difficult, or complex in a

way that might be more accessible to us. Fabrics differ in texture and weight; some are thin and

reveal more of the shape beneath, and some only give us a hint of something beneath, allowing

us to know that something is there but is, for whatever reason, hidden. I immediately connected

this epigraph to my "woven" research orientation and I marveled at its eloquence in describing

how I experienced rereading my entries, particularly those written in May and June of 2022.

There are many "ghosts" from this past year, and this study has helped me to see their

importance and feel their presence.

On June 5th, 2022, I lost someone whose death was so profound that to this day, it takes

my breath away even to think about her. I see her ghost throughout this entire dissertation; she is

woven into it inextricably, and she gives it a unique and beautiful texture, one that I can feel

physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This autoethnographic study would be completely

different without her, and I am so grateful for Allen's (2022) novel—what she explored in it and

the serendipitous time it came to me, as it bolstered my sense of what Anzaldúa (1987) asserted:

everything is connected.

This dissertation chapter weaves my journal narratives written between July 1, 2021 and

June 30, 2022 with relevant, connected research and literature. The narratives include situations,

interactions, and incidents that occurred throughout this time period, as well as my emotional,

embodied responses to them. In this chapter, I contextualized these experiences within research literature, attempting to develop a deeper understanding of my experiences and how they might reflect and contribute to feminist educational leadership studies. I also hoped that this exploration would provide another feminist account of women's experiences in education, akin to Edwards (2017) and Franklin (2015), as their work was so validating to me as a woman.

Reed-Danahay (1997) noted "autoethnography foregrounds the multiple nature of selfhood and opens up new ways of writing about social life" and "stress[es] multiple, shifting identities" (p. 3). As themes began to emerge in my journal narratives and as I began to write about them, I felt a budding clarity of who I was—an identity that embodied and integrated the emotional, academic, professional, and spiritual facets of who I am. I also continued to consider my spirituality and how it connected to my research experiences, honoring the work of Kimmerer (2013), Anzaldúa (1987), and Pérez and Saavedra (2020) that centered the spiritual in research.

To make this spiritual-research alignment explicit in this study, I identified specific tarot cards that I felt aligned with each research theme and subtheme. These tarot explorations paralleled my experience in taking a chronological account of my 2021–2022 school year and reorganizing it thematically. Similar to this process, the major arcana cards of the tarot referenced in this study, have a specific progression but also do not follow a given progression when they emerge in tarot readings. Rather, they emerge as symbolic representations of what is occurring in a given situation or within the broader context of someone's life (TarotX, 2022, para. 1).

TarotX (2022) provided a broad overview of tarot cards and the variety of decks in existence. Currently, there are over 1000 tarot decks that represent a wide artistic range of

symbolic representation but are aligned in the general meaning of each card (TarotX, 2022, para. 15). All tarot decks are comprised of seventy-eight cards and are divided into two main types: major arcana cards representing the "greater secrets" (TarotX, 2022, para. 7) and minor arcana cards representing the "lesser secrets" (TarotX, 2022, para. 8). Minor arcana cards are similar to playing card decks. There are four suits with four "court" cards and ten numbered cards for each. The major arcana, however, is much different. According to Arrien (1997), the tarot's major arcana is a progression of twenty-two cards that represent "universal principles or laws" that are experienced "in different aspects of our life at different times" (p. 23). The major arcana cards provided me with a symbolic means of connection between my research and how I experienced each facet of my research process spiritually. Each card was a beautiful touchstone, serving as a reminder of the importance of both the challenges and celebrations of this study. The tarot cards individually symbolize important points and facets of this study, and they collectively represent how I moved through the entire journey.

This chapter is organized in two parts, and for each facet, theme, and sub-theme, I have identified a corresponding major arcana tarot card, as noted in Table 1. The first part of the chapter contextualizes how the study began through a series of four "beginnings" and one "re-beginning." These five beginnings/re-beginning and corresponding major arcana cards are as follows:

Table 1

Major Arcana Tarot Cards

Major Arcana Tarot Card(s)	Beginning/Re-Beginning
The Tower	A Critical Professional Moment

The Empress and The Priestess	A Feminist Critical Mass
Art	Connecting the Personal and Professional: Bringing Therapy into the Autoethnography
The Hanged Man	A Critical Stagnation
The Fool	The Work Began Again (Re-Beginning)

The second part of this chapter explores themes and sub-themes that emerged in my journal entries, as listed in Table 2. They are organized and connected to corresponding major arcana cards as well. Themes with their respective major arcana cards are in bold, and sub-themes and corresponding major arcana cards are listed below them.

Table 2

Themes, Sub-Themes, and Major Arcana Cards Themes, Sub-Themes, and Major Arcana Cards

Localization of Patriarchal Educational Norms: The Emperor	
Turning Othering into Agency	Fortune
Male Fragility with Women Leaders	The Emperor (Revisited)
Women Colluding with Patriarchy and Proximity to Power	The Devil
Disrupting My Internalized Patriarchy	The Moon
A Complicated Balance of Acting Authentically and Protecting Myself Professionally	The Aeon
Small Feminist Disruptions: The Chariot	

An Emergent Feminist Leadership Practice	Lust/Strength
Openly Sharing My Vulnerability	The Lovers
Disrupting Educational Hierarchies	Justice/Adjustment
Disrupting Dominant Educational Narratives	The Hierophant
Enacting Feminist Care with Those Who Have Hurt Us	The Magician
Grace: The Star	

It is important to note that my choice to place the tarot card first in the headings of the first section and second in the headings in the second section was deliberate. The first section expounds on the beginnings of this study, the progression of which I considered fortuitous and spiritually guided. As previously noted, weeks before my 2017 investigation, The Tower card featured prominently in a reading I had, and the card served as a symbolic touchstone while I endured that experience. Additionally, had one of the "beginnings" facets not occurred, I do not believe that this study would have developed as it did. Therefore, I choose to place the cards first to honor the mystical aspect I experienced in the origins of this work.

In the second section, I deliberately put the cards *after* the theme and sub-theme headings, as they served as a means of reflection after the themes and sub-themes emerged in my journal entries. The process of connecting the themes and sub-themes to major arcana cards allowed me to reconnect my academic work to my spiritual experiences. The cards supported how I might consider these themes and sub-themes in a broader context and lead me to a deeper understanding of the potential implications of this study, adding a spiritual aspect to "getting lost in the discourse" of the work (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 477).

A Study's Beginnings (and Re-Beginning) in Five Parts

The progression of "beginnings" ends with a "rebeginning," mirroring the progression of the tarot's major arcana. The Tower represents the critical professional moment that set this study into motion nearly seven years ago. The Empress and Priestess represent a convergence of feminist individuals and explorations that urged me to delve deeper into this work, and Art represents the alchemic process of merging my personal and professional experiences and incorporating therapeutic concepts into this autoethnography. The Hanged Man represents a stagnation that was necessary for me to recognize that I could no longer continue as I had before, and the Fool represents the new beginning that emerged from this stagnation. Through the Fool, I began again.

The Tower: A Critical Professional Moment

This study had several beginnings. As I previously noted, the first beginning was in 2017, when months before my tenure date as an elementary school principal, I was brought up on a healthy workplace environment investigation. I had been in this position since August of 2013, and the investigation seemingly came out of nowhere. I had just had a meeting with our Liaison Committee, a group of teachers charged with bringing teacher concerns to my attention, and they shared nothing mere days before I was called into central office to be questioned for the investigation. I was terrified, blindsided, and hurt, as I feared for my job and always felt that I was approachable and amenable to constructive criticism.

The following statement was included in the "Areas in Need of Improvement" in my summative principal evaluation for the 2016–2017 school year: "I encourage you to focus on more effectively managing your display of mood/emotion." The Director of Elementary Education at the time wrote it after I had endured a lengthy healthy workplace environment

investigation prior to receiving tenure. A healthy workplace environment investigation can be

launched by any staff member in a school district who feels that s/he has been treated in a

disrespectful or malicious manner by a colleague or a superior. Once the district receives a

written account of the allegations, they are required to conduct an investigation. If the

investigation determines that conduct concerns are founded, the district is to take remedial steps

to ensure that the conduct does not occur or continue to occur (New Jersey Employment Law

Firm, 2023).

My investigation resulted in the above notation in my summative evaluation, which was

the first negative notation in my four years of employment in the district. One of the most

difficult parts of this investigation experience was that I never really knew where it started or

with whom it started. Through the three interrogations that the central office designees did with

me (I call them interrogations, as that is how it felt—that I was being interrogated rather than

interviewed), I was able to infer that some of the allegations were that I had my office door

closed and I did not hide frustration from my staff at times. It was difficult to discern what

specific behaviors of mine prompted this, which left me without a clear path to address any

concerns. I was also accused of forcing a custodian to jump into a dumpster in an attempt to

retrieve a pair of student glasses. This allegation was patently false as I was the person who

attempted to jump into the dumpster, and the custodian in question insisted that he go in instead.

Ultimately, the district granted my tenure, but they did give me a 2/4 in the "Human

Resources Management" section of my 2017 summative evaluation in addition to the "mood

regulation" comment. However, I was not put on any remedial plan, nor was I given any support

to address the concerns that were presented. It would seem that if the district had so many

concerns about my performance, they would have provided me some interventional supports, but

they did not. I was, and to this day, remain unsure as to why they did nothing more. Through the

following years, I had glimmers of intimation that the individuals who launched the investigation

wanted to remove me from my job so that one of them could become the principal of our school,

but still to this day, I can only speculate.

Despite the dearth of support my district afforded me, I wrote a response that included a

plan in an effort to show that I was reflective, capable of accepting feedback, and willing to

address any concerns presented to me. In it, I noted specific efforts to be more communicative

and "visible" in the building. I specifically addressed the mood regulation comment with the

following:

- More effectively managing your display of mood/emotion.

  - Take a moment before responding to potentially challenging situations unless

    an immediate response is necessary.

  - Continually reflect upon the needs of teachers as individuals—what a newer

    teacher needs versus what a more veteran teacher needs and check in with

    teachers to establish a continual dialogue with teachers to respond to needs

    and concerns as they emerge. (Summative Evaluation Response, May 2017)

I finished my response with the following: I thank you for the opportunity to discuss these efforts

and any feedback that you may have in these realms. I look forward to checking in informally as

needed and formally at designated times/dates. (Summative Evaluation Response, May 2017)

Although I was skeptical as to why the investigation was launched, I always want to be

open to feedback and reflect upon it. Yet, the amorphous feedback that I received did nothing but

make me feel more unmoored because I struggled to understand exactly what I had done. In re-

reading the above response, so much anger and sadness resurfaced for me. I was angry at my

superiors and the system, and I was sad that I had to acquiesce so much of myself to continue

working within the system.

On a systemic level, my supervisors never provided specific situations in which my

behavior was interpreted in an untoward way, and this lack of clarity disallowed me from fully

analyzing what I was feeling in the given moment and how those emotions manifested in a way

that was not well received. Additionally, the "more effectively managing your display of

mood/emotion" feedback felt very gendered. I had seen male colleagues through the years

express frustration openly, only for such behavior to be dismissed as "that's just him." On April

29, 2017, I shared my investigation experience with some of my closest women friends in a

Facebook group. I summed up the post with, "This would have never, ever happened to me if I

were a man" (Jadick, 2017).

Sojo et al. (2016) noted how detrimental negative gendered experiences are upon

individuals. They conducted a meta-analysis of women's occupational well-being, specifically

focusing upon how the severity and frequency of gendered harmful workplace experiences

impacted women's health. Their study delineated these experiences into two main groups: "low-

frequency/high-intensity" experiences, which are those of an overt sexual nature and "high-

frequency/low-intensity" experiences including sexist discrimination and sexist organizational

climate (p. 15). Their findings indicated that high-frequency/low-intensity experiences were as

harmful to women's workplace well-being as low-frequency/high-intensity experiences.

The "high-frequency/low-intensity" experiences that Sojo et al. (2016) reflected

Mayock's (2016) concept of "gender shrapnel" (p. 630). As Mayock (2016) noted, these

gendered experiences become embedded, festering within us. This is exactly how I experienced

my investigation and its aftermath: festering pieces of shrapnel that were difficult to extricate.

Although I ultimately earned tenure and continued on in my position, the anxiety that the investigation caused me remained far beyond the 2016–2017 school year and pervaded almost every interaction that I had in the years that followed.

Sadness also pervaded this experience. Each time I have reread my "thank you for the opportunity to discuss these efforts and any feedback that you may have in these realms" inclusion in my summative response, I have had a visceral reaction, recalling how confused, betrayed, and scared I was when I wrote it. This sadness has both a surface layer and a layer that is far deeper, more insidious, and triggering. The top layer involves the more obvious, understandable response anyone would have to such an investigation: sadness for myself back then, having to sit through weeks of not knowing whether or not I would have a job in the fall. There was also a deeper layer of sadness that had originated in my childhood, which became a compelling force in this dissertation.

As I detailed in Chapter Three, my childhood experiences of emotional "gaslighting" and the emotional responses that I developed as a result of them invariably impacted how I responded to my gendered professional experiences. As a child, I developed an understanding that I could not display anger or frustration, lest my mother criticize me. I never felt entitled to either emotion. Of course, I continued to have these emotions, as I am a human being, but I had the additional layer of guilt and shame on top of them. Throughout extensive therapeutic discussions for the past two decades, I processed why these childhood experiences happened and worked toward developing healthier emotional responses to situations. Nevertheless, these emotional complexities remained (Awareness Centre, 2022).

My investigation brought me back to my mother accusing me of "being dramatic" and "unreasonable" whenever I expressed anything other than love and appreciation for her. In

instances in which I did not meet her emotional needs, she would shame me into thinking that

there was something wrong with me. My evaluation response was of that child who was not

allowed to show anger and frustration. Being told, as a 42-year-old woman, that I still was "too

emotional" was eviscerating. That I was also given no context, nor any support and care, was

also extremely painful, if not, cruel. I wanted to hug that 2017 me and tell her that it will never

truly make sense, you *are* valued, and you have way more agency than you feel right now. "It

will be okay, Necole. It will be better than okay." This is a sentiment that I needed to hear as a

woman in 2017 and as a child.

I was forever changed by the entire investigation experience. It gutted me emotionally

and psychically, and it made me question my ability to be an elementary principal, a role that I

had cherished since I started in it. I doubted my self-worth, my self-perception, and my

awareness of what was going on around me. It called into question everything I had worked so

hard to achieve as an educator and as a human. Twenty years of therapy—was I completely

deluded all along? I had no idea that this investigation would be so instrumental in my growth as

a woman, an educator, and a leader. As with most growth experiences, I was not able to see its

importance in my life because of the traumatic way in which I experienced it. The Tower tarot

card's symbolic depiction of wisdom through tremendous upheaval represented this experience

perfectly (TarotX, 2022).

The Empress and the Priestess: A Feminist Critical Mass

The second beginning occurred in the spring of 2020, a time in which the world was in

crisis with the COVID-19 epidemic. I had enrolled in Dr. Monica Taylor's "Critical Feminisms"

class, an experience that provided me with my first sense of feminist community. This sense of

feminist community is symbolized in The Empress tarot card. The Empress represents feminine

wisdom and love. According to TarotX (2022), the Empress "is an inexhaustible spring that encourages our creative potential and ability to accept impulses, allowing a new thing to inside development" and encourages us to disrupt old paradigms (para. 14).

Although this class was held online due to COVID-19, the connections and communal, care-centered learning was unlike anything I had ever experienced. It provided me the safety and support to do this work and subsequently develop it in a much deeper, richer manner. Through my readings and discussions in Dr. Taylor's "Critical Feminisms" class, I developed a sense that my investigation story, and more broadly my experiences as a female educational leader, needed to be heard. With crisis often comes a sense of reckoning, and I felt this profoundly. I needed to afford myself the space and time to reflect upon the feminist rage that the mere thought of my investigation ignited. I chose to take a feminist autoethnographic approach to my final research study for the class. I centered emotional knowledge in it, which was a deliberate disruption not just to the implication that I lacked an ability to regulate my emotion, but also that I *should* regulate emotion. This disruption extended to related sexist research norms such as logic being valued over emotion, compelling me to challenge what "counts" as knowledge.

In rereading my Critical Feminisms study now, I am struck by my vulnerability and honesty in it. Not only did I write explicitly about my investigation for the first time; I also shared the pain it evoked. Citing the final lines of my evaluation response shared above and in which I thanked my director "for the opportunity to discuss" my efforts to address the concerns and how I was "look[ing] forward" to formal and informal check-ins, I shared the painfully unfair position I felt I was in: "As a single woman with no other income, a mortgage, and bills to pay, I had no choice but to acquiesce to a dynamic that sickened me to the core. I had to express

my willingness to conform to their sexist expectations and indicate that I was open to further

critique in this respect" (Jadick, 2020).

My doctoral colleagues' response to this work was immediate, visceral, and profoundly

validating. One colleague wrote in the Project Feedback Template that I was "really brave and

strong" in the study, and others echoed similar sentiments in theirs. Alice, who ultimately

became a critical colleague and friend for this dissertation, wrote "I appreciate that you

demonstrated vulnerability in pursuing and sharing this project. You practiced 'The personal is

political'" (Project Feedback Forms, TETD 816, 2020).

Being in solidarity with the women in my class, their responses and support watered the

seed that my investigation had planted, and through this collective, feminist support, the seed

sprouted. I could no longer ignore how these enormously emotional, infuriating gendered

experiences affected me emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. And yet despite the

seeming depth of my Critical Feminisms study, Monica kindly, if directly, told me that this study

did not go far enough. She was absolutely right: I was nowhere near done with this work.

Moreover, Alice and I strengthened our connection through my sharing this work, and in

retrospect, her feedback on my 2020 project fomented our work together as we moved into the

dissertation phase of our doctorates.

This class provided me with a strong sense of feminist community, one that was

intersectional and required me to examine my whiteness and positionality. The strength of this

community was so significant that it ultimately led a group of us to write a chapter for a book on

self-study. In our chapter, we described the community that we had forged, decentering our

whiteness and intentionally and explicitly making "space for our Black, Indigenous, People of

Color (BIPOC) sisters, our queer brothers and sisters, and other marginalized individuals in our

class, using the privileges we each possessed to position ourselves as co-conspirators" (Taylor et al., 2022, p. 21). This community allowed me to simultaneously feel the discomfort in reckoning with my white privilege and the support of others as I did so. As we wrote, "we created a space where we could examine our positionality in the face of racial injustice with honesty and vulnerability" (p. 18).

My Critical Feminisms class experience provided a foundation upon which I could grow my feminist understandings while maintaining a vigilance toward the disruption of my whiteness. It was a place of profound growth and nuanced understanding of who I was, what I valued, and what I needed to disrupt within me. I knew that my co-conspirators would hold me accountable for my whiteness, but I also trusted them to do so in a manner that was care-centered Our connection was deep, "forging the bond that led us to write this chapter" (Taylor et al., 2022, p. 21).

The Priestess: Rejecting the Patriarchal Epistemology for an Emotion-Centered Feminist Epistemology

The Priestess tarot card reflected my welcoming of the "unknowing" in this study. Whereas The Empress represents feminine knowledge and encourages us to disrupt antiquated paradigms, The Priestess symbolizes inner, subconscious knowledges. She engages the unconscious to connect "reality and the inner world of emotions," and urges us toward our roles as "helpers, healers, or prophetic women" (TarotX, 2022, para. 19). In the spirit of The Priestess, my Critical Feminisms study also uncovered assumptions that I had made and continued to make about knowledge and the limitations of the traditional ways the patriarchy conceptualizes knowledge. I engaged with the work of Forgasz and Clemans (2014), which centralized emotion as a valid and rich form of knowledge, disrupting the "masculine professional paradigm" that

views emotions as contaminants to reason and logic (p. 64). Citing Jaggar (1989), they explicitly

challenged assumptions of objectivity in research by explicitly embracing subjectivity "to see the

emotions that inevitably shape our supposedly objective forms and ways of contemporary

knowing" (Forgasz & Clemans, 2014, p. 64). This centering of "emotional and embodied

knowledges" was deeply resonant with me, as so much of what I knew and learned from my

investigation was steeped deeply within my emotional understanding of it.

The work of Taylor and Klein (2020) also helped me in becoming more connected to my

anger and finding space for that anger in my academic work. They found spaces in academic

writing for "sexism, misogyny, and rage" (p. 53) as a way of "speak[ing] back to the patriarchy

and legitimiz[ing] emotions as a way of knowing" (p. 63). In my Critical Feminisms study, I

noted the importance of their disruption of "conventional hierarchies of knowledge that favor

'balanced, reasonable, and constrained' over 'emotional and embodied knowledges' that are

considered 'irrational, indulgent, and potentially dangerous'" (Forgasz & Clemans, 2014, p. 63).

My Critical Feminisms class was essential to fostering a sense of self-worth and legitimacy in

my own experiences and what I knew within them (Emotion as Epistemology and Professional

Trauma, May 2020).

The convergence of the emotional impact of processing my investigation for our Critical

Feminisms class, my growing legitimization of emotional knowledge, and the connections I

made with women during the spring of 2020 clarified that I needed to examine further how I

have internalized patriarchy and how this internalization is important, valuable knowledge itself.

I also needed to understand how other women in educational leadership positions experience

their jobs. I craved a broader sense of solidarity, and I felt strongly that examining the relevant

literature and research on women in educational leadership would be essential to fostering this.

Yet, engaging with the literature and research was the easy part. It held a more logical, systematic, and reliable means to an end. I would read, reflect on the reading, and make connections to my work and my life on the whole. That process was familiar and comfortable to me. The hard part was the reflective, embodied work that I needed to do to disrupt my own internalizations of patriarchy, both how I have reacted to the patriarchy and how I have perpetuated it. It was evident in reflecting upon my summative evaluation response that I had complied with the terms of the situation without question. There was no requirement for me to write a response as thorough as I did, and I certainly did not need to thank them for their anticipated feedback. That response was my own doing, and I needed to deconstruct why I felt compelled to write it. This reflection also made me consider where else I have enacted such patriarchal compliance toward myself, and perhaps worse, toward others. To do so, I had to delve into my daily experiences as a woman in educational leadership, explore the emotions that these experiences evoked and how I acted in them. I also had to examine how I negotiated emotion within a patriarchal system. Although engaging in this work in this manner was terrifying in that I did not know where it would take me emotionally and mentally, I could no longer imagine studying anything else.

My clinical therapeutic work was a vital touchstone for this study, and poststructural feminist thought aligns with the nonlinear nature of the therapeutic process. As St. Pierre (2000) noted, poststructural feminism does not seek definitive truths. Rather, it encourages us to lose ourselves "in the play of discourse," engaging, examining, and re-engaging, often with the same concepts (p. 477). My therapeutic work routinely involved returning to previously explored dynamics as they emerged in my daily interactions and how I experienced them. As I delved more deeply into the connections between how I responded emotionally and behaviorally to

situations, I frequently found the same themes emerging, and as they did, I would develop a

more nuanced understanding of why I felt things the way that I did and how they influenced how

I acted in response to them.

Jaggar's (1989) work regarding emotions as epistemology reflected the connection

between my therapeutic emotional learning and my professional and academic work. She

disrupted the positivist assertion that emotions are "alien invaders" in the field of research in

favor of an emotionally integrated stance. She explained: "[R]ather than repressing emotion in

epistemology it is necessary to rethink the relation between knowledge and emotion and

construct conceptual models that demonstrate the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional

relation between reason and emotion" (Jaggar, 1989, pp. 156–157).

Jaggar's (1989) research also validated my inclusion of emotional knowledge within this

study. Yet, her highlighting who is allowed to display emotion, who is not, and what that means

within power structures was equally important to this discussion. Whereas a lack of emotional

display is associated with "reason," a trait lauded in western culture and assigned to those in

"dominant political, and social groups," namely white men, the display of emotion has been

connected with "subordinated groups" and used as a tool to perpetuate their subordination (p.

157). She (1989) provided a theoretical grounding of emotion as epistemology and of how

emotion is used to reinforce dominant power structures.

Therapy had long required me to reflect upon my responses to situations and make

connections to childhood dynamics and coping mechanisms developed in response to those

dynamics. It was a perpetual dance among being, thinking, feeling, doing, and reflecting. The

connections between my therapeutic work and my professional and academic life were quite

clear, and I did not doubt the depth that these connections would yield in my study. In fact, if

anything, I feared where the depths of these connections might take me emotionally. So much of this study involved me sharing my deepest emotions and vulnerabilities, and in order to be authentic in my journal entries, I had to be willing to write about things that were shameful and moments of rage, sadness, and vulnerability. As this study began to take shape during the spring of 2021, I frequently questioned if I had the strength to do it in a fully embodied way. What would this work do to me? Would I be able to handle what it evoked? My therapist, husband, and dearest friends assured me that I was stronger than I thought I was. They had faith that I could stare down my experiences as a female educational leader—that I could sit in the extreme discomfort of my shame, anger, and doubt and move through it.

As Glennon Doyle (2020) noted, the best thing to do with shame is to bring it out into the open and expose it. The support and solidarity I experienced by bringing my investigation experience to light in my Critical Feminisms class, and into the larger sphere of my life—with my friends, family, and colleagues—compelled me to build upon it and create this study. I *had* to do this work as an academic and as a principal and as a woman, my strength growing in this resolve. I was not sure how I would do it, but I would do it. I would illuminate how I experience my gender as a woman in an educational leadership role. Rather than suffocating my experiences out of shame or fear, I would give them oxygen and space to be seen and heard. I would shed light on my struggle in shouldering the impact of patriarchy, both externally and internally, while trying desperately to disrupt it. My instincts, therapy, and growing sense of self-love all told me it was my only path to healing.

It is important to note that this study coincided with the final months of my regular therapy sessions. In retrospect, I feel that this study helped me to channel all that I had learned in therapy into one focused, multifaceted exploration. Its feminist autoethnographic approach

required me to dance among "searching, questioning, examining, and investigating," within an emotionally centered space (Taylor & Coia, 2019, p. 12). Its explorations were iterative and cyclical, and I frequently found myself returning to previous concepts, viewing them through different lenses and developing more nuanced understanding of them. It required me to employ all that I have learned in therapy about myself to make sense of what I experienced. This study provided me the opportunity for me to bring all of my learning together, allowing an integrated dance to emerge. This dance engaged all of my muscles at once: academic, political, professional, spiritual, therapeutic, emotional, and embodied muscles that moved through this study together.

Art: Connecting the Personal and the Professional—Bringing Therapy into the Autoethnography

The third beginning of this study was in July of 2021, when I began to delve into the literature surrounding women in educational leadership, patriarchy, and trauma and discovered a life-changing text written by Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider entitled *Why Does Patriarchy Persist?* (2018). There are many things, large and small, to which I attribute my arriving at this dissertation's focus—my investigation, my Critical Feminisms class, my therapeutic work—but I also embrace kismet and a connection to a spiritual force beyond my consciousness as an instrumental facet of my work. My encounter with this book at the perfect place and time is just that.

The Art tarot card is frequently referred to as "Alchemy," and as TarotX (2022) noted, "the purpose of alchemy is to bring substances in an incomplete condition into a complete state through refining." This refining process requires that all of the substances are reduced to their components so that they "can re-aggregate on a higher level" (TarotX, 2022, para. 22). In the

realm of knowledge, the process of alchemy requires us to reduce our understandings to their

essential qualities to reconfigure them in a more nuanced, deeper way. Reading Gilligan and

Snider (2018), connecting with it, and then processing these connections with Alice felt like the

alchemy process to me. It broke down my understanding of the impact of my childhood

experiences and my anxious attachment behaviors and reconnected them with how I also process

my emotional and behavioral reactions to patriarchy. It "re-aggregated" my past and present

experiences into a deeply integrated manner, creating an emotional alchemy not previously

understood.

I cannot recall how exactly I came across Gilligan and Snider's book (2018), but I had

admired Gilligan's work since I watched a video of her speaking at a conference a few years

prior. She pushed the boundaries of Noddings' (1984) ethic of care and brought a more honed

feminist lens to it, one grounded in her explorations of moral theory and psychology. In her

lecture, Gilligan (2013) connected the "separation of thought from emotion" to "manifestations

of injury or trauma." She also criticized academia for valuing this separation in many scholarly

disciplines (0:24). Gilligan (2013) not only touted the value of emotion as a means of knowing;

she also asserted that its disconnect from thought is harmful to humans, as it creates dissociative

behaviors. I found these insights to be so profound and resonant, which compelled me to explore

Gilligan's (2013) work further.

Gilligan and Snider (2018) explored how patriarchy manifests in our society, cultures,

and systems, and connects its operationalization to Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) and

humans' reaction to trauma and loss. It is important to contextualize Gilligan and Snider (2018)

with a brief exploration of Bowlby's work. Bowlby (1969) asserted that humans need to feel

bonded with their caregivers in order to feel safe and secure. He delineated three phases of

response to a bond loss: protest, despair, and detachment. If a child does not feel a care-giving

emotional bond, s/he will begin to protest, usually by crying or clinging to the caregiver. If their

protestations do not result in a sense of emotional bond, the child moves into a state of despair.

Over time, in an attempt to shield themselves from further emotional pain that this lack of bond

creates, they detach or dissociate. Bowlby (1969) noted that this final detachment phase

manifests in two main ways: anxious attachment and avoidant attachment. Anxious attachment is

characterized by the desire for high levels of intimacy and approval from others, and individuals

with this attachment style tend to attend to the needs of others, subsuming their own. Avoidant

attachment manifests in the desire for extreme independence and invulnerability to feelings.

Individuals with this attachment style tend to eschew emotion in favor of self-reliance (Carvallo

& Gabriel, 2006; Johnson, 2019; Sperling & Berman, 1994).

Throughout my years in therapy, I explored how my anxious attachment tendencies

manifested in my interpersonal perceptions and interactions. My parents divorced acrimoniously

when I was ten, and they could rarely interact without arguing. Once they lived separately and

shared custody of me, I became their messenger, and this role cemented my anxious attachment

behavioral patterns. One parent would give me a message to tell the other parent, and that

message would invariably infuriate that parent, who would react emotionally to it. I would then

have to convey their response to the other parent. Being this messenger felt unsafe and scary, and

in an attempt to avert the pain this caused, I developed the tendency to try to share messages in a

manner that I thought would elicit the least reactive response. To do so, I had to subsume my

emotional needs, and as I remember it, I was in a nearly constant state of emotional vigilance,

always looking for ways to keep my parents from fighting through me. I also strove to be a good

student to avert any further parental emotional reactivity. I thought that if I just behaved, figured

out how to convey messages between my mother and my father that would avert negative

emotional reactions, and subverted my own emotional reactions to things as much as possible, I

would be loved. All of these behaviors were characteristic of anxious attachment behavior

(Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006; Johnson, 2019; Sperling & Berman, 1994).

As I began to read Gilligan and Snider (2018), I felt an immediate connection to their

work. My emotional reaction to patriarchal dynamics had always been intense, and yet, I often

found myself struggling between acquiescing to it and speaking out against it. Given that I had

explored my anxious attachment tendencies in therapy, their connections between Bowlby

(1969) and emotional response to patriarchy was revelatory for me. It gave me a deeper,

embodied understanding of my response to patriarchy and why, due to my childhood dynamics, I

had such a visceral, complicated response. My reactions to sexist situations were deeply

connected to my anxious attachment responses that stem from my adverse childhood

experiences. This book provided a link between my therapeutic work and my academic and

professional work.

Both the anxious and avoidant attachment styles are an act of protection against a

profound sense of loss. Gilligan and Snider (2018) connected these attachment styles to the

enculturated ways that men and women respond to patriarchy, "the patriarchal ideals of manhood

and womanhood" (p. 77). The ideal man is fiercely self-reliant and dismissive of the need for

emotional connection, which is characterized as "compulsive self-reliance" (p. 53). Gilligan and

Snider (2018) related this characterization to Bowlby's (1969) avoidant attachment style (p. 48).

The ideal woman selflessly helps others, subverting her own needs and identity to service others.

This archetype is that of "the compulsive caregiver" reflective of the anxious attachment style

(Gilligan & Snider, 2018, p. 13, p. 61).

Building upon these archetypal connections, Gilligan and Snider (2018) noted how women are enculturated to be conciliatory to men and to others, whereas men are required to be emotionless and grounded exclusively in "reason." Both of these gendered roles reify patriarchal order; they "maintain the conditions of submission and dominance, silence and violence" (p. 78). If this dynamic were not insidious enough, Gilligan and Snider (2018) argued that the idealization of these gender roles also idealizes trauma responses, a downright cruel dynamic. Patriarchy relies upon trauma responses to "anesthetize us from the pain that comes with awareness" (p. 78). This numbness dissuades us from challenging patriarchal norms, allowing them to remain unchecked. By making such connections, Gilligan and Snider (2018) provided a compelling argument as to how painful and traumatic patriarchy can be for all humans regardless of gender or gender identity.

Alice, my critical feminist friend, and I began sharing our reflections with each other via Google Docs, dialoguing with the comments feature and chatting periodically via Zoom. Whereas Alice describes her childhood experiences as abusive, I describe mine as emotionally negligent. Despite this difference, Alice and I feel connected in how we perceive and feel things, and as we grew as friends, we discovered that we had developed similar behavioral adaptations that are characteristic of Bowlby's (1969) anxious attachment type. We tend toward pleasing others over ourselves, and we often feel guilty when asserting our needs because we were conditioned as children to subvert them to appease those of the adults charged with our care. We also share a tendency toward hypervigilance, often sensing emotional threats that are disproportionate to the actual given situation.

As I began reading Gilligan and Snider (2018), I immediately thought, "Alice MUST read this." The book was revelatory for me because it specifically connected my childhood

experiences and adaptations to my feminist life. On August 13, 2021, I shared with Alice my experiences reading Gilligan and Snider (2018) and its connections between responses to patriarchy and responses to trauma. I also noted what I felt was kismet in my discovery of the book as I started to document my reflections for this study, as it quickly became a critical text for my study. I told Alice, "It was as if I was meant to read this. I was yelling and throwing things because I had such a visceral response to it" (August 13, 2021).

Gilligan and Snider's (2018) assertion that behavioral responses to patriarchy and behavioral responses to trauma parallel each other resonated deeply with me, as I have an embodied response to sexist experiences. Alice subsequently read Gilligan and Snider (2018), and we referred to the text in several of our Google Doc exchanges. The text served as a touchstone for our discussions about how we respond to patriarchy in our work. Through a foundation of solidarity, care, and mutual understanding, our relationship deepened and grew. Her reflections, support, insight, and loving friendship have been emotionally grounding to me in this study and life. Without them, this study would lack nuance, richness, and compassion. When I began writing this section, I emailed Alice to see if she was comfortable with the language I used, and she responded:

> Necole, this writing is beautiful, rich, accurate, complex, and brave—much like you. The messages in this touch me more than I can really put into words. I'm so grateful that you feel the connections we share have supported your growth and learning. Your friendship has, and continues to, help me grow. I'm so very grateful. (Email Exchange, 10/2/22)

Alice's response is clearly illustrative of our close relationship, but it also speaks to how our work and our lives are inextricably woven.

This study *is* my life, and as such, whenever I reference this study, I mean all of my embodied experiences and reflections throughout the 2021–2022 school year. It has enhanced my life immeasurably because it gave me a framework in which I could process and analyze my experiences, which resulted in me understanding myself more deeply and more compassionately. Collecting my journal entries allowed me to express my feelings, thoughts, and reactions in real time, and my analysis of them allowed me to see the broader picture of how I grew through this study as an educator, as a leader, and as a human. The journaling process was iterative and cyclical, and in retrospect, I did a great deal of data analysis "in the moment" through it.

During the proposal process, I characterized this study as a healing feminist autoethnography, yet in retrospect, I do not think that I truly understood how accurate a characterization it would be until I began writing this chapter. This healing feminist autoethnography has been an act of self-care and a tool for me to disrupt a great deal of assumptions and beliefs that I had internalized quite deeply. This healing also does not have borders. My stance in it is not only intersectional in accounting for my whiteness and other facets of marginalization; it is also intersectional in that it involves the emotional, social, and spiritual facets of my identity. My work in therapy informed my academic work and my work with students, families, and staff. My spiritual reflections and explorations allowed me the centering necessary for me to work through difficult situations. My reflective work with dear friends and colleagues allowed me to consider how I could move through my work as an educational leader in a more holistic, integrated manner that nurtured and healed my own humanity and potentially contribute to the healing of others.

The Hanged Man: A Critical Stagnation

The fourth beginning was at the onset of the 2021–2022 school year, 2 years into the COVID-19 pandemic. One might think that given the length of time in which I had been juggling all of the logistical, mental, physical, and emotional facets of the pandemic, I would feel more confident in my ability to lead my school community. Yet, it was the complete opposite. On top of the now-familiar contact tracing, mask wearing, quarantining, and live-streaming facets of my job, I was also carrying the now-unbearable burden of negotiating my school community's weariness of all of these things, not to mention my own weariness. Expectations remained unclear, health guidelines changed by the day, and as an elementary school principal, I was tasked with managing all of this, along with the emotional responses of all families and staff in my care. I felt stuck in an untenable situation from which I saw no relief, and I was not alone in this sentiment.

In an article for the New Jersey Monitor, Nieto-Munoz (2022) reported on a heated and drawn-out New Jersey Senate Education Committee meeting in January in which school staff across the state expressed that they were "stretched beyond their limit" due to the dynamics created by COVID-19 (para. 1). Nieto-Munoz (2022) noted problems ranging from staffing, changing protocols, and academic needs for which schools were not adequately funded, all amounting to unsustainable working conditions. We were all in a state of needing to move forward but feeling stymied in our efforts to do so. Everyone had questions and the responses from the state never seemed to be clear.

This sense of stagnation is reflected in The Hanged Man tarot card. Yet, The Hanged Man's stagnation is deceptive. As with tarot's major arcana on the whole, this is a journey. Just as we need moments of activity and progress, we also need moments of pause because they allow us the space to not know what we need. The Hanged Man requires us to examine our

current state, notice the elements that are no longer working for us, and accept the need for a new

perspective.

Although during this time, I found some sense of solidarity with colleagues and friends in

education who were feeling the same way, the solidarity only went so far. For the first time since

I began my career in education, I wanted out. Whereas I had always thought that I would need to

be carted out of my principal job on a stretcher to retire, I could no longer bear the thought of

staying in education a day longer than my pension required me to. A friend and colleague sent

me a picture of what he did during one of many endless and unnecessary administrative

meetings: a chart of his years in education, noting the earliest year he could retire. I immediately

did the same, and to this day, it still sits on my desk at work (Text Exchange, June 1, 2022).

Elizabeth Gilbert (2016) best characterized this emotional space as "not this." Gilbert's

(2016) "not this" is how she described moments in which we realize that we are not in a place

that we want to be without knowing where the right place is yet:

> You don't need to know where you are going to admit that where you are standing
>
> right now is wrong.
>
> The bravest thing to say can be these two words.
>
> What comes next?
>
> I don't know. You don't know. Nobody knows. It might be worse. It might be better. But
>
> whatever it is . . .? It's NOT THIS. (Gilbert, 2016)

These pandemic years changed me. They helped me to reexamine where and how I placed my

professional life in the context of my whole life. I did not know how to reframe or reorganize my

professional and personal lives, but I had a growing sense of "not this." I could no longer engage

with my professional experiences the way I had in the past. I could no longer operate exclusively in survival mode, needing to find a path that was more authentically me.

The Fool: The Work Began Again

My findings are both an end and a beginning—a "re-beginning" of sorts, similar to The Fool in the major arcana of the tarot. In reviewing my narratives, a clear arc and journey can be seen from September of 2021 to June of 2022. On the surface, it is a story about a woman navigating her gendered experiences and her reactions to them. It detailed how I attempted to feel and act authentically within a district's narrow behavioral parameters. It examined the emotional labor of negotiating unconscious bias and patriarchal collusion.

Yet, it is also a story of her beautiful imperfections and how she developed a greater sense of grace toward herself, allowing her personal, professional, academic, and spiritual lives to dance together. It is a story of possibility in how that dance can be transformative in her educational practices and allow her to be kinder with herself while she continues to disrupt gendered norms. The Fool dances on his card, not knowing where the journey will take him but trusting that it will take him somewhere important, and that this destination will also be a new beginning. I do not know where these findings might lead next, but I have experienced enough in this journey and in other journeys to trust that they will serve as a foundation for the next one.

Just as the Fool foments a new beginning, it also implies an ending. As Arrien (1997) noted, "The Fool is the universal principle is associated with the state of consciousness that we experience before birth and after death" (p. 24). It is from this place—this "mystical, transcendent" place—that I begin my thematic explorations, starting with the patriarchal contexts in which I existed professionally, and concluding with how I enacted kindness and grace toward others and toward myself.

Emergent Themes

Three central themes emerged in the data: the localized enactment of patriarchal education systems and norms; small feminist disruptions; and grace. Within the theme of the patriarchal education system, subthemes included turning othering into agency, male fragility with women leaders, women colluding with patriarchy and proximity to power, disrupting my own internalized patriarchy, and negotiating the balance between acting authentically and protecting myself from professional peril. The central theme of small feminist disruptions involved my emergent feminist leadership, openly sharing my vulnerability, disrupting educational hierarchies, disrupting dominant educational narratives, and enacting a feminist ethic of care with those who have hurt me. The last theme of grace is one that allowed me a more embodied understanding of how I could be kinder to myself as I moved through the difficulties, grief, and beauty of feminist growth, recentering myself in a new way within the context of this autoethnography and within the world around me. This grace theme also provides a bridge into the implications of this study.

It is important to note that these central themes often overlapped, tangled, and influenced one another. Initial feminist disruptions of patriarchal norms, dynamics, and assumptions in 2021 compelled me to seek other ways I could disrupt patriarchy in my work, and they informed the growth of my feminist leadership practice as I moved through the school year. Yet, just as my small feminist disruptions informed my emergent feminist leadership practice, my growing feminist leadership practice fomented more feminist disruptions. Harkening Taylor's (2020) concept of "walking," and the iterative process of this study on the whole, I meandered along a path on which each step involved a symbiosis of action and thought, bringing me to a place of a deeper, integrated understanding of what embodied feminist leadership felt like (p. 5). This walk

also fostered a greater sense of self-compassion and grace, which allowed me to hold myself in a kinder, less critical way.

Localization of Patriarchal Educational Norms: The Emperor

According to Horton (2022), The Emperor tarot card is symbolic of power structure and societal hierarchies. This card's obvious maleness is reflective of patriarchal norms and how they are positioned culturally. Yet this card has a deeper, more nuanced meaning. It connotes how one relates to the power structures present in their life and how they impact feelings of security. It encourages us to examine our own concepts of hierarchy and offers a representation of male energy that is benevolent and compassionate. As such, this card is representative of both the patriarchal dynamics of my district and how I negotiated and related to them.

During the summer of 2021, several situations highlighted my experiences with othering as a female leader. Although a typical K–12 school year runs from September to June, most administrators work 12 months out of the year, with the summer months used for planning and preparing for the following school year. It tends to be a calmer time, but the Summer of 2021 was anything but. In addition to pandemic dynamics and unclear guidance both from the state and our district, we also were dealing with parental uproar because of the misinformed rhetoric about teachers teaching Critical Race Theory (Sawchuk, 2021, para. 10).

Similar to what was happening in school districts across the country (Sawchuk, 2021, para. 2), parents were coming to board of education meetings, voicing opposition toward materials and curriculum topics that they considered to be offensive, questioning why we could not continue teaching what we always had, particularly in the realms of Social Studies and Health. They questioned how allowing students to learn from resources that provided nonwhite perspectives on racial topics could alienate white students. They characterized comprehensive

health lessons and materials that included LGBTQIA+ perspectives as deviant. Whereas the

district devoted considerable time and resources to expanding our Diversity, Equity, and

Inclusion (DEI) work in the 2020–2021 school year, the district's position changed considerably

in reaction to this parental pressure to maintain the status quo.

Central office administrators expressed feelings of stress regarding this parent pressure,

and the district decided to have a parent forum for parents to share their concerns and learn more

about the curriculum. In all honesty, I was not even sure what was going to be discussed, but it

became quite clear that the president of our administrators' association (our union) made a deal

with central office to have certain individuals, all straight white males with no education in what

Critical Race Theory actually is, attend this forum as administrative representatives. They gave

no explanation of the selection process.

A colleague and I are the two elementary administrators in the district with the most

knowledge of Critical Race Theory, and we were not asked to participate—not even in an

advisory capacity. Three other administrators whose expertise and experience were also quite

relevant to the DEI work were also left out of the discussion. In my July 16th, 2021 entry, I

referenced a series of text exchanges with several administrators all involving our frustrations

about being excluded from any discussions about this parent forum. Our omission confirmed

what we had feared: the DEI efforts from the previous year would crumble at the first sign of

resistance.

I talked on the phone twice that day with this colleague, and the second time, he shared

something that resonated with me in its abject truth: "They have said no. Clearly said no,"

referring to the district's response to his continued efforts to create more inclusive learning

dynamics in our district. I felt that statement so deeply. I wrote, "They say no. Again and again"

(Journal 3, July 16, 2021). The frustration and anger of the school year had begun even before the school year itself had begun.

Later, I detailed a relevant conversation that I had with a colleague, Mike. Mike and I did not particularly like each other when we first met, but through the years, we had become strongly allied with one another. He is a cisgender heterosexual white man who uses his self-recognized power and privilege to advocate for marginalized communities within our district. He and I have talked explicitly and openly about our earlier experiences with one another—how we did not like each other and why—which has made our friendship and collegial relationship grounded in one of mutual honesty and grace. He has been instrumental in my growth this year, and my August 3rd entry provides a good first illustration of his role in my life and in this study. In this entry, I shared a conversation that Mike and I had in which he confirmed that the district administrators did not want me involved in the DEI parent forum. I was viewed as "having a position on things" (Journal 8, August 3, 2021).

Mike's sentiments were comforting in that they countered my tendency to think, "Am I imagining this?" However, this comfort only went so far, as my frustration about how I am positioned in the district quickly overtook me. Through the years, I have felt unsure as to how the superintendent views me, and my investigation did not do much in terms of making me any less leery. Moreover, he has read through my emails pulled from the server[5] in certain situations. On one such occasion, I was called into the central office with my union representative with the implication that I had done something wrong. It seemed that my emails had been pulled from the server for review, and they were being used as a means of getting me to turn on a colleague. The

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[5] In the state of New Jersey, there is no expectation of privacy on school email accounts and servers. Accordingly, the district may go into server archive emails of an employee and review them if they feel the employee is doing or communicating something untoward (New Jersey Department of Education, 2023c).

emails pulled never involved anything nefarious or untoward. Ever since my investigation, merely seeing my superintendent's number come up on my cell phone screen elicited a full-body panic response. "What did I do now?" Whenever I interact with him, I frequently find myself engaging in childhood patterns of hypervigilance. This sense of hypervigilance is also quite prominent in my narratives for this study.

The district's act of pulling emails from the server is one of coercive power. Cooks-Campbell (2022) defined coercive power as one that "employs the use of force, threats, and other forms of coercion to stimulate an outcome" (para. 5). Dynamics associated with coercive power structures include top-down communication, punitive consequences, the use of threats, and systems of surveillance, and these dynamics can contribute to a climate of distrust and anxiety, if not downright antagonism between levels of leadership. Cooks-Campbell (2022) noted that although there are some instances—those in which high levels of error or disfunction occurred—that might merit coercive practices, the disadvantages far outweigh the potential benefit to the system. The situation for which my emails were pulled did not involve high levels of error. Pulling emails from the district server only served to increase distrust of those who did so.

The latter part of August brought our administrative retreat each year, and 2021 was no different. It was also no different that I felt these meetings to be largely uninformative, basic, and at times, even insulting to our collective experience and knowledge as administrators. I fully acknowledge and accept that there are topics that we must review each year by law, such as the standard legal policies review, safety and security updates, and our requisite teacher evaluation review. Yet, the topics and discussions beyond those mandated by the state during the August 2021 administrative retreat centered upon "student learning loss" and "positive school leadership." My visceral response to "student learning loss" was evident. I wrote:

I am so angry. I'm angry that [we] started with these chintzy, simplistic videos

that imply that our teachers are not supporting students emotionally . . . I just called out

her use of the repeated term "learning loss," and she responded that we

are not using that term. Um, you did. Multiple times. I'm so sick of hearing this term.

 (Journal 12, August 16, 2021)

After two years of teachers enduring, against all odds, the public's criticism of response

to online learning, DEI initiatives, and mask mandates, I felt an overwhelming sense of

protection for my staff. I felt that the term "student learning loss" was being used to position

teachers as being at fault for not being able to mitigate the impact of a pandemic that killed over

1 million people in this country alone. Moreover, it did not account for the overwhelming

systemic inequities that contributed to students' educational access challenges far before the

COVID-19 pandemic (Nieto-Munoz, 2022). Of course, the academic impact of COVID-19 was

important to discuss, but the term "learning loss" to me framed it in a way that was focused upon

educators' efforts or lack thereof, and all I saw for the previous years was our teachers routinely

going above and beyond in innovative and creative ways to support their students. In March of

2020, our teachers created work overnight for students as we transitioned to remote learning.

They learned virtual formats for instruction in days, and they became experts in navigating Zoom

and Google Meet, all while working countless hours beyond the school day to keep in touch with

families from afar.

As we began the 2021–2022 school year, we had discussions about what teachers needed

and how we could stretch our resources to support our students, but I found it unhelpful to frame

it with the term "learning loss," and I saw its impact upon their morale when an administrator

used it in a presentation or in conversation. Teachers felt defeated by this term and accordingly, I

refused to use this term with my staff. Yes, we had concerns about our students, but using this

language only served to chip away at the already tenuous teacher morale (Journal 12, August 16,

2021; Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022).

My anger was also palpable regarding the topic of "positive school leadership": "I guess

I'm really grappling with the implications as to what we are NOT. Are they implying that we are

not employing positive school leadership?" Whereas the "student learning loss" language

implicitly places blame upon teachers, "fostering positive school climate" implies a deficiency in

building administrators (Journal 12, August 16, 2021). These first administrative meetings set the

tone for the school year, and the initial message to us was that we were failing our students,

teachers, and families. This message felt quite antithetical to "positive school leadership"

(Journal 12, August 16, 2021).

Moreover, this "positive school leadership" focus reflected a common issue in schools:

what Treleaven (2022) called "toxic positivity," which pervades schools and districts. Rather

than genuine efforts to support school community members, "toxic positivity demands that we

ignore, suppress, or deny negative or critical emotions" (para. 2) and often, it is used to

manipulate and overwhelm individuals. Treleaven (2022) detailed how educational communities

frequently use "teamwork" and promote concepts of "we are a family" to instill a (false) sense of

communal trust and collaboration (para. 5). In the August 16th meeting, I felt anything but trust. I

wrote, "I don't feel safe being myself in these admin meetings" (Journal 12, August 16, 2021).

I also noted in this entry that very few central office administrators were present, which

frustrated me further because their absence was antithetical to building a positive school

community. I wrote sarcastically, "Guess they know how to treat people already." This entry also

detailed the lack of racial and systemic bias awareness in this workshop, which I found to be

unsurprising but frustrating. I wrote, "The presentation was very basic . . . The presenter gave us

this abridged list from Brené Brown of words that are important—core values. We were told to

note 5 of them and then choose one" (Journal 12, August 16, 2021). Alice commented on this

entry that her principal did the same thing with Brown's work, noting "Incredible. Oy vey"

(Comment, Journal 12, August 16, 2021).

Another dynamic emerged during the first few months of 2022 that evidenced the

systemic patriarchal norms of our district. Speculation regarding a Healthy Workplace

investigation emerged on a colleague with whom I had continually struggled. This colleague was

a straight white male who had spoken to me multiple times in a manner that I found remarkably

patronizing despite the fact that I had several more years of experience than he did. We had had

interactions in which he explained to me how to create a schedule, how to deal with difficult

parents, and how to deal with student behavioral dynamics—all things that I can do quite well. I

first referenced this dynamic in my February 11, 2022 entry, noting that I was "getting the sense"

that he was under investigation. Given that I had experienced multiple instances in which he had

been condescending toward me, with seemingly no consequence, I was skeptical about him

being subjected to any professional consequences. I wrote about my skepticism and anger that I

felt treated differently: "I guess it's just that my experience has been that this individual in

particular gets free passes about his behavior whereas I'm scrutinized" (Journal 29, February 11,

2022).

The protecting of a straight white male is a concept that Franklin (2015) elucidated in her

exploration of an experience with a male professor's reactivity and how the university positioned

itself, her, and the professor. Franklin (2015) wrote a social theory "thought piece" for

"Professor P" in which she presented a feminist analysis of a certain social theorist's work (p.

17), one that she thought reflected the level of critique expected of a doctoral student. Instead of

examining Franklin's (2015) critique, he took offense to it, scrawling his protestations of her

work all over the paper in red ink. When she discussed the situation with her doctoral supervisor,

the supervisor advised her to prioritize her "scholarship" over her feminism or risk being asked

to leave her doctoral program (p. 21).

Yet, not once was Professor P's eviscerating response to her analysis called into question.

Despite his blatant and clearly documented reactivity, he was protected. She broadened these

considerations by stating how white men's "systematically dysfunctional behaviour is

frustratingly condoned" (p. 23). Franklin's (2015) analysis was reflective of Taylor and Klein's

(2020) examination of the Brett Kavanaugh hearings as well: men are allowed to throw tantrums,

even in public and in writing, with little consequence. Women must continually exhibit extreme

emotional control, even in the face of these tantrums, which creates even more rage that we must

suppress.

Turning Othering into Agency: Fortune. Horton (2022) characterized The Fortune

tarot card as "one of the most powerful cards in the Major Arcana" (p. 12). It foments the end of

a phase in life and the beginning of another. Horton (2022) indicated that this change could be

tumultuous and require flexibility and adjustments, but that it yields a positive change.

Additionally, this card also indicates that the individual has agency in directing this change

rather than being at the whim of fate. A change of this nature began in October of 2021.

Although the incident was another example of my professional othering, and although it was

difficult for me mentally and emotionally, it ultimately yielded a great deal of growth and insight

that guided me throughout the rest of the 2021–2022 school year.

During the months of September and October of 2021, a group of district parents began a concerted effort to remove books with LGBTQIA+ characters and gender identity references from our school media centers, books that had been in our media centers since 2018 without a single parent voicing concern until now. The elementary-level books in question were from a list provided by Follett Books, a very well-known book vendor. Several elementary principals purchased these books, and we all followed the district's ordering process, which includes approval by our direct supervisor and the Business Administrator.

In an email on February 15, 2018, I expressed appreciation for collegial solidarity, as my fellow principals had supported keeping developmentally appropriate LGBTQIA+ books in our media centers:

> You have no idea how grateful I am for your support just now.
>
> I've had a really rough couple of weeks, and what just happened in our meeting is a huge part of why I don't throw in the towel.
>
> Thank you, thank you, thank you . . . (Email, February 15, 2018)

Mike, who was then a fellow principal, shared the Follett book list, noting that he and his Media Specialist would be ordering them. In early October 2021, our principal supervisor asked me about how we ordered the books. I searched my email archives and forwarded her the email thread from February 2018. In response to parent complaints about some of these books in our media centers, the central office administrators directed us to pull all of them off the shelves. The elementary media specialists pushed back on the directive, equating it to censorship and citing the already established district procedure for parents to challenge book placement in our media centers. Our supervisor called an elementary principals meeting for October 14th to discuss the situation and invited higher-up administrators. As the meeting was framed as a "discussion," we,

the elementary principals, expressed similar sentiments to those of the media specialists: this was

censorship, and we have a board approved process for challenging books. When our supervisor

realized that we were all together in our belief that the books should remain on the media center

shelves, she said, "Well, I can't protect you." My October 19, 2021 entry details the exchange

that followed her statement:

> I said, "That sounds like a threat—I know you don't mean it like that, but it does. Can
>
> you explain what the danger is? What do we need to be protected from?" She took
>
> offense to that, even though multiple principals agreed with me that it sounded like a
>
> threat. She clarified (sort of—it still didn't make sense to me what we needed protection
>
> from) "from parents," and we moved on, deciding as a group to put the books back on the
>
> shelf . . . (Journal 15, October 19, 2021)

> The following day, this supervisor texted me and said that she was stopping by to talk.

My instincts and my experiences with her told me that this would be more than a simple chat,

and accordingly, I told her that I wanted my union representative there. She responded that she

would set something up with Human Resources. I anticipated this might happen, as the district's

central office personnel always want to have "even sides" in discussions such as this; if I was

bringing someone, she would want a Human Resources person there. Although this escalated the

formality of the dynamic, I had hit a critical place in my sentiments regarding my interactions

and relationships with central office. I spoke with my representative, who is also a personal

friend and someone who affirms how I feel I am positioned in our district, and he said, "If we're

meeting with HR, I think you should go for it. Tell them how you feel." The meeting was set for

October 19, 2021 (Journal 15, October 19, 2021).

Over the weekend, I wrote out notes that I would use in our meeting with the central office administrators. I sat on our cabin porch in Bethel, NY, watching the leaves fall as I poured all of the anxiety, frustration, and anger that I had toward central office over the past several years into an enumerated list of the facets of my positioning within the district. I noted at the top the overarching message:

> I have a **pervasive discomfort**[6] in my interactions with higher admin. Despite my
>
> adherence to all expectations of me in my role as elementary principal and my
>
> contributions to our elementary team, I am continually positioned as someone with "**an**
>
> **agenda**," and that is **framed in a negative light**, so much so that I fear that when I am
>
> called by central office, I am in some sort of trouble. (Journal 15, October 19, 2021)

I then detailed five specific facets of central office personnel's behavior that has contributed to this "pervasive discomfort":

1. How although I endured my investigation in 2017, I was never given any support to ameliorate the dynamics that led to the investigation.

2. A subsequent conversation with a central office administrator who characterized my investigation as "water under the bridge," only for other central office administrators to use it in an attempt to turn me on a colleague two years later.

3. In a principals' meeting, a male colleague made comments that I found racially insensitive, and when I attempted to address them, I was silenced, and how despite a conversation with my supervisor, this colleague's behavior continued. His comfort was, and continued to be, valued over mine.

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[6] All entry citations include the original formatting, including bold, capitalizations, and italics to preserve the feel of the original sentiments.

4. My exclusion from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion parent forum despite my doctoral work in this realm, and my positioning as "having an agenda" in this regard and thereby needing "protection."

5. My most recent positioning in the discussions regarding the LGBTQIA+ book purchases in 2018 and how, when I voiced concern that removing the books would further marginalize students who are gender nonconforming, I was again told that I would not be able to be "protected." (Journal 15, October 19, 2021)

I concluded my notes with the following paragraph:

> This **pattern continues to create a sense of professional peril** and has resulted in a dynamic I find emotionally taxing and fostering a perpetual state of anxiety for me. I take great pride in my work and in my growth over the past several years, and I do not feel that it is recognized or valued. Instead, I feel that I am under undue scrutiny. (Journal 15, October 19, 2021)

Shaking and terrified of what I was about to do, I read my notes, grateful for them and the clarity and grounding that they provided as I sat across from my boss and a Human Resources representative. The Human Resources person took notes. I concluded my statements noting that I was considering filing a Healthy Workplace Environment claim because of these continued dynamics.

My supervisor then began by saying that she had planned to come to my school to talk about the "biting tone" that she felt I displayed in the elementary principals' meeting. She also stated that other principals feel that I will "yell at them" if we disagree, an account that was subsequently disputed by several of my colleagues. I felt particular frustration in this because

[she] was, again, protecting the comfort of a straight white male colleague over discussing points

of disagreement (Journal 15, October 19, 2021).

My supervisor's characterization of my tone and perceived behavior was reflective of

Edwards's (2017) experience with tone policing in academia. Edwards (2017) shared how a male

superior told her that an anonymous male colleague had been upset by the way in which she

spoke to him to "clarify misconceptions" about a new academic program (p. 629). The male

superior told Edwards (2017) to "tone it down" in her delivery (p. 626). She described this

dynamic as "the person to whom the sexist behavior is directed is given the message that their

own behavior needs to be recalibrated to better fit the cultural context and expectations" (p. 629).

My supervisor did this very thing. Rather than reflect upon her discomfort with disagreement

among colleagues, she, in effect, directed me to "tone it down."

Moreover, this situation with my supervisor also reflected the facet of Edwards's (2017)

account in that rather than approach me directly, "other principals" told her that they were

uncomfortable with the way in which I engaged in discourse. Her actions also were reflective of

Einhorn's (2021) analysis of how women police each other to conform as a way of releasing

their own feelings of aggression to oppressive gender dynamics rather than directing their ire at

those who perpetuate such dynamics (p. 490).

As the meeting ended, the Human Resources representative asked me, "Necole, do you

like working here?" My reaction to this question was detailed in my October 19, 2021 entry:

> So, basically, my boss and . . . HR did the EXACT THING that I accused them of—
>
> making me feel in a continued state of professional peril. My boss also revised her story
>
> in front of HR to indicate that what she meant in that meeting was that she was going to
>
> "protect" us from the [central office administrators] if we didn't do what [they] wanted—

us to vet the books before putting them back on the shelves. That was NOT what

happened—we were presented with a discussion, and it was posed as a decision to be

made as a group. (Journal 15, October 19. 2021)

I was amazed, if unsurprised, that immediately following a district employee detailing her

othering, the Human Resources representative would ask if I liked working here. The whole

point of this meeting was to note how *they* had created a work environment fraught with

problematic dynamics. The Human Resources representative concluded the meeting with a

question that further demonstrated how they seemingly had missed my point: "Do you need to go

home now?" To which I responded, "No, I need to go back to my building to be with my staff

and students. They are the reason I come to work every day" (Journal 15, October 19. 2021).

The response of the central office administrators to my sentiments in the October 19th

meeting are indicative of how power is centralized in the higher levels of administration. Rather

than demonstrate empathy toward me, they enacted a managerial stance, attempting to have me

acquiesce to the district's narrow behavioral norms for women. Blackmore (2013) defined this

expectation as the pursuit of "standardization as the norm" that does not account for contextual

dynamics, including gender, associated this standardization pursuit with patriarchal leadership

orientations (p. 151). Additionally, my supervisor's characterization of me challenging her as

"biting" suppressed any sense of collegial debate. There was simply no room for me to express

disagreement; they needed me to conform to feel in control. To do so, my supervisor had to

dismiss my experiences of concern and critique my vocal tone (Journal 15, October 19. 2021).

In Chapter One, I referenced the autoethnographic study that I did for my "Critical

Feminisms" class in the summer of 2020 that ultimately led to this dissertation. In this 2020

study, I attempted to process and disrupt the assumptions in my 2017 summative evaluation. In

my supervisor's feedback, she encouraged me to manage my "display of mood/emotion." There were two implications here: I lacked the ability to regulate my emotions, and that I *should* regulate them (Jadick, 2020). Although both of these assumptions are germane to the discussion of my supervisor's characterization of my tone, the latter held more resonance for me in this situation. The core of the issue here was not my tone, but rather that I should not have shown anger or frustration in a situation in which I felt it. I was not disparaging or disrespectful. I never raised my voice. I was simply not hiding my frustration (Journal 15, October 19. 2021).

Traister's (2018) explorations regarding women and anger provided some context to this dynamic. She wrote about how surprising women's anger can be, attributing it to our cultural conditioning to suppress it:

> But perhaps the belief that anger is somehow at odds with the otherwise affable feminine personality has to do with the fact that women have been so well conditioned to tamp down the rage, to disguise it or compartmentalize it. (Traister, 2018, p. 58)

I was not behaving in an "affable feminine" manner in the meeting my supervisor referenced, and since I had not said anything untoward, she needed to focus upon my tone. Traister (2018) posed that the discussion of women's anger should not center upon how it is expressed, but rather *why* we are so angry in the first place. Similarly, no consideration was given to why I had a "biting tone" in that meeting, which arguably would have focused the discussion upon our concern for marginalized students, a far larger problem than the tone in which I allegedly spoke (Journal 15, October 19. 2021).

I subsequently learned that unbeknownst to me, a colleague had recorded the meeting. In response to me sharing my supervisor's characterization of my "biting tone," the colleague said plainly, "Yeah, that's not how it went down. She was interrupting you." I asked if they were

sure, and they told me that they would listen to the recording again. They did so, and the next

day called and said: "Confirmed. Your tone was not biting. You were pushing back, and she

didn't like it. Sit with that." Although I maintain that the issue should have been centered upon

the marginalization of students rather than my tone, I was grateful for the validation of my

recollection of the meeting.

       Male Fragility with Women Leaders: The Emperor Revisited. As previously noted,

Horton (2022) characterized The Emperor tarot card as symbolic of power structure and societal

hierarchies, noting its strong male energy. The "Shadow" side of The Emperor warns of a

tendency toward dominance, representing an insecure man (TarotX, 2022). Unfortunately, I have

had many experiences with such men, and those experiences have all required me to demonstrate

control and calm in the face of emotional reactivity, highlighting one of the most difficult facets

of being a woman in educational leadership. I have experienced a glaring disparity between the

treatment and behavioral expectations of me versus my white male colleagues. As detailed in my

October 19, 2021 entry, my straight white cis male colleague's comfort was consistently valued

over mine, even when he said things in meetings that were problematic, such as citing his

reading of a book of poetry written by a black woman as evidence that he did not have any racial

bias. I was the one who was deemed to be problematic with my "biting" tone (Journal 15,

October 19, 2021).

       However, I must not only ascribe to a narrow set of emotions and defer to the feelings of

men in meetings; I must also manage the fragility of men who are in what would be considered

subordinate roles to me. As DiMuccio and Knowles (2020) defined it, fragile masculinity is a

response cisgender men have in response to feeling that their manhood is "precarious" and that

societal expectations dictate that men must actively defend their "high-value status as men" (p.

25). This dynamic was quite evident in an interaction that I had with a male substitute in my

building in March of 2022.

As I detailed in my March 31, 2022 entry, at dismissal, I was informed that this substitute

told a child to stand in the corner of the room in response to the student's alleged disruptive

behavior in class. The child was understandably upset when he arrived in the aftercare program,

and he came to me to share what had happened. After I spoke with his parents, I called the

substitute and asked him if he had the student stand in the front corner of the classroom. He

responded that the child was "not following the rules" despite numerous reminders to do so. He

then admitted to having the student stand in the corner. I responded that, per substitute notes, he

should engage me as the principal or the school counselor to address issues such as this. Instead

of acknowledging the expectations for addressing student behavioral dynamics, he questioned

why having the child stand in front corner of the room was wrong, to which I responded that it

was alienating to the child. I reiterated that he should engage me or my counselor should

anything of this nature arise. He interrupted me with, "Message received."

Yet, he was not done with me. He then said that he "had a few things to share about" our

school. He proceeded to tell me how poorly behaved some of my students were, and that as the

principal, "You should do something about that." I calmly reiterated my expectation that

substitutes should engage me or my counselor for these matters, and he again interrupted me,

saying "Yes, I got it. Loud and clear."

I ended the telephone call, and immediately became enraged. I recounted this exchange in

my March 31 entry:

> Despite this sub challenging me AS THE BUILDING PRINCIPAL and telling me how to
>
> do my job and insulting my school, I—ME—had to keep my cool. I even called my

[supervisor] after the conversation because in my experience, the ones with the most

hubris are ALSO the ones who will call [central office] and complain about me. (Journal

28, March 31, 2022)

I continued with the following:

This guy would NEVER have spoken to a man like that. Of course, I can't really know

that, but every time I have to keep my cool in the face of someone['s] behavior in an

egregious manner, I think about how much women have to overcompensate in being

calm, lest we are characterized as erratic, emotional, or unhinged. Dr Blasey-Ford, Justice

Brown-Jackson . . . forced to be calm in the face of grown men throwing tantrums.

(Journal 28, March 31, 2022)

This particular reflection showed the emotional labor I had to employ in keeping calm

during this conversation with the substitute. I knew that if I showed any bit of an emotional

reaction, he would be able to dismiss my capabilities in running my school building further or

even provide him with a reason to contact the district central office to complain about me. I

immediately thought about reading Franklin's (2015) experience with the male professor who

responded to an innocuous feminist analysis with vitriol and how I had such a visceral response

to it. I reflected upon how in the face of a male's disproportionate emotional reaction to a given

situation, we must react with a disproportionately controlled response:

This gets me thinking about what that does—what that consideration—how we include

this in our thinking and navigating—how we control ourselves to the nth degree—that

control of what is a legitimate, honest, and commensurate reaction to such ridiculous

behavior does to us. What that vigilance does to us as women, and its compound effects

upon BIPOC women. It's an additional labor. With every extra facet of marginalization, there is an added layer of labor. (Journal 28, March 31, 2022)

My interaction with the substitute also was an example of Mayock's (2016) gender shrapnel. It was a relatively small incident of sexism that undermined my ability to have an authentic response to a substitute's defensive and dismissive reaction to my addressing his unacceptable behavior with a student. Edwards's (2017) characterization of experiences such as this as undermining, and that is exactly how it felt. Instead of focusing solely upon what the substitute had done that was unacceptable and why, I had to channel a great deal of energy into delivering the message in a manner that would not incite an aggressive response. In spite of my efforts in this regard, he still responded aggressively, and I had to channel even more energy into being measured in my reaction to him.

The above analysis involved how I had to behave in the situation, using what I have learned as a woman in educational leadership and how men tend to respond to me correcting them. Yet, this analysis only covers the external manifestation of it: how I responded behaviorally to the male substitute. An additional and more insidious tension in this entry involves a deeper internalized patriarchy: defaulting to doubt in the validity of my experience. Despite many situations in my life in which I have had to be very measured and excessively calm when dealing with someone, usually a man, who is decidedly not measured or calm, and despite my witnessing other women demonstrating the same composure in the face of men challenging them with open disdain and venom, I still felt compelled to write "Of course, I can't really know that" after stating that the substitute would never have spoken so disrespectfully to a man. My default is to question my own truth, not his reactivity (Journal 28, March 31, 2022).

This tension is situated squarely in my internalized patriarchy. It is reminiscent of Taylor and Klein's (2020) analysis of their reactions to the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court hearings. They noted Dr. Blasey-Ford's "calm, professional, and composed" demeanor as she testified about Kavanaugh sexually assaulting her at a party during their high school years (pp. 61–62). Even with this extremely controlled demeanor, Dr. Blasey-Ford's story was questioned. Kavanaugh's response during the hearings was quite the opposite, full of overt, unchecked rage. Taylor and Klein (2020) noted this incongruence: "We were struck by how Kavanaugh's rage, which seemed both terrifying and ridiculous to us, somehow failed to discredit his statements. Instead, it seemed to garner him support" (p. 62). They then returned their discussion to how they have frequently been cautioned as women "to be 'calmer' and 'less emotional' or 'less hysterical'" (p. 62).

It is also reminiscent of Chase and Bell's (1990) myth of "gender neutrality" (p. 163). My "Of course, I can't really know that" statement is an internalized attempt at gender neutrality, similar to their anecdote about a woman board of education member hiring a woman superintendent being questioned if her gender influenced her decision to do so. The board member's response of "we hired the best person for the job" is indicative that she understood that she needed to attempt to remove her gender from the conversation, but Chase and Bell (1990) argued that such an attempt actually reified sexism in the situation, as no male board members were questioned about the men whom they had hired in the past. In acquiescing to the possibility that the male substitute might not have reacted less defensively to a male principal's feedback, I implicitly concluded that the male response is the norm. This dynamic is also reflective of Blackmore's (2013) insistence that systemic, historical inequities should be considered in such situations, as we cannot just consider the individual in the situation. We must also consider the

"collective attribute that is socially constituted historically within systemic relations of power" (Blackmore, 2013, pp. 145–146).

It was evident in my March 31st entry about the substitute that the external manifestations of patriarchy and my internalized patriarchy continually influenced one another. Similar to the doubt in my own experiential validity in the March 31st entry, I referenced a situation in my April 20–21st entry in which one of my straight white male colleagues was being protected from consequences for alleged unprofessional acts toward some staff members in his building. I expressed my frustration and anger with the difference in how they were treating him versus how I was treated in my 2017 investigation. I wrote, "This is difficult because I don't have any definitive proof of this bias, but I suppose I need to remember what I'm studying here—MY experiences/feelings/responses to all of this." Alice offered a relevant disruption in a comment exchange on my April 20–21st entry. She challenged my compulsion to provide external "proof" that my experience of a gendered dynamic was true, commenting: "You are studying yourself, your experiences, and they are valid. Do we need to shove them into the 'proof' box? Is that even going to reveal anything new?" (Journal 41, April 20–21, 2022) I responded to Alice, "YES to ALL OF THIS," referencing my tendency in my academic writing to default to "academic patriarchy and how hard it is to challenge that internally" (Journal 41, April 20–21, 2022).

Women Colluding with Patriarchy and Proximity to Power: The Devil. The Devil tarot card represents an oppressive situation or person with whom one willingly, if perhaps unknowingly, joins. This situation or person weighs an individual down, depressing them and draining them of energy, and one from which that individual must break. Yet, this situation or person has no discernible hold upon that individual. To rid oneself of this dynamic, we must

overcome fear and look at our "Shadow side," or what we consider to be our faults. Once we are

rid of the dynamic, transformations can happen (Horton, 2022, pp. 17–18).

The Devil tarot card exemplifies a critical sub-theme of localized enactment of

patriarchal education systems and norms: women who collude with patriarchy. During the DEI

parent forum discussions, it became evident that a white female high-ranking central office

administrator was instrumental in elevating the clout of straight white men, choosing them to be

building-level administrative representatives at the DEI parent forum despite their lack of

experience with DEI initiatives or knowledge therewith. This was not uncommon behavior for

this individual, but her selection infuriated me, nonetheless. My anger was palpable in the entry

that detailed the parent forum situation: "So . . . a woman, is choosing a straight white man—

implicitly recognizing his 'knowledge' that he doesn't have and lauding him for something he

doesn't deserve—to do this work while omitting anyone with knowledge or education in it"

(Journal 3, July 16th, 2021).

This entry was the first of many in my data in which I expressed my overwhelming sense

of betrayal by women colluding with patriarchy to gain a proximal location to power. The

collusion of women is reflected in Purewal and Loh's (2021) work. It is infuriating when straight

white men center themselves, but it is far more insidious and devastating when women

marginalize other women. hooks (2015) also reflected on this dynamic, noting how women can

be their own worst enemies. She explained how sexism is not just perpetuated by social

structures, institutions, and hegemonically dominant individuals, but also "by the victims

themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status

quo" (hooks, 2015, p. 43). She also considered how a lack of "extreme restrictions" or overt

sexism can allow certain women "to ignore the areas in which they are exploited or

discriminated against," or even lead them to believing that women are not indeed oppressed at all (hooks, 2015, p. 5). This is exactly what the white female administrator did with regard to the DEI work, and what she and other women with similar central office positions did as well throughout the 2021-2022 school year.

A resounding example of women colluding with patriarchy is my October 19th meeting with Human Resources and my supervisor. Upon analyzing my October 19, 2021 entry, I surmised that my supervisor did not like that during the October 14, 2021 meeting, I was challenging her position and her version of how the books ended up in the media centers in 2018. Although I could only speculate as to my supervisor's reasons for her behavior, I pulled from my knowledge of how our district tends to work and my own experiences of internalized patriarchy to analyze them. As I have previously noted, the district had a coercive tendency to find someone to blame when things got messy. This book situation was just that. We had purchased the LGBTQIA+ books without any question in 2018, and they were available for check-out from 2018 to 2021 without a single challenge. With the backlash of a small yet vocal group of parents questioning the appropriateness of LGBTQIA+ themed books in our school media centers in the fall of 2021, this was now an issue.

Given that my supervisor approved the purchasing of the books in 2018, she invariably felt her own sense of professional peril for approving the purchases in 2018. Yet, instead of addressing her own response to the situation, or even the ridiculousness of the situation itself, she turned her discomfort outward as part of an attempt to eschew responsibility. When I challenged her, she became defensive, as colleagues confirmed, and I was an easy target for her discomfort. I could be the scapegoat, as I had already been positioned as a troublemaker. Although she had

not written my 2017 summative evaluation, she had read it and was well aware that it was a point

of vulnerability for me, and she capitalized on that.

On October, 27, 2021, I added the email that my supervisor sent me that day as a follow

up:

Necole,

Thank you for meeting with me, [Human Resources], and Atticus last Tuesday, October

19th. As was shared, the reason I wanted to meet was to provide feedback regarding

something you said at our principals' meeting a few days earlier. I appreciate your

willingness to reflect on what was said, and to consider the impact both tone and word

choice have when communicating in a professional environment. Discourse has always

been, and will continue to be encouraged at our meetings, and all voices are appreciated

and valued.

[Human Resources] will be reaching out to you regarding additional statements you made

at the start of the meeting.

Respectfully, [Supervisor] (Email, October 27, 2021)

Although most meetings involving Human Resources are followed by such an email

confirming what was discussed, my supervisor was reinforcing the patriarchal norms against

which I pushed back in the previous meeting. She reframed her tone policing as a necessity for

"discourse" and reasserted that "all voices are valued" in our meetings. Despite it angering me, I

merely responded to this email that I had received it. The reality was that I know that within our

professional paradigm, she was required to write this email to memorialize what was discussed

in the meeting and that they were doing what they were legally bound to do regarding my

possible filing of an Unhealthy Workplace Environment claim.

Traister's (2018) work regarding women's anger is illustrative of my feelings here. She explored anger dynamics in women, noting how we are enculturated to subvert our rage, noting how even feminist icons like Gloria Steinem worked to unlearn this subversion. Traister (2018) referenced a conversation she had with Steinem in which Steinem characterized the process of recognizing and expressing her own anger "in real time" took much of her life to embody (p. 56). She further elucidated this dynamic:

> If it is so difficult for Gloria Fucking Steinem to confidently let loose with fury, is it any wonder that in many places when I speak to students, young women ask me how *they* might express their own ire? They are scared, they tell me—in high schools, and on college campuses—to be publicly open about their rage, because they are afraid it will be alienating to their friends, to their peers, to men. They fear it will make them sound deranged or aggressive. They're not deranged and they're not aggressive; they're just angry. (Traister, 2018, p. 57)

Whereas women risk alienation if they show their anger in social situations, they risk far more in professional ones. Brunner (2000) studied women in educational leadership positions and found that the women whom she studied shared a common understanding that they needed to be "ladylike" in their interactions, in the way they dressed, and even in the way that they sat in meetings. These women also indicated that they needed to be vigilant in controlling their emotions, as they were quick to be deemed emotionally reactive and therefore less fit for their leadership positions.

This vigilance reflected the expectations communicated in the feedback that I was given in my 2017 evaluation about mood regulation and subsequently by my supervisor in the meeting with Human Resources about my "biting tone." My school district had narrowly defined

behavioral expectations for me, akin to those Brunner (2000) elucidated, that did not apply to

men in my position. I had to behave in a manner that suppressed emotion, never expressing any

sentiments that made others feel uncomfortable, regardless of the validity of those sentiments. In

my notes for my meeting with my supervisor and Human Resources, I referenced a principals'

meeting in which an older white male colleague said something that I and other colleagues found

offensive regarding race. I noted how rather than allow us to unpack the problematic nature of

what he said, we were silenced. "[W]e were told that this colleague 'has a lot of experience' and

that we should hear about it," as if his "experience" somehow mitigated his problematic

statement (Journal 15, October 19, 2021). This male colleague's defensiveness heightened, and

my supervisor's comment about his experience seemingly emboldened him. He responded by

noting that he was reading a poetry book written by a black woman as further evidence of his

racial sensitivity.

Although I subsequently reached out to my supervisor about how I felt silenced in that

meeting, I noted in my journal, "Nothing has changed with this colleague, and his behavior

continues. His comfort continually seems valued over mine" (Journal 15, October 19, 2021). I

referenced "comfort" in this entry, but this dynamic did not rest solely in the realm of comfort.

My straight white male colleagues were held to different behavioral standards than I was. They

were not only permitted to say things that were offensive without question; they were also

afforded more emotional leeway in the way in which they communicated, reflecting Traister's

(2018) explorations of women and anger and Taylor and Klein's (2020) examination of the Brett

Cavanaugh hearings.

In my April 20–21 entry, my anger about how my colleague whom I inferred was under

investigation was seemingly being treated during his investigation versus how I was treated in

mine was evident. I noted "how much he is being protected" despite my numerous experiences with him in which he was overtly patronizing to me and toward others. Alice commented on this entry, sharing that a white male in her school behaves in a similar manner. She echoed my anger: "We have one teacher like this in my school, a white male. He refuses to acknowledge IEPs and does not follow them, and is sexist and patriarchal and ableist. And historically he's basically been protected. It's infuriating" (Journal 41, April 20–21, 2022).

As frustrated as I felt toward my supervisor, I had empathy for her, as communicated in a text exchange with a colleague from one of the other schools in the district. I wrote:

> I think that her heart? Spirit? Is/are in the right place, but it's so misguided and comes from a place of fear. And she isn't capable of self-reflection. She gets defensive. She's also carrying a ton of internalized sexism, as you know having gone through my notes from that HR meeting. (Text communication, January 4, 2022)

This colleague agreed, noting that she wished that my supervisor would lead more "with her heart" rather than from a place of presumable fear. She further expressed how strange it was that my supervisor had policed my tone, surmising that this too came from a place of either fear or feeling the need to "prove herself" to higher administration (Journal 24, January 10, 2022).

Although I could empathize with my supervisor, I was hurt by her collusive behaviors. Einhorn (2021) examined how women's internalized patriarchy, or as she referred to it "internalized misogyny," compels them to reify "the power relations of patriarchy" by "policing each other" (p. 482). She noted the devastation that comes from a woman betraying another woman: "Many [women] have also said that although their hearts had been broken by lovers, they had felt more hurt, let down and betrayed by women" (p. 486). She continued this thought:

Women police each other to protect themselves from the risks attached to male violence

but also police each other against the risks of not conforming. Women often feel freer to

express their own aggression and even violence, painful as it is, but safer when directed

to sisters, children and friends. Thus, women also fear each other. (Einhorn, 2021, p. 490)

My supervisor "policed" me in characterizing the way I spoke in a meeting as "biting."

This characterization connoted her discomfort in my unwillingness to conform to the norm of a

woman eschewing any emotion. Although I had previously talked to her about how she silenced

me for the sake of a straight white male colleague's comfort, she did nothing about the dynamic.

Instead, she chose to police my behavior in the October 12th meeting. In considering her actions

within the context of Einhorn's (2021) work, it seems that my supervisor's centering of the male

colleague's comfort over mine was more about *her* comfort than anyone else's (Journal 15,

October 19, 2021).

Nevertheless, my text exchange with my colleague helped me reflect upon the tension

between my frustration and anger about how my supervisor positioned me and treated me, and

my empathy for her. This colleague shared her genuine appreciation for my supervisor "as a

person," a sentiment I shared. Despite all of the frustration, anger, and resentment that my

supervisor evoked in me, I did have a great deal of care for her, and I certainly understood why

she acted the way that she did. My relationship with her allowed me an opportunity to grapple

with the effect of others' internalized patriarchy on me while critically examining my own. It

also gave me an opportunity to work through this in a caring manner because ultimately, I have

great empathy for women who collude with patriarchy. The concluding thoughts in my journal

entry sat in this tension:

I think that this is part of the tension, too—my own internalized sexism and the women

with whom I work at Central Office. We all have different degrees of collusion. I would

like to think that I have the least collusion of all, and certainly the events of late and the

reasons I have gotten in trouble are indicative as such, but I always want to be critical in

not assuming that. What strikes me as internalized sexism is how much a woman in an

organization acts out of fear of reprisal—of formal reprisal and informal reprisal. (Journal

24, January 10, 2022)

It is important here to take a moment to consider a situation in which I enacted my own

internalized patriarchy. Several years ago, we had a teacher who was relatively new to the

profession. I tend to give teachers a wide berth, and new teachers are required by the New Jersey

Department of Education (2023b) to have a mentor teacher assigned to them as part of their

initial years in teaching prior to the state's issuance of their standard certification. This new

teacher had a mentor who was one of our veteran teachers, and I trusted the mentor teacher to

provide the guidance and support that this new teacher needed. As it turned out, this teacher was

struggling, and I started to receive messages from parents that they were displeased with her.

Such messages are not unusual—I receive them periodically, and few teachers go through a

school year without at least one parent displeased with something that they have done.

Nevertheless, I received several complaints about this new teacher, and I was growing

concerned.

This situation occurred prior to my 2017 investigation, and I had significantly higher

levels of anxiety than I do now. My nontenured status fueled that anxiety, and during this time, I

recall a strong sense of having to prove that I "had things under control" or else risk the

perception that I was not doing a good job at running my school building. I discussed my

growing concerns with the teacher and her mentor, noting that things needed to improve. I do not

recall giving her support beyond her work with her mentor—just an indication that I was not

pleased. I did the paperwork, documented my concerns, and ultimately, we did not renew her at

the end of the year. Although I have empathy for myself back then because I was merely trying

to survive my first years in administration, I am ashamed that I did not view this teacher as

worthy of support, nor did I know how exactly to support her. I had enacted my assumption that

new teachers "should just know" how to teach, and they either had "it" or they did not (Brill,

2018).

Considering this situation now, I can empathize with other women who collude. My

decisions were largely driven by fear; I was afraid of what my supervisors would think, and I

was largely acting as a manager rather than a leader. Not renewing the teacher was less messy,

and I opted to acquiesce to a less caring paradigm. Perhaps this teacher could have improved her

work with students had I provided more support, or perhaps not. I will never know, but I will

always remember that situation when considering the balance of supporting teachers and

ensuring that our students have strong and talented teachers (Einhorn, 2021; Journal 24, January

10, 2022).

Disrupting My Internalized Patriarchy: The Moon. The Moon tarot card represents

"Powerful Inner Workings" that involve intuition and deep emotional dynamics. As the moon is

seen only in darkness, this card requires us to plumb the depths of our "Shadow Self" to gain

insight and reconcile facets of ourselves that can feel troublesome. These facets of our shadow

selves also include traumas and subconscious biases that we carry, and The Moon tarot card

encourages us to confront our "personal demons and make them allies" (Horton, 2022, p. 21).

I understand women's collusion to my core. I have colluded with patriarchy, and my internalized patriarchy is a compelling force in doing so and is indeed an integral part of my shadow self. In fact, it is a constant tension for me, as it is far easier and less scary to collude than to challenge it. It certainly has its rewards, too. My supervisor moved up the administrative ladder quite quickly, as did other women central office administrators, and a large part of that acceleration was their collusion with the patriarchal dynamics of our district (Journal 25, January 12, 2022).

As Purewal and Loh (2021), Restani (2017), and hooks (2015) all examined, this collusion is not uncommon, nor new. hooks (2015) noted former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's collusion with patriarchy in preventing progressive legal movements such as the Equal Rights Amendment from coming to fruition. hooks (2015) described O'Connor as "exercising power alongside men" (p. 89). She succinctly concluded "[t]hese women validate the concept of power as domination and control, and exercise it, while assuring men that their 'masculinity' is in no way diminished" (pp. 89–90).

Given how girls are conditioned from an early age to be quiet and acquiesce to society's idea of what a good girl is, it is understandable that so many women collude with paradigms that subordinate them. As Restani (2017) noted, she learned from a young age that "when men approve, you will be liked, possibly loved, and successful" (p. 4), which is reflective of Gilligan and Snider's (2018) patriarchal archetype of a woman: someone who continually subverts her own needs for those of others. The success of women in central office required them to be complicit with, if not partake in coercive acts for the sake of maintaining their professional status.

Adler et al.'s (1993) work also noted the tension women feel between their upbringing that encouraged them to be "good girls" and having power (p. 95). They further connected this upbringing to women communicating this "good girl" message. Given that the lion's share of child rearing is done by mothers, it is highly likely that the message of female compliance is communicated through women. Additionally, Traister (2018) wrote about women in collusion with patriarchy. She noted how, in various contexts, men were not the only individuals "coding" women's assertive behaviors as a threat. She cited a moment in which Mika Brzezinski described Elizabeth Warren as "shrill . . . unmeasured and almost unhinged" (p. 56). Such characterizations are routinely used to discredit powerful women. Brzezinski demonstrated discomfort similar to my supervisor in her characterization of me as having a "biting tone" and likely to "yell at" my colleagues (Journal 15, October 19, 2021).

I began to push this concept of collusion further in my January entries. My reflections fomented considerations as to how I could reconcile the inevitable collusion with our district's systems with my need to remain within the system. I needed to remain in the system because I have financial responsibilities that I could not meet if I were not employed. I considered and subsequently discussed with Alice the negotiations necessary for collusion within our respective districts while seeking ways to disrupt them. Reflecting on these conversations, I wrote, "we have to collude to a certain extent in our work and our jobs—but also being disruptive in that. I've been trying to figure out how to negotiate relationships that I don't trust but I have to be in for work" (Journal 25, January 12, 2022). This January 12th entry provided a bridge between the subtheme of my internalized patriarchy and the subtheme of balancing my authenticity with professional self-preservation.

A Complicated Balance of Acting Authentically and Protecting Myself

Professionally: The Aeon. The Aeon connects the external knowing with new knowledges and processes. It is a card of reconciliation of concepts and according to TarotX (2022), it "represents a new way of thinking" that precipitates a period of liberation. Horton (2022) elaborated on this card, noting its connection to an awakening and rebirth. My attempts at reconciling acting in a manner that felt authentic and protecting myself from professional peril reflected this "new way of thinking" that allowed me to find different ways of interacting with others at work while maintaining vigilance for my sense of professional safety (TarotX, 2022, para. 3).

Alice and I explored the tension of behaving authentically within a system that has a narrow view of acceptable behaviors. Alice helped me to unpack the various forces involved in my fear of behaving authentically at work. Central office administrators had already documented my "moodiness" in my 2017 summative evaluation, so it was on record that I had been chastised for demonstrating emotion deemed unwelcome at work. This documentation gave me a tremendous amount of anxiety about being viewed as less than cordial to anyone and everyone, resulting in continued hypervigilant monitoring of my interactions with others regardless of the dynamics. Given that the summer administrators' retreat required me to interact with central office administrators in a concentrated manner, my anxiety was high. I never saw them throughout the school year as much as I did during these retreat days. In my August 17th, 2021 entry detailing the second day of our administrators' retreat, I wrote:

> [Central office administrators are] speaking, trying to focus upon positive things. I can't
> even look at [them]. [They] said hello to me, and I managed a respectful salutation back.
> Wasn't effusive in the least, but I'll call it a win. [Another higher-level administrator]

asked me how my summer was, and I managed to be polite and engaged (well, acted

engaged), and I didn't roll my eyes. Gold Star for that one. (Journal 13, August 17, 2021)

Another facet of this tension, of working to change a system from within, was revealed in

my conversation with Alice:

Alice: These moments of negotiating interactions with people who represent and enact

patriarchy can be so difficult. It is a tension, for sure. We need to be in the system to

enact change, yet, do we then become the system? It is a win, that you negotiated not

rolling your eyes and not being effusive or untrue to yourself. At least, that's how I see it.

Me: YES. It's this vacillation between doing what feels right and what strategically is

right in the moment. And then I wonder, isn't that authentic—recognizing that I can't be

authentic in the moment is being authentic as well?

Alice: YES! What a great insight, and a wonderful way to resolve, or at least work with,

this kind of tension. (Journal 13, August 17, 2021)

This comment exchange evidenced how Alice helped me to expand my concept of

"authenticity" to include the recognition that I was not being any less authentic when I acted

cautiously with certain district employees than when I was interacting with people with whom I

did not feel the need to be as cautious. This exchange contextualized authenticity for me and

allowed me to reconcile my interactions with central office administrators in a way that felt more

emotionally grounded to me. As Brunner's (2000) study illustrated, context is important. The

women superintendents in her study were cognizant of the narrow behavioral parameters in

which they were expected to act, noting that "they could not be natural" in their professional

interactions. Instead, they described numerous situations in which they needed to eschew

demonstrative emotion, speak in "a softer style" than that of their male counterparts who were

free to be more direct. In these instances, they were behaving authentically, as they were

cognizant, however oppressive, of the contextual norms in which they worked. Alice's

comments helped me to see this more nuanced perspective on authenticity (Brunner, 2000, p.

94–95). Of course, this reframing of authenticity did not quell my ire for the blatantly patriarchal

norms at play, but it allowed me to judge myself less in professional interactions in which I felt

the need to be more cautious. These acts were *strategic*, not inauthentic, also echoing the

sentiments of the women superintendents whom Brunner (2000) studied.

As with so much emotional learning, this reconceptualization was not immediately

resolved. In fact, I revisited this tension many times throughout the year, needing Alice to remind

me to be kind with myself and that doing what I needed to do in a given moment of difficulty

was indeed authentic. This recursiveness reflects St. Pierre's (2000) characterization of

poststructural feminist process of losing ourselves in the discourse of engaging and reengaging

with the same concepts and dynamics. Additionally, although my reframing of authenticity

required me to acquiesce to current gendered paradigms, it did not inhibit my desire or

willingness to consider how I could be disruptive of patriarchal norms at work. Rather, it omitted

a great deal of self-judgment. With this new conceptualization of authenticity, I had a wider

range of behaviors that felt aligned with whom I truly am. I embodied Jaggar's (1989) "mutually

constitutive" model of embodied knowledge that allows for both "reason and emotion" (p. 157).

Small Feminist Disruptions with Authority: The Chariot

The Chariot card represents the strength of a person's resolve to overcome adverse

dynamics. It is a card that calls upon us to use all of the disparate elements of ourselves to create

a victorious outcome. By unifying the seemingly opposing facets of ourselves, we harness a

personal power previously unknown. This card symbolizes the theme of small feminist

disruptions with central office, within my school building, and with colleagues that emerged in

my journal entries. These disruptions emerged in ways that, over time, seemed to precipitate

each other. Given that they involved me speaking my truth to those whom I felt held power, I

was fraught with anxiety in doing them. Yet, when one proved to be fruitful, it compelled me to

attempt another or consider how I might replicate a similar disruption in a different context

(Horton, 2022).

       As I reflected upon these moments within the context of relevant literature and with Alice

and Enzo, I discovered other possible locations for disruption, ultimately leading me to enact

them as part of my emergent feminist leadership. This recursive process—one that required me

to interrogate myself as much as I interrogated the system in which I worked—aligned with

Purewal and Loh's (2021) call to "decolonize feminism" by "knowing-being-doing" the work

with humility (p. 6).

       For the purpose of this study, I characterize small feminist disruptions as moments,

interactions, and decisions that I made in which I did not do or say what was expected within our

district's patriarchal norms. As I moved through the analysis of my journal entries, I began to

realize that there were two main types of feminist disruptions: ones with those hierarchically

above me and ones with colleagues, teachers, students, and parents. I address the former of these

in this section, and I address the latter within the context of my emergent feminist leadership. I

use the term "small" loosely, as it encompassed both simple interactional choices as well as acts

that required me to resist the urge to be silent, most prominently my decision to have the October

19th meeting with my supervisor and Human Resources, that did not immediately yield a

significant change yet seemed to shift the way in which those in power interacted with me

(Purewal & Loh, 2021).

The first of many small feminist disruptions I made during the 2021–2022 school year occurred during the "Positive School Climate" workshop in August of 2021. The facilitator for this workshop was a straight, white woman, who, as previously noted, used some of Brené Brown's work on core values. We moved through one particular activity in which we needed to choose one word to define our leadership style. The facilitator gave us a list of words from Brown's website, and she also allowed us to choose our own if it was not on the list. I chose and wrote down one not on her list: "feminist." In the journal entry recounting this experience, I wrote "I felt like a kid," because I turned my paper over after I wrote it. I further detailed my overwhelming sense of fear in positioning myself as a feminist so openly in an administrative workshop. Nevertheless, when the facilitator came over to our table, I turned my paper over and shared it when she asked us what core values we had chosen. I texted Enzo, who was also in our group, about my vulnerability in sharing, and he immediately texted back that he understood but commended me for "putting it out there anyway" (Journal 12, August 16, 2021).

In our comments exchange later, Alice echoed this sentiment: there was bravery in stating that my core value was "feminist." She also validated my feelings of vulnerability, writing that my reaction "makes perfect sense." I felt vulnerable and uncomfortable, but these feelings did not stop me from declaring my feminism. Although I did not know it at the time, the explicit declaration of "feminist" as my core value was an incredibly significant moment for me. It was as if my truest self had spoken and committed to this healing feminist journey before I had been conscious of doing it. This moment reminds me of the proverb "Leap and the net will appear." When I shared "feminist" as my central core value openly, I leapt into this work, not having any idea as to how the net would appear, but it ultimately did (Journal 12, August 16, 2021).

Although I was unaware of it at the time, my self-declaration as a feminist in the "Positive School Climate" workshop was an internal feminist disruption for me. I moved into the school year with that definition of myself at the forefront of my mind. When the October 14th principals' meeting occurred and my supervisor subsequently indicated her desire to talk with me, this internal shift seemed to compel me to request union representation. Once the meeting became more formal, and although I was terrified of what might come of it, I had reached a point of no return. I could no longer silence my truth, and the October 19th meeting proved this to be true (Journal 15, October 19, 2021).

The meeting with my supervisor and Human Resources in which I confronted my othering proved to be a defining moment of feminist disruption. After the meeting, I wrote:

> I'm furious, but I did the brave thing, and I stand by that, even though they clearly twisted it to serve their narratives . . . I'm really struggling, but I did what I thought was right. I hope something good comes from it, even if I don't see it. (Journal 15, October 19, 2021)

I shared this particular entry with both Alice and Monica. I was reeling from the experience, and my immediate feeling is best described as, "What did I just do?" Their support and solidarity reassured me that I was not alone and that what I did was important. Monica shared a similar positioning she experienced by a woman superior, noting her anger with women colluding with patriarchy and referring me to some texts to read regarding this particularly infuriating dynamic. My response was as follows:

> Thank you so much for sharing this. It makes me feel less alone. I told my union reps that I wanted them to share with other allies in our association about the situation. So much of this coercion RELIES upon shame to keep us silent and disallow any other

narratives than the dominant one. I want my counternarrative to be heard so that

if/when someone else feels marginalized in this way/coerced, they know they're not

alone. (Email/Text, October 19, 2021)

In response to my statement, "I did the brave thing," Alice commented, "Yes, you did do

a brave thing. I'm in awe of the courage and tenacity that this took." Alice and Monica both

expressed appreciation for my statement, "I hope something good comes from it, even if I

don't see it." Monica noted that my speaking out was potentially "opening conversations

which is so important for others in the district who are positioned in even less powerful

ways." Alice's response is indicative of the expansive way in which she thinks and for which

I am grateful, equating me to "the butterfly effect" phenomena:

> [T]his is such an important point. I so often forget that the actions we take, even when
>
> they don't reveal immediate outcomes, can have results that we may not be able to
>
> foresee at present, especially when we face barriers. You are the butterfly (Vernon,
>
> 2017, para. 2), moving your wings and changing the winds, even if we don't know
>
> what will come of it. (Email/Text, October 19. 2021)

Although my immediate response to Alice's comment was "I'm kind of sick of being

the butterfly. I mean, I can't help myself, but it's exhausting," I so appreciated her affirmation

and recognition as to how hard it is to remember that we may never see the effect of our

efforts toward change. She responded to my comment with exactly what I needed:

> Of course you are. I'm sorry. That makes so much sense.
>
> We've both seen other colleagues—F—comes to mind at the moment—go through
>
> similar waves of up and down, hope and exhaustion, despair, and progress. You
>
> reminded me that this work takes time. Please give yourself some of that, some buffer

space, some grace, as you said, in whatever ways are possible at the moment. x0x0.

(Email/Text, October 19, 2021)

The exhaustion I expressed in this October 19th entry is reflective of the emotional labor

involved in such acts of disruption and its toll on me. Ahmed (2017) described this feeling as

"not having the energy to keep going in the face of what you come up against" (p. 163). She

noted how difficult it can be "to find ways to keep going, to keep trying, when the same things

seem to happen over and over again" (p. 163). Yet, Ahmed (2017) also stressed the importance

of moments in which we feel that our efforts have changed something, and my expressed hope

that "something good comes from it, even if I don't see it" in reference to my October 19th

meeting allowed me to keep moving forward (Journal 15, October 19, 2021).

My perception of how the interaction occurred was confirmed by the recording of the

October 14th meeting. The colleague characterized the interaction as my supervisor not liking

that I was pushing back, noting that my tone was not "biting." Although I was grateful for this

affirmation, it also highlighted an internalized tension that originated in my childhood:

questioning my own perception and memory of situations. When my colleague shared with me

that they had recorded the October 14, 2021 meeting, I was, at first, relieved. Given my tendency

to default to others' perceptions of situations, it was comforting to know that I had proof that I

had been positioned as "having a biting tone" rather than actually having one. Yet, I could not

help but be frustrated that I needed "proof" by an external entity. My own recollection of the

meeting was not enough. I thought about Gilligan and Snider's (2018) patriarchy and trauma

connections, and how my default to the perceptions of others is deeply ingrained in my

childhood adaptations and my position as a woman in patriarchy. By needing external

confirmation that my perception of the October 14, 2021 meeting was valid, I subverted my own

internal truth. I was sitting in the tension between wanting to believe my recollection of the

meeting and struggling to do so.

Doyle (2022) and her cohosts elucidated how women routinely question their perceptions

of situations on the November 3, 2022 *We Can Do Hard Things* podcast. Doyle (2022) and her

cohosts, Amanda Doyle and Abby Wambach, discussed a situation that emerged minutes before

they were set to record a podcast episode with someone whom they were excited to interview.

However, when their team was working with the individual to set up the technology, the person's

husband became aggressive with one of their team members. Amanda Doyle, one of the cohosts,

then informed the intended interviewee that they would not be recording the podcast. When

Amanda told the interviewee and their husband this, they framed the situation as the team

member "getting their feelings hurt" (Doyle, 2022, p. 3). Amanda responded that the cancellation

of the podcast recording was not about the teammate's feelings; it was about how they treated

her. Doyle (2022) and her cohosts then decided to record their discussion of the situation.

Amanda indicated that when the team member first called her to share the way she was

treated by the intended guest and their husband, she immediately reconsidered, thinking that she

might be overreacting. Yet, the sentiments of Doyle and her cohosts were unchanged: they were

not doing the recording. Wambach noted the importance of Amanda seeing and believing this

team member's experience, and she further connected it more broadly:

> I would love to know how many women in the world right now, today, have had
>
> their nervous systems activated because they've been mistreated and they have learned
>
> how to condition, pushing those feelings away, going for a walk to take care of some sort
>
> of activation, swallowing it . . . (Doyle, November 3, 2022)

The cohosts also noted how common such situations are, and how women's reactions to them are to question how they perceived the situation despite feeling "activated" (Doyle, 2022, p. 8). Listening to this podcast was incredibly validating and encouraged me to move toward a space of greater self-trust, but it also highlighted the importance of allies seeing and speaking out when they see someone being treated poorly. My colleague reaching out to me and confirming that my behavior in the October 14th meeting was not untoward was exactly that. The colleague bore witness, and although I had wished that I would have a stronger belief in my own perception of the meeting, I viewed it as a step in my "walking," and another manifestation of resistance as an "ongoing practice" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 493; Taylor, 2020, p. 5).

Although the LGBTQIA+ book situation became a major point of frustration, anger, and strife in the fall of 2021, it resulted in several points of solidarity and disruption. Whereas I equated my 2017 investigation with The Tower tarot card, a card that represents a huge and destructive but ultimately positive change, the book challenge situation and the subsequent meeting with my central office administrators, in retrospect, had a more hopeful feeling to it. Although I was fearful of retaliation immediately following the October 19th meeting, I began to see glimmers of hope that what I did might yield some shifts in our district. I therefore relate these events to The Fortune tarot card, as it represents a turning point and a move toward good fortune and our own destiny. I did not know it at the time, but the solidarity that it created among my colleagues and the impetus to speak my truth to two women in power over me was the fertile soil from which every other small feminist disruption grew. After the November 20th meeting, I spoke with Atticus, a colleague and friend, and Enzo. The final line in my reflection on this conversation proved prescient, indicating that Alice's "butterfly effect" reference might hold truth: "We're all so frustrated, but we are united in our work, and that's something" (Journal 19,

November 21, 2021). That "something" proved to be the start of something significant that reached far beyond myself.

An Emergent Feminist Leadership Practice: Lust/Strength. The Lust/Strength[7] tarot card is represented by a goddess riding a lion. While she holds reverence for the "fierceness and potential destructiveness" of the lion, she has managed to tame it in a manner that is gentle. According to Horton (2022), this card symbolizes "a blending of the ego/conscious mind with the deep passionate emotions you feel, and the primal shadow-self" (p. 10). The card encourages us to embrace our most powerful emotions including rage and grief rather than try to tame them in an effort to appear "in control" (Horton, 2022, p. 10). The card indicates that once we embrace these powerful emotions, we will move toward our "Whole Authentic Self" (Horton, 2022, p. 10). The growth of my feminist leadership practice required me to embrace a more embodied, authentic way of moving through my work, and as I began to share myself—all of myself—more openly with teachers, students, parents, and colleagues, my leadership practice deepened and grew far beyond where I ever thought it could go (TarotX, 2022).

This emergent feminist leadership practice was grounded in a feminist ethic of care stance. Noddings (1984) characterized an ethic of care as a stance in which all decisions and considerations are grounded in "feeling with" and considering the emotions and perceptions of others (p. 30). As Gilligan (1982) noted, this stance stressed the importance of human connection and voice and being heard respectfully. As I moved through the 2021–2022 school year, I deliberately centered care in my work, and the subthemes that emerged in my journal entries reflected such centering. As I previously noted, several subthemes emerged in my journal entries

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[7] This card is referred to differently by the Crowley tarot deck versus the Rider Waite deck. The Crowley deck card is called "Lust" and the corresponding Rider Waite card is called "Strength." Their interpretive meanings are the same (TarotX, 2022)

in this respect: openly demonstrating vulnerability, disrupting educational hierarchies and narratives, enacting care with parents, enacting care with those who have hurt me, and grace toward myself and others. While analyzing these subthemes, it became apparent that they reflected how I viewed this research study as woven. I could not entirely extricate any of them from the others. They moved in and around each other, intertwining and knitting, to construct the fabric of my feminist leadership practice (Oxford, 2023).

Upon returning to my school building after this "Positive School Leadership" workshop in August of 2021, I was greeted by a large number of teachers readying themselves for the school year. Mid-to-late August is always a time in which my school begins to bustle with activity, and it is always great to see everyone again after two months of quiet. I miss these people, and over the years, we have seen each other through any number of life's hills and valleys. Although I am not particularly productive on these latter days of the summer, I am given reminder after reminder of how much I adore the people with whom I work and how precious they have become to me (Journal 12, August 16, 2021).

Openly Sharing My Vulnerability: Lovers. The Lovers tarot card is a card that honors honesty, transparency, and vulnerability in relationships. It calls for us to make choices that grounded in harmony and a desire to connect through this vulnerability (Horton, 2022). Yet, it also honors the bravery that is necessary to share one's vulnerability in making such choices. Accordingly, The Lovers represents the emotional dynamics inherent in my willingness to share more of myself with teachers, students, parents, and colleagues. I had made a deliberate choice to be more vulnerable with them (TarotX, 2022).

Despite seeing so many beloved staff members, my feelings of frustration regarding the "Positive School Leadership" workshop lingered. I sat uncomfortably in the wake of the

performative workshop, but teachers soon allowed me the opportunity to shift that discomfort

into care. A teacher came into my office to inform me that she was pregnant. This teacher had

suffered a devastating miscarriage last year, and accordingly, this pregnancy was wonderful

news. I told her that I supported her taking care of herself and her family and doing whatever she

needed to do prior to her maternity leave, and she expressed appreciation for this support. Then,

another teacher came in to share her family dynamics. We talked about aging parents, and I

shared with her my stepmother's Stage 4 cancer diagnosis and my breast cancer scares over the

past two years. I also shared some of my frustration about the "learning loss" rhetoric and told

this teacher as well that I wanted her, and everyone on staff, to put themselves first. This teacher

expressed appreciation as well.

These interactions with teachers reflected Kropiewnicki and Shapiro's (2001)

characterization of caring as "an ongoing activity and ethic" (p. 21). I was considering their lives

outside of school and by sharing my own personal life with them; I allowed my own

vulnerabilities to be present in our relationships. Moreover, by explicitly insisting that teachers

prioritize their families and personal lives, I was enacting Nodding's (1984) ethic of care in

considering their needs and expectations. I "stepped out" of my "frame of reference" and into

theirs (Noddings, 1984, p. 24).

In my August 16th entry, I wrote about my broader disruptive intentions that are evident

in these conversations with teachers:

> I want everyone to focus on their humanity this year, even when everything being thrown
>
> at us is telling us to subsume that in favor of productivity and student learning and BS.
>
> EVEN when I am inconvenienced or upset about what's going on. I want everyone to

own their personal lives and push back on that narrative that we have to be these

perpetual sacrificial saints. (Journal 12, August 16, 2021)

My explicit centering of care for teachers by telling them to prioritize their humanity

"EVEN when I am inconvenienced or upset" also reflected the core of Noddings's (1984) work.

Her ethic of care considerations included situational dynamics; caring did not necessarily look

the same in all contexts. Rather, it was a way of moving through relationship dynamics in a

manner that was always reflective of the individuals involved and how they experienced those

dynamics. An ethic of care stance is "rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness"

(Noddings, 1984, p. 2).

After these teacher conversations, I had a renewed sense of grounding. These teachers

and I connected on a personal level, and this connection felt recentering. This recentering

through having meaningful conversations with teachers and colleagues became another theme

throughout the school year. Whereas the disconnect between what central office thought we

should be doing and their performative "wellness" initiatives almost exclusively geared toward

students, neglecting the care of our staff, was a source of personal ire, reconnecting with the

people whom I value most became an emotional and energetic counterbalance to this ire.

Rather than brooding in my frustration, I saw these interactions with staff as moments of

resistance that further engaged me in this work. I channeled my frustration with the district and

how I felt things should NOT be done into my own interactions with my[8] teachers. Alice

commented on this journal entry, "I love how you are resisting patriarchy, even within yourself.

So beautiful" (Journal 12, August 16, 2021).

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[8] I am reluctant to use "my" in reference to the teachers who work in my school building, as it feels too patriarchal, reifying a norm that I am seeking to disrupt in this work. However, I will use "my staff" for the purposes of clarity to indicate only that these teachers work in the building where I am the principal.

Alice's comment highlighted an additional nuance that I had not previously considered: to resist patriarchy externally, we must continually resist it internally. In this moment, I examined my own frustration and anger regarding the workshop, and instead of defaulting to patriarchal collusion, or even emotional resignation, I reconfigured my emotion into an action that centered my teachers' humanity. It was as if I said to myself, "I know how terrible that workshop made me feel, and I will do whatever in my power to not have my teachers feel that way" (Journal 12, August 16, 2021).

Disrupting Educational Hierarchies: Justice/Adjustment. The Justice tarot card calls for balance and truth, noting that truth might not always be easy to bear. This card compels us to make deliberate choices that create more equitable, fair dynamics that consider our own perceptions as well as the perceptions of others (TarotX, 2022). However, it is not a card without cognizance of emotion. Rather, it views emotion as integral to this balance. As Horton (2022) noted, "Justice is fair, it is subjective and relative, not brutal, blind, and devoid of empathy" (p. 14).

This growing sense of justice pervaded my explorations of the power dynamics within my school and in my relationships with others. I considered how perceptions in the system are important to recognize, as they contribute to the system *and* the way in which people interact within it. I reference a text exchange with one of my nontenured teachers who had taken a sick day. She initially reached out to me regarding a parent call, and the rest of the text exchange centered upon my care and support of her. I saw that she took a sick day, and when she said that she was feeling under the weather, I told her that I was proud of her that she was taking the day to care for herself. (Journal 28, January 31, 2022)

My journal reflected Blackmore's (2013) and Brunner's (2000) delineation between "power over" and "power with" dynamics and how my interactions with teachers are impacted by them:

> I was thinking about how this work is not just the concept of power and how I enact it, but how others *perceive* my power, particularly with our nontenured teachers. My awareness must include the perception of others as well as my own self-reflective/critical lens. Basically, although I want to have "power with," I may not be perceived that way because of how teachers have existed in the "power over" dynamics for a long time— they are accustomed to it. (Journal 28, January 31, 2022)

Brunner (2000) delineated between "power over" and "power with/to" (p. 86). Whereas the power as it is most commonly conceptualized is "power over"—a dynamic in which one individual, group, or entity has power, and another individual, group, or entity does not, "power with/to" is more collective and communal. Brunner (2000) defined "power with/to" as "a capacity to accomplish certain social goals through cooperation among agents with various interests and concerns" (p. 86). This entry indicates my desire to embody a shared power dynamic with teachers, but it also recognizes the difficulty in this due to systemic forces.

Blackmore (2013) offered insight into these broader systemic forces that inhibit a "power with/to" stance with teachers. She critiqued the myth of gender neutrality, and more broadly, systemic neutrality, in her reflections upon how women leaders are commonly given the false narrative that it is somehow within their power to overcome systemic inequities if they just work hard enough. Citing historic legacies "of past or collective injustices based on race, gender, or class," she asserted how problematic it is to place the burden of changing these dynamics upon individual women (p. 145). She characterized this myth of systemic neutrality as "symbolic

violence . . . perpetuated when difference is treated as only and individual, and not also as a collective attribute that is socially constituted within systemic relations of power" (pp. 145–146).

It was evident that I was grappling with the tension between how I wanted to share power with my teachers and how the system in which we worked made this sharing extremely difficult. I wrote:

> I have to have this awareness in interacting with teachers—I need to be in that relationship and cognizant of how I am and how they perceive me in a place of power and how they act and perceive through that filter because we are all working in a paradigm that reinforces and reenacts "power over" regardless of how much we try and disrupt it. (Journal 28, January 31, 2022)

I concluded these considerations with the question, "Knowing that I am working in a patriarchal structure that runs with the supposition of 'power over' in the principal-teacher dynamic, how do I consider the internalized patriarchy of OTHERS who are, within that structure 'under' me?" (Journal 28, January 31, 2022). Despite my desire to share power with the teachers in my building, I was thwarted in doing so because of how the system inures us to the problematic nature of "power over" dynamics, causing us to acclimate to them.

Our acclimation to "power over" dynamics is an important consideration. In my comments with Alice on this journal entry, I articulated my realization that engaging with her was also, itself a disruption to school system hierarchies. I wrote:

> It occurred to me that in addition to being a critical friend merely because you and I engage like this, an important facet of your position and how you help my work is that if we were in the same building, I would technically be your superior within the norm

of education. Our work together disrupts that and helps me be even more vigilant in

my positionality, if that makes sense. (Comments exchange, January 31, 2022)

Alice responded, "Wow. That is so interesting. I hadn't thought about it quite that way,

but it really is true" (January 31, 2022). The disruption of positional hierarchies that my

relationship with Alice challenged was instrumental in this study, as I always knew that Alice

would look at my entries through the considerations of her own position. Although we are

women of similar ages, education levels, and backgrounds, our jobs are quite different from

one another. She shared with me reflections from her own study, and I was able to see how

hierarchies in her own work impacted her and her work with colleagues and students, which

impacted the way that I was able to tease out nuances of power.

I began to raise the question, "Can I realistically create a 'power with' paradigm with the

teachers with whom I work when we work within a 'power over' system?" Upon considering

this question and the entries of early 2022, it is evident that I was engaged in St. Pierre's (2000)

"play of discourse," as I began to look at the micro level of my work—my work individually

with teachers, students, and parents as a means for creating small disruptions in the macro level

of the broader system. Rather than view "creating a 'power with' paradigm" as a fixed point of

resolution, it was important to reframe this question in a manner that allowed me to move

forward not with a definitive plan to create a "power with" dynamic in my building, but to move

forward with a deeper awareness of how the system impacts the members of the system. I

considered this reframing, influenced by Blackmore's (2013) broader systemic considerations:

"Teachers/staff are going to perceive that systemic imbalance, and that is difficult to navigate. I

want to make sure that I am aware of this as I move through the work" (Journal 28, January 31,

2022).

A situation arose in February 2022 that challenged me to center this awareness and enact a feminist caring stance. A first-year teacher in a tenure track position, Linda, was having a difficult time with her classroom climate. One of the elementary administrators was in her classroom to sort through some materials that had arrived in January, and she shared with me concerns about the classroom dynamics and how they were potentially compromising instruction in the classroom. A few days later, our school counselor was in Linda's classroom and noted similar concerns. As a first-year teacher, Linda was assigned a mentor teacher who is a veteran educator at the same grade level. I shared the administrator's concerns with the mentor, and we discussed one particular student who was struggling behaviorally and how we might support Linda and the student. Another administrator subsequently observed Linda and had similar concerns. This administrator and I discussed how to frame the post-observation conference and the observation write-up, and we arranged for coverage for both the mentor teacher and a teachers' association representative, Lisbeth, to attend the post-observation conference. Lisbeth is a highly respected teacher in our building and in our district, as is the mentor teacher. In my journal, I shared the discussion in the conference:

> I explained to the teacher that we have concerns—basically stating that I understand that she is getting advice from a lot of different people, perhaps, and that could be overwhelming. However, what I am not seeing is a consistent implementation of much of anything, which results in inconsistent expectations for her kids. (Journal 26, January 14, 2022)

I also noted that I would provide coverage for any articulation, peer observation, or any other supports that would help Linda. After the teacher left, Lisbeth, the other administrator, and I remained, and we talked about how to support Linda moving forward. We arranged for peer

observation coverage, and we decided it would be a good idea to delay Linda's third observation

until mid-March to allow her the time to work with the mentor teacher and Lisbeth. After this

conversation, I called my supervisor and shared with her the plan. Human Resources needed to

know about nontenured teachers for whom we might not be renewing contracts, and my

supervisor and I had discussed my concerns with Linda previously. My supervisor noted that it

would be easier not to renew her now rather than wait a year to do so. I sat in this, knowing that

in terms of logistics, my supervisor was correct. Yet, my growing internal disruptions bristled. I

described this internal bristling in my journal:

> Linda rarely volunteers for things, leaves for lunch, never stays late, etc. So, here's the
>
> rub: I was inducted into teaching with the expectations that this job is hard, takes a lot to
>
> do well, and requires a lot of extra hours, particularly in the first few years of teaching. I
>
> knew that I needed to volunteer for things, get involved, and work hard to earn tenure.
>
> Now, I struggle with these expectations because although there's a part of me that really
>
> feels that this is how neophyte teachers should act, I recognize that this is a VERY
>
> coercive patriarchal paradigm that positions teachers as needing to be selfless to be
>
> worthy—like good women should behave. (Journal 30, February 15, 2022)
>
> At the end of this entry, I asked, "[w]hat do I owe her as a feminist?" I further grappled

with supporting Linda while considering how her difficulties are impacting students. I

concluded, "I'm not really sure what the right thing is to do here, and by 'right' I mean right in

the feminist caring sense. Damn, if this work doesn't complicate things" (Journal 30, February

15, 2022).

My questioning is reflective of the recursive, unfixed nature of feminist explorations. My

questioning of "what I owe her as a feminist" is itself feminist. I connected this sentiment to

Taylor and Coia's (2019) description of their work as "being open to shifting out attitudes as our

community moves and grows" (p. 2). Although I was not giving Linda license to struggle

indefinitely, as that would be a detriment to her students, I was allowing her the space and

support to grow. As a feminist, I owed Linda this room to grow, and I was affording it to her.

As planned, Linda was afforded release time to meet with Lisbeth and the mentor teacher

and observe them in their respective classrooms. My next journal entry involved reflections upon

Linda's positive response to the support we provided noting, "The change has been amazing and

quick" (Journal 37, March 20, 2022). Yet, this entry included a reflection on how Lisbeth helped

me to disrupt my assumptions of what a first-year teacher "should" be doing:

> Lisbeth shared with me that her first year was terrible and had it not been for caring
>
> admins who believed in her, she would have never survived. These words really, really
>
> changed my outlook on the situation. It was a little shift but a MAJOR shift for me.
>
> (Journal 37, March 20, 2022)

I observed Linda, and the difference in her classroom was significant. Later in the journal

entry, I noted "she seemed more at ease and enjoying herself with her kids . . . her kids were

more engaged, and she was able to focus upon academics while balancing the needs of some

students who have had a hard time for various reasons" (Journal 37, March 20, 2022). After I left

Linda's classroom, I contacted my supervisor and informed her that I would be removing Linda

from the nonrenewal list with Human Resources. I scheduled the post-observation conference for

the following day. I recounted this meeting:

> When Lisbeth, the teacher, the teacher's mentor, and I met, I started the meeting by
>
> getting off the table that all was well. I talked about the shifts that I saw instructionally,
>
> but I emphasized the calmer and kinder way that the teacher interacted with students, and

how it was a joy to see. I told them that I am recommending her for renewal, and I

explicitly stated how Lisbeth's comment to me about her first year allowed me to shift

my headspace and perspective. I was very open with my reflections and how this

situation has allowed me to grow as well—it has challenged me to embody feminism in

my work. (Journal 37, March 20, 2022)

I concluded my reflection of this situation, "It would have been so easy and tempting to

nonrenew this teacher . . . but what kind of an educator would I be if I wrote someone off so

easily? What kind of FEMINIST would I be?" (Journal 37, March 20, 2022). This situation with

Linda afforded me an opportunity to enact a "power with" stance with staff, both externally and

internally. Logistically, I allowed Linda the support, time, and space to grow as a teacher, but I

also disrupted my own internalized patriarchy. Lisbeth's shared experience as a first-year teacher

disrupted my assumption that a teacher's abilities would be readily apparent in his/her first year

of teaching. I was able to recognize my own biases and unrealistic concepts of what first-year

teachers needed to be while also continuing to hold Linda to high expectations: "It's not that I'm

letting her off the hook, I'm saying that teaching is difficult, but this is a learning space and we

are ALL learners" (Journal 37, March 20, 2022).

I expanded upon this idea of "a learning space for all learners" by noting what us

supporting Linda's growth models for our students: they get to see an adult learning too—

through mistakes, through victories, through everything" (Journal 37, March 20, 2022). I pushed

this idea further, bridging into the realm of the broader school community:

AND if parents question me, I have a grounding understanding of why I am choosing to

have this teacher back for another year. I hope I get asked that question because my

answer of "This is a learning community that focuses upon the process of learning for all.

We don't write anyone off at the first sign of a concern. We provide support, and we do

so in an empathetic manner" is disruptive. (Journal 37, March 20, 2022)

This sentiment mirrored Taylor and Coia's (2019) learning community that "can

accommodate and support us all" (p. 2). My work specifically with Lisbeth in this situation also

felt like movement toward a more "power with" dynamic in our school. I was honored that

Lisbeth felt comfortable enough to share the challenges she had during her first year of teaching.

She trusted me with her vulnerability, and I held that vulnerability with reverence, grounded in

my care for her. Lisbeth and I interact quite frequently, as she is one of two building

representatives from the teachers' association. She, Rosie—the other representative, and I have

an ongoing text thread, and over the years, we have become quite close.

For example, in a text exchange, we demonstrate our relationship's dynamics. It followed

us working through a coverage issue that arose early one morning. I had joked with them, "Do

you think most teachers know how much tap dancing we do behind the scenes to make

everything go as smoothly as possible?" Lisbeth and Rosie responded that although it is a lot of

work, it is worth it because we have "a problem- solving mindset" and that they and other staff

members were appreciative of how we work together. Rosie also shared that she had forgotten

the balloon that she bought for Secretaries Day, punctuating this text with a "facepalm" emoji. I

responded, "Awww . . . thanks for that. I'm doing a lot of processing on my leadership style and

how we negotiate everything here. I'm glad to hear that people feel that way" (Journal 42, April

27, 2022).

I reflected upon my relationship with Lisbeth and Rosie and how it impacts all of the

relationships in our building: "I feel like we all try to cultivate this culture of being human, and

when I share more of me, I allow them to share more of them" (Journal 42, April 27, 2022).

Lisbeth sharing her own vulnerable experiences as a first-year teacher earlier in the year was

aligned with this "culture of being human," as was Rosie's inclusion that she forgot the balloon

for Secretaries' Day. We text frequently, and we have an ongoing Instagram message thread

where we send each other things to make us laugh, to make us think, and to make us feel that our

experiences as educators are not unique. I was vulnerable with them, and in turn, they feel more

comfortable being vulnerable with me. My relationship with Lisbeth and Rosie reflected an

embodied feminist orientation in which there is no separation between the personal and

professional, echoing the women's ethic of care leadership stance studied by Kropiewnicki and

Shapiro (2001) and as Taylor and Coia (2019) considered integral to fully embodied feminist

work.

      Disrupting Dominant Educational Narratives: The Hierophant. The Hierophant tarot

card challenges us to disrupt what "traditional society expects" and "what or who you really are,

want to do, and be" (Horton, 2022, p. 6). This card cautions us to beware of illusion and trust our

intuition, allowing it to guide us as we encounter external forces committed to maintaining a

narrative that does not reflect the "whole truth" about something. The Hierophant exemplifies

my explorations of oppressive educational narratives and how educators are positioned in these

narratives, as it recognizes the disparity between how educators were positioned sociologically

and my growing sense of the insidiousness of this positioning.

      I explored this positioning as I began to feel a tension between my identity as an educator

and my desire to set healthy boundaries at work. As my stepmother's health declined in the

spring of 2022, the tension became even more emotionally charged. I described various ways I

give my own time to my job—calling parents on weekends and attending night events, to name a

few, then immediately noting my frustration with the expectation that as an educator, we should

always use our own time to attend events and do work things far beyond the school day because

it's "for the kids:"

> This narrative that educators are sacrificial and giving is—in my estimation more and
>
> more—a BS sexist paradigm aimed at making us feel that being our professional selves
>
> FAR beyond our work hours is part of ourselves as individuals, and when we challenge
>
> that—when we pull back JUST ONE OUNCE, our identities come into question. THIS is
>
> what patriarchy has created in education. This. It's not all-or-nothing. (Journal 43, April
>
> 29, 2022)

> Further elaboration on this tension revealed how my internalized patriarchy played into it:
>
> And you can see that I have so much anger and resentment about it because as I am
>
> writing these things, there's always that voice in me that says, "Maybe you're
>
> wrong/selfish." And then there are colleagues who go to everything because "they want
>
> to," and I wonder if "want" is really the truly accurate verb. We are so trained to think
>
> that's what we want to do for our kids. WANT. (Journal 43, April 29, 2022)

> This last excerpt reveals so much of my growing awareness of my own resentment of

how we have been professionally trained to feel that in order to be good educators, we need to be

selfless at all times. We feel unentitled to our own lives outside of work, and when we become

more protective of this personal time, we question ourselves and our identities within our work.

Alice commented on the word "selfish" in the April 29th entry, explicitly addressing the gendered

aspect of the word: "I think, as women especially, that S word is a loaded one, right?" (Journal

43, April 29, 2022).

> Morley (1998) examined the labor of women within educational settings, noting the

expectation that they suppress their own needs and feelings due to "sex role spillover," defined

as expectations that women have "in organizational settings which correspond with the

traditional roles of females and mothers" (p. 24). She equated the ideal of a "good teacher" to

that of a "good mother," noting that the societal expectation of both is to allow oneself to be

completely consumed by that role. She noted that this dynamic "is facilitated by a complex

cocktail of guilt, social positioning and feminist engagement with sisterhood" (Morley, 1998, p.

24). It is important to note the insidiousness of this idealization, not just because of its view of

woman as commodity, but more so that it is also perpetuated by women.

This sacrificial positioning has historical resonance as well. Blount (2000) noted how,

during the late 1800s and early 1900s, the public highly regarded women teachers as "high-

minded, upstanding pillars of the community who selflessly devoted themselves to their

students" (p. 87). Gilligan and Snider (2018) broadened the concept of "selflessness" and how it

is an expected trait of women within the paradigm of patriarchy. Ideally, women are "selfless"

and "have relationships that surreptitiously serve men's needs" (p. 6). The lauding of selflessness

as an ideal feminine trait includes an implicit statement that the opposite, selfishness, is a

vilifiable trait. Gilligan and Snider (2018) highlighted this converse statement: women exhibiting

autonomy and a voice are accused of being "nasty, shrill, or selfish" (p. 80).

This positioning is part of what hooks (2015) characterized as the process of gendered

indoctrination and reflected what Alice referenced in her characterization of the word "selfish"

as "a loaded one" (April 29, 2022). I continued to explore this dynamic in my journal, inspired

by a tweet by Adam Grant (2019) about the insidiousness of a "passion tax." He wrote:

> If you love your job, people are more willing to ask you to do extra work unpaid—even if
>
> it's demeaning and outside your role—and sacrifice sleep and family time. It's time to

end the passion tax. Enjoying work shouldn't come at a cost to your health, paycheck, or

loved ones. (Grant, Tweet, May 30, 2019)

I connected Grant (2019) to the "weaponization" of educators' self-image as "a sacrificial,

passionate server of children," further noting how "we can be our worst enemies in this respect

because we internalize" this narrative as well, and that it "could easily be applied to just about

every role that a woman plays. We are trained, conditioned, bred, etc. that our worth is

embedded in our ability to meet the needs of others" (Journal 32, February 24, 2022).

I continued my considerations of how women are conditioned to internalize selflessness

as essential to our identities in a later entry, further expanding it to how our ego influences our

identity as educators. I considered the statement, "We're always going to do what's best for

kids," something one of my colleagues, Kara, made during a dinner we shared:

We started discussing how we all go above and beyond in our jobs as admins, and we

feel, especially after this past year, that the district takes advantage of this. Kara said,

"We're always going to do what's best for kids." And so I asked, "But at what cost?" She

showed some resistance—like my even questioning that was—I don't know—not

offensive, exactly, but certainly not comfortable to even consider. Kara and I are friends

too, and we respect each other, which is why I feel relatively comfortable pushing back

on the narrative with her. The 'we'll always do what's best for kids' is almost a reflex of

ours, and that reflex—it's almost as if we need to question ANY professional reflex we

have because our work needs to be interrogated. (Journal 33, February 26, 2022)

I further examined this "do what's best for kids" facet of our educator identities in noting

how difficult it is to challenge this "professional reflex." I asked:

If we minimize that facet of our identities as educators, what then does our identity look

like? If we are in support and want to advocate for our kids, but not to the extent that it

makes us ill or to the extent that it makes us dysfunctional and allows us to be taken

advantage of, what do our jobs look like? (Journal 33, February 26, 2022)

Alice offered support and insight into my continued questioning of our educator egos. I

initially wrote: "I continue to think about our egos and the way in which we view ourselves as

educators. I think, the more ego we have in our work, the less reflective we can be, and the

[worse] we are as educators and as leaders" (Journal 34, March 7, 2022). Alice and I exchanged

comments regarding the impact of ego on our work:

Alice: And, maybe, even acknowledging our egos are in the work, is a start? If we

begin to recognize it, we may pause sometimes, and reflect? And even if we can't

always manage it, maybe the pause gives us room to be uncomfortable with just doing

things the same way, and opens us up to think for the next time, or the time after that?

What do you think?

Me: YES. I think this fits in with our humanity. Although maybe some beliefs/people

strive to eliminate ego, I don't know that it's a realistic goal. Rather, it's about

considering it as we move through life and work and remember that it can creep up in

places we don't really care to admit. (Journal 34, March 7, 2022)

Alice's comment recentered me within a feminist paradigm of an unfixed, caring

orientation (St. Pierre, 2000). Her comment offered me a less judgmental, less value-based way

of moving within the tension of professional ego and my desire to disrupt it. She encouraged me

(us) to "pause" and provide "room to be uncomfortable" with our usual defaults in the hopes of

perhaps changing the way in which we engage with it in the future. My response to her reflected

my appreciation for her reframing and how it allowed me to be more compassionate with myself when my own ego "creeps up" in my work (Journal 34, March 7, 2022).

Another site of feminist disruption that informed my emerging feminist leadership practice was within the realm of summative evaluations and conferences. In April and May of each year, a large administrative task involves writing educator evaluations and scheduling summative conferences to discuss them. In these conferences, we usually talk about instructional performance and professional goals for the following year. This focus is dictated by state and federal educational entities, and has been a cornerstone of the "accountability movement" (Marshall & Edwards, 2020, p. 9). This accountability movement encompasses initiatives such as Race to the Top and the establishment of the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards. Despite its positioning as a means of heightening the professionalism of the teaching field, Marshall and Edwards (2020) asserted that the accountability movement requires managerial leadership styles stereotypically considered to be more masculine, eschewing more collaborative orientations more commonly associated with women leaders (Marshall & Edwards, 2020, p. 9).

Accordingly, summative conferences seemed to be a site ripe for feminist disruption, and when April of 2022 arrived, I felt a resistance to the process that was stronger than ever. I completed the summative evaluations, as required by our district and the state, but I used the summative conferences as a location for feminist disruption. Instead of discussing goals for the following year, summative scores, or any other quantifiable facets of the teacher evaluation process, I used the summative conferences to build humanity among us. In my journal, I wrote about one of my first summative conferences earlier in the month. It was with a veteran teacher who is truly a gift to the profession. I wrote: "This teacher is an exceedingly skillful,

knowledgeable, amazing, educator, and there is nothing served by us having some [unnecessary] discussion about professional goals" (Journal 43, April 29, 2022).

This teacher, and almost all of my tenured staff, are incredibly adept veteran educators who balance their vast experience with their unwavering desire to learn and grow themselves. I largely view my job as putting the right people in the right places, giving them the tools and materials that they need, and allowing them to do what they do best: teach. Gerry Brooks (2019), a popular elementary school principal on social media, author, and motivational speaker, has often asserted similar beliefs. He encouraged administrators to get out of teachers' way and "empower educators in order to empower all of us" (Brooks, 2019, p. xvii). We as a staff discuss learning and social dynamics, and they often come to me with goals on what they would like to do or explore. They are the experts on their students and their work, and I want to honor that (Brooks, 2019; Journal 43, April 29, 2022).

Brooks (2019) also highlighted the importance of sharing ourselves to build community. He asserted the need for us to "be vulnerable, transparent, and tell your story," and in doing so, "you allow others to feel less alone if they're going through the same thing" (Brooks, 2019, p. 184). Reflecting on the summative conferences, I posed a related question: "What if—WHAT IF we looked at these summative conferences with veteran teachers as conversations about how to support them as individuals?" I noted that my conferences with tenured staff "center[ed] upon me asking them what they need." When I asked teachers this question, some of them respond[ed] with logistical stuff, but most launch[ed] into a discussion about their lives" (Journal 43, April 29, 2022). I allowed teachers to guide the discussion, as they are more than capable of establishing how they need to move their practices going forward. As I listened to them, I

quickly realized that more than anything else, they needed a moment to share themselves with me. I also realized I needed that moment as well.

Blackmore's (2013) explorations of feminist leadership was useful here. She noted how feminist leadership called for leaders to allow space for teachers' feelings of anger, fear, and despair, recognizing that these feelings are partly, if not predominantly derived from a sense of powerlessness within a system that routinely requires them to relinquish a great deal of professional autonomy (p. 147). By centering care in these conversations, I also centered the teachers themselves, allowing them the space to bring "multiple identities" into our professional space (Taylor & Coia, 2019, p. 15).

Later in the entry, I reflected upon this realization. I posed, "What if summative conferences centered more about having a conversation that fosters a deeper understanding of each other as people? What if they were organized more around ME getting to know my staff better?" I then listed the topics that arose in summative conferences: house hunting, menopause, spouses, aging parents, the evisceration of our profession and how we have nothing left for ourselves at the end of most days, migraine treatments, parental frustrations, medical issues, exhaustion, teenage children's anxiety, college-bound kids, and retirement (Journal 43, April 29, 2022). These topics arose merely from me asking "How are you, and how can I support you in this crazy time?" They could interpret that question in any way they wished. Their responses revealed the topics that were most important to us as a community, and I felt that they should be given just as much reverence, space, and time—if not more so—as professional goals. I concluded my thoughts on this, noting that my staff did not need help establishing professional goals. They had to create them for their Documentation Logs and Professional Development

Plans (PDPs[9]), and there would be time for those discussions as we began to prepare for the

following school year. I also expressed my frustration with establishing professional goals in a

performative manner. I wrote, "HERE'S MY GOAL: NOT KILL MYSELF FOR THIS JOB.

Everyone is welcome to use that for their PDPs[10]" (Journal 43, April 29, 2022).

The same entry included a text exchange indicative of how challenging the sacrificial

narrative expanded to relationships with colleagues. I documented a text exchange with two

colleagues regarding a non-school event to which all of our graduating students were invited. It

was a Friday, and I was exhausted. One of my colleagues texted another colleague and me to ask

if we were attending the event, and we both quickly replied, "No." We all shared our feelings of

guilt but also acknowledged our collective exhaustion. I wrote in my journal: "And this is

resistance, right? I feel like it's resistance. I always feel angry—like I need to be defiant in not

going to these things. I'm going to our school musical next week" (Journal 43, April 29, 2022).

As with so much of my work, it was far easier to enact a feminist caring orientation with

others than it is with myself. In my January 14, 2022 journal entry, I detailed an exchange

illustrative of this. A colleague had been working on a project of creating a digital library of

books aimed at expanding our DEI digital text resources. He called me and shared that he was

really upset because a central office administrator had gotten an email from a teacher at his

school complaining about some of the texts in the digital collection, particularly those involving

Black history. He shared that he was less upset about the complaint than he was about his

emotional reaction to it. I wrote about my response to him and our subsequent exchange:

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[9] A PDP is a Professional Development Plan that the New Jersey Department of Education requires for all teachers.
Teachers establish professional goals and use this document to record their professional efforts toward those goals in
a given year.
[10]This reference was made with sarcasm.

I said, "I'm going to take a feminist stance here and push back on this. What good would have done by preparing yourself? Would it really have helped? It's an emotional response, and it's a valid and understandable, emotional response to that feedback. This work is personal to us and in particular, it's personal to you—perhaps even more so than to me." I continued in saying that the emotional response is justified, and I don't know— would it have been better had you been prepared for it? He responded, "'I'm just so tired.' And I said, 'But that's part of the work—the exhaustion is part of the work." And he said to me, "Wow, that's such a good reminder. Thank you for that. That's such a good reminder. I always think about the work externally, and there's also work that we do internally." (Journal 26, January 14, 2022)

My continued reflections showed how I pushed this disruption further. I thought about how "this work is not just action . . . nor should [the action] always be prioritized" (Journal 26, January 14, 2022). I wrote:

It's just as important to consider our response and handling/managing/processing the emotion that comes with it, and the disappointment and the frustration that can come with it and doing that in a way that allows ourselves grace. It is so important for us to just be like that, and as I noted to my colleague, I do the same thing. "Dammit, I shouldn't have known better . . . I should have been prepared . . ." I'm beginning to question—what would that have done? What would that have prevented? What good is not having an emotional response? (Journal 26, January 14, 2022)

I then connected the frustration with having an emotional response to Gilligan and Snider (2018) and Bowlby (1969). I wrote:

[w]e are conditioned to protect ourselves emotionally—wishing we could detach so that

we might not hurt, just like Bowlby's attachment theory indicates . . . This is why I

continue to return to Gilligan and Snider (2018) because I find their connection between

attachment theory and patriarchy as foundational—the trauma work is necessary for me

to do the feminist work, and the feminist work cannot be extricated from the trauma

work. (Journal 26, January 14, 2022)

The emotionality of my experiences within the patriarchy and how I navigated continued

to prevail. In a comment exchange with Alice in late January, 2022, I referenced internal work

that I had to do almost immediately following my reflecting: "I have to reflect on a situation

that happened over the last 24 hours that is EXACTLY this. Hopefully, I'll have the time to do

so today or tomorrow. XOXOXO" (Journal 26, January 14, 2022). By "this," I was

referencing a situation that occurred in January of 2022 that proved to be one that wove

together several facets of my embodied feminist ethic of care leadership. It required me to

demonstrate vulnerability as I integrated disruptions of my internalized educational narratives

and educational hierarchies into my professional practice.

In January of 2022, the central office directed elementary principals to create a student

academic intervention program based upon testing data. We were given a student data set that

identified students for the program. When I asked the administrator who had aggregated the

data, if there was any flexibility in determining student participants, she informed me that we

needed to use these data, not teacher recommendations, to determine students for the program.

The data spreadsheet had already been color-coded to highlight students for the program, and

that administrator was coming to our school to discuss it (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022).

This intervention program and its execution is illustrative of the accountability movement that Marshall and Edwards (2020) critiqued. Our students were positioned as deficient and in need of intervention based upon test scores, and by default, our teachers were positioned as falling short of supporting our students. Moreover, with the requirement that the selection process would only involve student test scores, it removed teachers' input as a consideration, creating the sense of powerlessness that Blackmore (2013) identified.

As with most central office directives that I find problematic, I looked for where we had flexibility in this student identification process, and I realized that I could invite three specialists who are deeply involved in our Intervention and Referral Services process. My Basic Skills teacher, Reading Specialist, and School Counselor all recognized the importance of being with me for this meeting and rearranged their schedules to do so. At the start of the meeting, the administrator who had aggregate the data reiterated that we needed to make student selection decisions based upon the data sheets and that we could not add students who were not highlighted on those sheets. This was frustrating for us, but we managed to negotiate a roster of students with which we were relatively comfortable.

When we shared the student rosters for this intervention program, most of our teachers understood what had happened, as they were quite accustomed to how directives came to us. They begrudgingly accepted that they would not have much input into student selection. Lanie, a phenomenal veteran teacher, was an exception. I detailed my recollection of this situation in my journal:

> [Lanie] sent me an email . . . questioning why certain students were chosen and certain
>
> students were not. She was pissed that she wasn't part of the discussion, which I get, but

it wasn't possible—we had already finagled inclusion of the RS/BSIP/counselor in the

discussion, which was far more than other schools did. (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022)

My frustration in this recollection was clear. I was so exhausted by having to push for

what seemed to me to be a rational way to select students for the program that Lanie's

response made me feel unappreciated. Yet, I resisted my urge to clean it up quickly, respond

to the email with a "this is just the way it is," and move on. I continued the entry, noting the

different tact I took:

> Usually, I rush in to take care of the issue, resolve it, whatever—mostly out of my
>
> anxiety to not forget something and get over with a painful experience. This time I didn't.
>
> I waited. I answered a logistical question in the email but tabled the rest of the discussion
>
> until Monday. (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022)

Taking this moment, or "pause and reflect," of which Alice reminded me repeatedly

throughout our exchanges, was an internal disruption. It was uncomfortable initially, but

ultimately, it yielded a much more nuanced understanding of my reaction to Lanie's reaction,

and ultimately, it led to a far deeper conversation and connection with her. I enumerated the

reasons why my pause was so important:

1. I didn't react immediately. I sat in my discomfort and told myself that I would

   not forget to deal and that this issue wasn't pressing.

2. The time allowed me to check the following immediate emotional knee-jerk

   progression and get to the heart of what was really bothering me:

   - "I'm the boss—how dare you talk to me like that." Nope, Necole—that's

     your internalized patriarchy talking.

   - "She's pushing boundaries with questioning me." Nope, Necole—still in

the patriarchy, girl.

- "Why can't you just play along. We are. Can you give me a break?" Nope,

  Necole—this is not really what it's about for you. (Journal 27, January 24–

  25, 2022)

I realized that the center of my response to Lanie's reaction was simply "I was hurt." I

wrote, "It took ME, the one who is supposed to be MS. FEMINIST ETHIC OF CARE, 2 days to

come to 'I was hurt by this.' If this isn't evidence of truly rooted internalized patriarchy, I don't

know what is" (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022).

When Lanie and I had a moment to talk, Rosie, a teachers' association representative,

happened to be in the office, and Lanie joked, "Do I need my rep for this?" I responded,

"Heavens, no. It's not like that, and I don't want to operate like that." We got some logistics out

of the way: we were able to add a student whom she had wanted added and take off one whom

she did not feel needed the support as much. I then said, "Lanie, this is not a union issue or even

really a work issue. This is an I love you and a Lanie and Necole issue. I was really hurt by your

original email." I explained how it hurt me to think that she thought that I was in agreement with

this student selection process, and I noted that I also understood why she would feel hurt as well.

We both became a bit emotional, and we discussed our mutual frustration with central office,

particularly how they do not listen to teachers and building administrators. She told me that her

emails were not intended to upset me and apologized. I responded that I knew that, and I knew

she was coming from a place of hurt too, and that is why I wanted to talk (Journal 27, January

24–25, 2022).

Structural power dynamics in this interaction were complex. Although I was appreciative

of Lanie's candor and grateful for my perception of mutual trust, our relative positioning within

the educational "power over" hierarchy is one of supervisor and teacher. In this interaction, I

deliberately chose to take a "power to/with" stance, but as I subsequently explored in my January

31st entry, we were still bound by the structural dynamics that place us in positions of supervisor

and supervisee (Brunner, 2000, p. 86; Journal 28, January 31, 2022).

Nevertheless, Lanie continued with her candor when she unexpectedly brought up some

feelings she had about my 2017 investigation, which surprised me but also comforted me. I then

shared a bit of what happened in my October meeting with my supervisor and Human Resources,

noting that I did not want to have a conversation with her that replicated the way they tend to do

things. We ended our talk with me telling her that I loved her, and as I noted, "I want her to feel

that she can be imperfect and strong and vulnerable because those things make so much of what

makes her a phenomenal teacher" (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022). I further reflected upon my

response:

> Had I addressed this situation on Friday—hell, even the use of "addressed" is patriarchal
>
> in this respect—I would have defaulted to some dominant way of boss-worker interaction
>
> that would not have even gotten to what the real issue was and would have compromised
>
> the connection that Lanie and I have. As I have noted earlier, I really get anxious when I
>
> don't deal with something right away, but I am starting to feel less anxious when I wait,
>
> and I hope I can remember this situation when I get into that anxious place again.
>
> (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022)

In dialogue with Alice, I recounted how I subsequently thanked Lanie for allowing me

the safety to have the conversation with her that I had:

> I feel like this interaction allowed me to practice what I'm so deeply thinking about all of
>
> the time. It's like I'm exercising the muscles—the deeper ones that are ones where the

real strength lies, if that makes any sense. It's the emotional labor muscles! (Journal 27,

January 24–25, 2022)

Alice responded, "Just so you know, few educational leaders communicate this. You

offer your staff such a gift in cultivating this approach" (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022). I had

centered care with Lanie, and she had responded in kind, even validating my perceptions and

feelings about my investigation. By sitting in my discomfort, as Blackmore (2013) emphasized

as important to feminist leadership, I allowed Lanie and me space to disrupt the normative power

dynamics of our district and openly critique it with one another. Additionally, Alice's support

and friendship, as evidenced in her validating response about the rarity of educational leaders

responding as I did, allowed me my own space to grapple with my initial conflicted feelings

about Lanie. In another comment on the same entry, I thanked Alice for her work with me. I

wrote, "we allow each other to grapple, be wrong, be white women, and grow from that." Our

friendship continued to deepen as our collaborative work continued throughout the school year

(Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022).

A nuance of this situation with Lanie emerged through a member check that I conducted

with her regarding my analysis of it. I shared with her what I had written, and she took a few

days to think about it. When she was ready to talk, she noted that there was one word that she did

not feel was accurate in describing how she felt in a moment I detailed. In my January 24–25th

journal entry, I characterized her response as being left out of the intervention program

discussion as "pissed," but that was not how she felt (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022). She

shared that she felt "impotent" in the situation. She also shared that upon her first reading of my

analysis, she felt misrepresented, but she went back to her emails to me and realized how she

came across in them. When I thanked her for thinking about it so deeply, she responded that she

did not want to "give me a thumbs-up" because she wanted to honor my work, and that she felt

comfortable being honest with me because of our relationship. I responded, "This is why I love

you so much," and she replied, "And this is why I love you so much." Although I am cognizant

that my relationships with teachers cannot all be this open, I am grateful that I am able to have

such a connection with Lanie. I am also grateful that our connection made her feel so invested in

my study and in me.

      Enacting Feminist Care with Those Who Have Hurt Us: The Magician. The

Magician tarot card is the card of "personal power" (Horton, 2022, p. 2). It recognizes our

own agency in creating a life that we wish to have, noting that we have the power to change

dynamics that are not useful to us. It is a card of intention, and accordingly, is reflective of the

facet of this study that was deliberate and challenging: being caring with those individuals

who had hurt me (Horton, 2022; TarotX, 2022).

      In early May, my supervisor called me to discuss something relatively innocuous.

Once we had discussed that topic, she paused, took a deep breath, and told me that she was

taking a few weeks off. Her voice waivered, and it was quickly evident that she was crying

with me on the phone. I detailed my initial "mixed feelings" at the beginning of my May 6th

entry:

> [S]he definitely colludes with the system, particularly when she feels threatened. Yet, of
>
> course, I felt for her. She always says, "Family first," and I always find it to be treacly
>
> and basic—glazing over the emotional complexities of what that means. . . . She's
>
> interesting because she's the first to talk about wellness, and yet, there are some pretty
>
> deep-seeded things about her—her seeming internalized patriarchy and how she reifies
>
> structures that she too bristles at. I don't think that she's aware of this collusion—in fact,

I think that she would be upset if she were confronted with it—defensive, and she sort of

has in the past with me. (Journal 44, May 6, 2022)

My first reflections in the May 6th entry connote a tension between wanting to be caring

with my supervisor but also being resentful that in many instances, she was not caring with me.

Yet, the year of deliberately enacting a feminist ethic of care and continually reflecting upon that

compelled me to do so with my supervisor. I continued:

Nevertheless, I said to her that I was proud of her because she doesn't really take off for

anything and that I hope that . . . the reason she gave me for taking the time—was okay. I

keep saying that these years have been difficult and that we're starting to see the fallout

from it, and here's another example. [She] can be really micromanagey and collusive, but

she's still a human, and the thing is with feminism is that you're really not acting in a

feminist manner if you're not that way to everyone. So, I was empathetic and

compassionate. I guess what is so interesting about this situation is that I felt compelled

to enact a feminist stance with her—that in order to be authentic in myself and feel

authentic in my leadership—I needed to be compassionate with her. (Journal 44, May 6,

2022)

Alice commented on this facet of the work of the entry, characterizing it as "align[ing]

with ourselves . . . setting our intentions, your orientation to the world, and the specific people in

it, even those like my supervisor who have internalized and reproduced patriarchy" (Journal 44,

May 6, 2022). Alice's comment pushed this feminist ethic of care into a deeper realm for me.

Despite such a stance being disruptive to norms withing a school system, it was relatively easy

for me to enact it with my teachers and students. Yet, it is not an embodied caring stance if I do

not take it with *everyone*. Of course, perhaps I need to be more mindful of my personal

boundaries with individuals who have demonstrated carelessness with me but eschewing a caring

stance with these individuals does nothing to disrupt patriarchy (Gilligan & Snider, 2018).

It was as if I were saying to my supervisor, "You have frequently been careless with me,

but I refuse to detach from you because of that." Yet, it is important to note that Alice's comment

regarding alignment between our theoretical feminist stance and our embodied enactment of it

compelled me to turn my reflection inward. I wrote:

> I would be remiss if I didn't say that a lot of times, I enact my own internalized
>
> patriarchy by being deferential to [my supervisor]—asking her questions, checking to
>
> see if she's okay with me doing something the way that I'm doing it—to make sure
>
> that she will have my back. The amount of work that I do to assuage my anxiety about
>
> not being backed in a given situation is significant. So, although at this moment that I
>
> referenced in the reflection was one of genuine care, I also interact with her more than
>
> I care to admit in a manner that reflects my fear about going too far out of the
>
> patriarchal boundaries of the relationship. (Journal 44, May 6, 2022)

My experience of enacting an ethic of care with my supervisor was a manifestation of

Ahmed's (2017) "sweaty concepts" (p. 13). Ahmed (2017) described feminist work as difficult

and strenuous, noting that it required significant labor and strain. Yet, she called for feminists to

endure it in an effort to "transform a world" (p. 14). Heeding Ahmed's (2017) call for endurance,

I remained in the tension of caring for my supervisor. Although I had moments of resentment in

doing so—and this resentment was certainly "sweaty" at times, it felt right and integrated within

my feminist leadership (Ahmed, 2017, p. 13).

It is also important to note how the feminist care with which Alice and I held each other

allowed me to turn this reflection about my supervisor back on my own internalizations. That I

did so without needing any encouragement is a testament to how Alice's care for me allowed me

a safe space to consider the totality of my reactions within the conversation with my supervisor.

As she did in our comments exchange on my March 7th entry, she was again giving me "room to

be uncomfortable," yet because of our deepening connection and trust, I did not feel the need for

permission to do so. It was something for which I no longer needed an invitation; I knew that my

vulnerability in sharing those still-present patriarchal internalizations would be received and

given space. Alice's friendship afforded me the emotional safety to bring my work to deeper

realms (Journal 34, March 7, 2022; Journal 44, May 6, 2022).

Another situation in which I had to reconsider my ethic of care to those who have harmed

me involved the straight white male colleague whom I speculated was the subject of a Healthy

Workplace Investigation. Although I was frustrated with how I perceived him being treated in

his investigation versus how I was treated during mine, I began to grapple with the complexities

of my feelings toward this colleague, and Alice's support, knowledge, and reflection was

instrumental in this process. My considerations about him shifted mid-May of 2022,

complicating my emotional response to the district "protecting" him. I learned that he was now

on sick leave for the remainder of the year, and the speculation was that he would not be

returning to our district. Whereas my interactions with him frequently frustrated, if not infuriated

me, I could not help but feel for him, recognizing how the system had failed him. I wrote:

> It's been several years of…him being positioned as doing just fine when our relatively
>
> infrequent interactions with him indicate that he doesn't have the social skills that are
>
> critical to doing the job of a building principal. And yet, we feel badly for him—I feel
>
> badly for him. (Journal 46, May 14, 2022)

I further explored the tension between my personal frustration with how he had been allowed to treat me and other colleagues and that he was placed in a position in which he was doomed to struggle. The district knew him prior to placing him as the head of school building; he had been employed in the district for several years. I expanded upon how protecting this colleague seemingly ran counter to the district's pervasive distaste for messy situations. I wrote:

> It's ironic because I have gotten the message time and time again from the [central office] that [they don't] like messes and get irritated if you do something that inadvertently or otherwise makes a mess . . . And [this colleague] is a big [mess]. (Journal 46, May 14, 2022)

Alice's participation with this particular entry fomented an even deeper understanding of the complexities of my feelings about this colleague. In the May 14th entry, I referenced social skills as "essential" to being a successful building principal, noting that he struggled in this respect. In response to this, Alice validated my exploration, but also challenged my thinking. She wrote:

> This is so complex, and I love that you are grappling with these intersectional issues honestly. I don't know what the answers are, and I do agree, there are systemic problems. This staff member clearly doesn't meet expectations in a way that compromises relationships. I wonder, though, in an environment where maybe he'd been set up to succeed, in thoughtful ways, if there could have been growth? (Journal 46, May 14, 2022)

I responded, "[H]ow crazy is it that I cannot see through that because I've been steeped in this dynamic—I have ZERO frame of reference for a supportive environment that might allow someone like [him] to be successful. Thank you for the bias check." She

responded with further validation and solidarity, expressing her own "conditioning" in this respect as well. She then recentered us again, asking "This that is the work, I guess, right?" I wholeheartedly agreed (Journal 46, May 14, 2022), enduring yet another of Ahmed's (2017) "sweaty concepts" (p. 13). Although the upper administrators would probably argue that they did support him, Alice's pondering that he might have been successful if given more "thoughtful" support highlighted how incongruous the district's support of him was with his needs. Moreover, their allowance for him to continue behaving in problematic ways, in effect, worked against him. As I noted, "That's the district's fault—not his" (Journal 46, May 14, 2022).

This exchange is a sound example of how I danced with my data during this analysis phase, embracing the St. Pierre's (2000) poststructural feminist state of getting "lost in the play of discourse" (p. 477) and embodying Ulmer's "rusty" research movement between past and present (p. 244). In this research dance, I allowed my anger toward this colleague to be present, while also acknowledging that he was placed in a position by a system that did not equip him or support him in that position. In this analytical process, I continually turned the work on itself, delving deeper into what exactly enacting an ethic of care in my work meant. It had not been as easy to be caring toward this colleague. And yet, this work did not feel authentic if I did not enact an ethic of care toward him, and subsequently toward other males to whom I felt similar, if not more pungent anger.

A more difficult individual to whom I felt compelled, if begrudgingly so, to enact an ethic of care was a male central office administrator. In my March 13th entry, I described an interaction that we had in a principals' meeting that he attended. For a bit of fun, Kara brought a book donated to their school's book swap entitled *I Need a New Butt*. We all shared

a laugh about the book, and we joked that [this central office administrator] should read the

first page from the book. He turned to the first page, closed the book, laughed awkwardly, and

said that he could not read the page aloud (Journal 36, March 13, 2022).

I reflected upon this interaction as I later drove home, considering a podcast episode of

We Can Do Hard Things. In this episode, Glennon expressed how she grew up in a very

heteronormative home with narrow gender roles, including the expectation that men needed to

be "strong and steady and stoic" (WCDHT Podcast, March 10, 2022). DiMuccio and Knowles

(2020) examined this norm in exploring how fragile masculinity is driven by anxiety, echoing

Gilligan and Snider's (2018) description of "the patriarchal ideals of manhood" that require men

to eschew emotional expression (p. 77). I considered what I knew about this central office

administrator's upbringing in rural America and how these roles were similar "and probably

even more rigid, toxically masculine expectations" (Journal 36, March 13, 2022). The mere

thought of reading a page from the book was enough to elicit what appeared to be an avoidant

response (Bowlby, 1969).

I grappled with a balance between grace for how his experiences have shaped him and

how I experienced my interactions with him:

> I'm not saying that I am now viewing him as this vulnerable individual because that
>
> would diminish all of my crap experiences with him . . . I could NEVER do that, but this
>
> consideration of his own experiences . . . did soften things for me a bit. I mean, I will
>
> NEVER allow myself to be vulnerable around him . . . but I wouldn't be doing this work
>
> if I didn't consider him as a human. (Journal 36, March 13, 2022)

Ahmed's (2017) "sweaty concepts" helped to frame such explorations as well. It is not

surprising that acknowledging the humanity of those with whom we have a challenging

relationship is a sweaty endeavor. Offering grace to someone by whom I was personally marginalized and through whom I have been systemically marginalized is not easy. As Ahmed (2017) advocated, I made myself "stay with the difficulty" and "keep exploring and exposing this difficulty" (p. 13). The labor of offering humanity to men with whom I have struggled is not easy, as the next paragraph in the March 13th entry clearly indicated: "I laughed as I typed that because the next immediate thought was, 'That's all I've got. That's all the empathy for a straight white man that I can muster this week. No more to spare—all out'" (Journal 36, March 13, 2022). I then connected the exhaustion of empathizing with these men back to this study: "I think that the most difficult things in this work—this healing feminist autoethnographic work—is the consideration of the humanity of our oppressors and the consideration that they carry burdens too" (Journal 36, March 13, 2022).

In addition to venerating the "sweat" of the work, Ahmed (2017) also emphasized the importance of allowing it to be present in our academic writing. Disrupting the normative academic expectation "to tidy our texts," she called for the inclusion of "the struggle we have of getting somewhere" in our writing (p. 13) and explicitly and openly embracing "the strain" of feminist study (p. 14). My concluding paragraph in this entry was illustrative of this messiness, as I acknowledged the work's complexity:

> Systemic oppression affects ALL OF US negatively, not just those who are most
> oppressed in it. The oppressors are carrying loads too, it's just that instead of owning
> their [issues] and taking responsibility for it and measures to mitigate it, they double-
> down and oppress others to make themselves feel a little less vulnerable or a little less
> weak—a little more in control or in power. (Journal 36, March 13, 2022)

Grappling with my criticism of my male colleague and male supervisor and my ethic of care stance toward them was indeed quite "sweaty" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 13). It would be far easier to view them solely as sexist oppressors with little, if any, humanity. Admittedly, there were many times during this study in which I felt compelled to do so. But doing so would deny the work its richness, depth, and nuance. As St. Pierre (2000) noted, "resistance and freedom are daily, ongoing practices" (p. 493), and considering the humanity of my oppressors is critical to a feminist resistance. As hooks (2015) posed, "Perhaps it is the knowledge that everyone must change, not just those we label enemies or oppressors, that has far served to check our revolutionary impulses" (p. 166).

Another group to whom I felt compelled to enact an ethic of care despite my experiences with them often being challenging, if not oppressive, was that of my students' parents. As the 2021–2022 school year wore on, it was evident that my professional weariness was growing. One of the most difficult aspects of this was the increasing number of parents demonstrating a lack of emotional regulation in our interactions with them.

I wrote about these precarious mental health dynamics: "I've dealt with so many parents who are incapable of regulating their own emotions—it's no wonder that their children are not doing a good job of it. Actually, their kids are doing a BETTER job of it than they are" (Journal 42, April 27, 2022). I continued detailing incidents of parents yelling at me and at my staff. I wrote about parents infuriated about COVID quarantining requirements and other health requirements set by the state. I shared another situation of a parent turning a conversation about her son's aggressive behavior into a castigation of my inability to find a special education teacher replacement, despite me sharing that there were no certificated candidates and detailing our efforts to staff the position in an alternate way. We repeatedly had parents exclaiming, "It's

not fair!" to parameters to which we legally had to adhere. The impact of these situations was

quite evident:

> I have to maintain the ultimate composure with all of these people while they are
>
> completely off the rails, and then I find myself so angry and exhausted thereafter. There's
>
> no relief. And then, I don't have anything left for my family . . . It's all used up by the
>
> time I get home. I'm perpetually exhausted. It shouldn't be like this. (Journal 42, April
>
> 27, 2022)

I explored these parental emotional dynamics in subsequent entries, and the entries began

to indicate a shift toward a more feminist caring stance in engaging with parents, both in the way

I attempted to care for them and in the way I maintained care for myself. In my May 27th entry, I

noted my developing ability to navigate conversations in which a parent was being

argumentative or defensive: "I tend to draw a boundary—whether it's about what I think given

the dynamic or what my decision is in a given situation—and then try to tap into some sort of

emotional connection." I then noted a specific "line" that I had begun to use and continued to use

for the remainder of the year: "I understand that you do not like my answer, but it remains my

answer" (Journal 50, May 27, 2022).

> I connected this tactic back to my struggle with it:
>
> In doing this, I feel more empowered in my interactions with them, whereas I was always
>
> so anxious about them. I think the anxiety comes from a place of being worried that my
>
> reactions will be too emotional. The reality of it is that parents who are unreasonable and
>
> often in the same conversation downright rude and disrespectful have made me feel
>
> powerless in the past . . . I had never realized that it was more about my own sense of
>
> control (or feeling that I didn't have control) in situations more than anything else.

(Journal 50, May 27, 2022)

I began to consider that these boundaries-setting behaviors previously viewed solely as acts of self-protection were actually acts of care for others too. By defining boundaries with emotionally dysregulated parents, I was building more emotional strength and freedom, which I could channel into creating more care-centered dynamics with students and families. I resisted my anxious attachment tendencies to prioritize the comfort of others over my own needs (Bowlby, 1969; Gilligan & Snider, 2018). I wrote, "If I'm being honest, I kind of have fun with it. It feels GOOD to be in control of the situation . . . I guess it's a form of agency that is developing within me" (Journal 50, May 27, 2022).

The symbiosis of my own boundary setting with my ethic of care enactment was evident in this excerpt:

And I think this agency is easier to access for me BECAUSE I have other parental

interactions that are positive and deep and honest about their kids. These conversations

are kind and aimed at supporting kids in their growth and mistakes and how these

dynamics can serve them if we help them to use them in positive and strong ways.

(Journal 50, May 27, 2022)

I took risks in both setting boundaries with parents and sharing some more personal aspects of my life with them, weaving vulnerability into my feminist leadership. I embodied St. Pierre's (2000) "daily, ongoing practices" of "resistance and freedom" (p. 493). I resisted the patriarchal norms that Brunner (2000) noted regarding appropriate behavior for an educational leader and freed more of my personal self in my work. My more personal way of interacting with parents reflected the work of Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001) in their study of women principals who consciously enacted an ethic of care in their leadership. These women also

blurred lines between the professional and the personal, a paradigm that became integral to my

work during the 2021–22 school year. I wrote:

> I try to give [parents] the space to be a bit vulnerable with me, often by sharing my aim of
>
> understanding what the problematic behavior is a manifestation of, and then expressing
>
> my connection to it. Anxiety is a big one—I frequently share my anxiety issues with
>
> parents and discuss what it looked like (in retrospect) for me, and even why I was so
>
> anxious. I know that they're mostly worried about their kids when they hear from me,
>
> and I try to remember that. (Journal 50, May 27, 2022)

I concluded this reflection with a specific student conflict situation and how I engaged

with the students, and subsequently their parents, in discussing it. Two students had an argument

about cutting the lunch line, which resulted in both students reacting in a manner that was not

particularly conducive to peaceful resolution. Rather than focusing merely upon the student

interaction and behaviors, I centered the conversations around what motivated them to act the

way that they did. I detailed my work with our school counselor, Kelly, in supporting these

students:

> We had them share what's going on, and we validated both students' feelings and BOTH
>
> the positive/understandable motivations that they both had—the boy got called out
>
> publicly, and that's really embarrassing and frustrating, and the girl seeing something she
>
> felt wasn't fair and calling it out. We noted that the frustration of the boy was
>
> understandable, and that the sense of justice that this girl has is a great thing, but that we
>
> need to figure out how better to use it and direct it. (Journal 50, May 27, 2022)

When I called each of the parents, I centered the discussion on what the emotional roots

of the situation were. With the parent of the lunch line "cutter," I validated her son's

understandable embarrassment in the way the other student called him out and focused our talk on how to support him in a more resolution-centered response without minimizing the validity of his emotional response. The other parent was a mom who, in previous interactions, had demonstrated defensiveness and a tendency to react emotionally to teacher feedback about her daughter's behaviors. With her, I noted that her daughter's reaction to the line-cutting stemmed from her strong sense of justice. I noted how I related to her daughter's reaction and how this sense of justice "is such a blessing and can be SUCH A CURSE" (Journal 50, May 27, 2022). I focused our discussion on how we could support her in developing discernment in how and when to engage that sense of justice. The mother was appreciative of the way we handled the situation, and she and I had an engaging, kind conversation (Journal 50, May 27, 2022).

These conversations felt wonderful, and I was feeling a greater sense of richness and nuance in my work. Another interaction of this nature occurred in June with the father of a child who is dear to my heart. This child has suffered several traumas, and she displays attachment dynamics in her interactions with her peers and with us. The end of each school year brings anxiety for her, resulting in her acting in ways that alienate her from her peers. In my June 27th entry, I described a phone call that I had with her father in which he expressed exasperation in managing all of the dynamics of co-parenting with the child's mother, with whom he has an acrimonious relationship. I asked him if he was seeing a therapist, noting how it was unfathomable how he was navigating all that he was, on top of the pandemic, without having someone with whom he could process it all. I further wrote:

[H]e thanked me profusely, and it seemed as if something broke. . . . I see what

toxic masculinity does to men like him. I wanted to offer him grace. I have no idea if

he'll follow through, but at least I disrupted the narrative that he needed to be tough or

whatever. (Journal 60, June 27, 2022)

Grace: The Star

The Star tarot card represents balance and inner strength, often stemming from a recent

difficult time. It indicates a journey that is both spiritual and intellectual, fomenting a time that is

illuminating and meaningful to us (Horton, 2022, p. 20). It is a card of hope and trust that our

experiences lead us to insight that engages all of our knowledges. The Star tarot card is

emblematic of the complexity of emotion that came with my personal experiences of late spring

and how I integrated them to allow myself some well-needed grace personally and professionally

(TarotX, 2022).

In the late spring of 2022, I felt more emotionally connected and grounded in my work

than ever. Yet, this was also a time of uncertainty and grief, which complicated things

considerably. Throughout the month of May, my stepmother, G, who had been diagnosed with

Stage 4 pancreatic cancer a year prior, was in a steep decline. G was a force of nature, a prolific

potter and cook who touched the lives of so many. I started my journal entry, "I'm going to

establish at the forefront of this entry that my stepmother is dying. Like, in hospice dying, and

this waiting for 'The Call' is eviscerating and awful. That's my baseline" (Journal 51, June 1,

2022). My stepmother's health and concern for my father and my stepsister, with whom I am

extremely close, was compounded by my anxiety and the exhaustion of trying to run a school

building, while also dealing with my own profound grief. I continued:

My chest feels like it's going to explode. Also, strangely and simultaneously, I feel like I

could sleep for days. I can't really focus upon anything else, and I've planned all that I

can for the next few days if I have to be out, so I figured I would write here instead.

Might not be the most cogent entry, but I am following my feminist path and just getting

it down, warts, emotions, and all. (Journal 51, June 1, 2022)

G's decline in May, which was always an extremely busy month at school, made the

challenge of sitting in my own discomfort exponentially more difficult. Yet, I felt supported in

doing so and instead of detaching emotionally, I just sat. It was as if my work during the

previous months had put me in a more authentic, aware space to navigate the eviscerating loss of

my stepmother. Rather than resisting the emotion, I allowed the emotions to come, as indicated

in my reference to "warts, emotions, and all" (June 1, 2022). Mike offered particular solace,

support, and understanding during this time. He had lost both of his parents not long ago and he

repeatedly checked in with me, each time validating my anxiety and grief. He expressed his

"understanding" of "the exact space" I was in at the moment. I concluded the entry, "I guess it's

about finding your people and reaching out to them when you need some leveling and

centering." Alice supported this, reaffirming our connection, "Yes. You have a team. Use us"

(Journal 14, June 1, 2022).

During this time, my spiritual awareness became heightened as well, and I noticed

various fortuitous dynamics and appreciated them, as they were instrumental in how I moved

through the world, balancing my responsibilities and my grief. I wrote my June 5th entry after a

run that I did with a woman, Leia, whom I knew peripherally but with whom I had never really

talked. Although we began our run in a group, Leia and I pulled ahead. I shared with her what

was going on with my stepmother, and she shared her grief in losing her mother recently. We

talked about the beauty and the utter devastation of death, citing Glennon Doyle's (2020) term

"brutiful"—a term that acknowledged how often brutal experiences are also beautiful (p. 254). I

messaged Leia later that morning, thanking her for the run and telling her that I was holding her in my heart. We had connected deeply that morning, and when I learned of my stepmother's passing later that day, I almost immediately messaged her to tell her. It was as if that run allowed me the space to process what was about to happen.

I also reflected in my June 5th entry about boundaries and grief. A family whom I had known since I began my tenure as principal was in the midst of their own grief. The mother was in the end stages of colon cancer. The son was still a student of mine, and his father had been very communicative about what was going on with his wife's illness throughout the past year. I wrote about my anxiety about supporting this family for whom I cared so much while dealing with my own eviscerating grief:

> As I was driving home from the run, I thought about how I cannot imagine how I can be there for my [student] and his family—how can I 'hold it together' for them when I am in such the same emotional mess? What does that even look like? I don't know where my grief ends and theirs begins. Or does it? I keep noticing how I push up against these norms of what a principal is supposed to be and how I am supposed to be, and I don't know where the norm is and what is really something that I shouldn't do. (Journal 52, June 5, 2022)

Alice reassured me, "You will figure this out as you go. And it does not need to be 'right' or 'perfect.' Just trust, as best you can. You are trustworthy, and so are your students" (Journal 52, June 5, 2022). I had "used my team," as Alice encouraged me to do in my June 1st entry. I needed the reminder, even after all of the work that I had done thus far this year, that I could be trusted to act in a way that was authentic and caring, both to myself and my family and to my student and his family. I had spent the previous afternoon with my father,

sharing a sandwich in his backyard and listening to him talk about his dying wife. He shared

some precious moments in their relationship. She had given him the gift of seeing things

differently, and he expressed how much he loved her ability to notice how light moved and

changed as he marveled at the leaves above us. I concluded my June 5th entry:

> So, I can put the time with my dad last night squarely in the brutiful category. It was
>
> devastating and beautiful, but I am grateful for that time with him, talking about G and
>
> listening to him talk about the love of his life. Although this seemingly doesn't have a
>
> direct, clear connection to my work according to normative standards or whatever, I feel
>
> like it's all connected and intentional. The time with my dad, the time with Leia, the time
>
> on the porch right now under the umbrella in the sunshine. I sit in the terrible and the
>
> beautiful and the devastating and the breathtaking, and that cannot possibly be
>
> disconnected from my work with children, staff, and families. (Journal 52, June 5, 2022)

My stepmother died in the early afternoon of June 5th. I did not write the next day, instead

I was sitting in a daze, trying to figure out arrangements, and calling the few family friends

whom I was tasked to call. Although my stepmother's death was incomprehensible, there was a

sense of relief. She was out of pain, and we were no longer in this excruciating holding pattern. I

was able to write again on June 7th and 8th, and this entry held that sense of relief:

> I am in a lot of pain and sadness, but I cannot help but feel that all of this experience—
>
> and the experience of enduring this past year since her diagnosis while running a school
>
> building in a pandemic . . . will make me more human . . . I am more willing to share my
>
> humanity with others in a professional setting. Not only am I more willing, I feel
>
> compelled to do so . . . To me, feminist is more human. It is to think about and live within
>
> the nuances of pain and love and grief and joy. It's to understand that all of these things

can and do exist in the same space, and that's so confusing—even the confusion lies there

with them. (Journal 53, June 7–8, 2022)

And yet, amidst the confusion, there was also clarity. After worrying about what to say to

the family whose wife had died only one day before my stepmother had, I trusted my own

"trustworthiness" and texted the father, "I am so sorry, but I will not be able to make the

services. My stepmother lost her fight to cancer on Sunday, and we're dealing with all that this

is. I am sending all the love and support I have to spare to you and your family." He responded

with condolences and sympathy, and I responded by telling him how connected I feel with his

family, noting "Your wife, like my stepmother, was such a force of nature ❤" (Journal 53, June

7–8, 2022). I admitted that although showing this vulnerability in a work context was "a little

disquieting," I noted "I would rather sit with that disquiet and be this way than withhold it and

not" (Journal 53, June 7–8, 2022).

This vulnerability was evidenced in the grounding of my work within the context of my

personal life. As Taylor and Coia (2019) realized, so much of who we are as educators is who we

are as women, and this experience of shared grief was intensely personal. I brought more of

myself to it than perhaps any other professional experience I ever had, and it allowed me to

consider what I might learn from the depth of this connection. The emotionality of it was

valuable knowledge.

This deep connection also had a healing element to it. Pérez and Saavedra's (2020) work

highlighted the healing potential of spirituality in research, noting the importance of connection

in this healing. My connection to this family felt so deeply ingrained in our mutual grief.

Through our years of working together, I always found this family to be kind and supportive,

always appreciative of my efforts with their children. Yet, our losses being in such close

proximity to one another brought us to a different level of interconnection, a facet of healing centered by Womanist and Chicana feminists (Anzaldúa, 1987).

The day after my stepmother's cremation service, I had my 6-month breast scans. In the previous two years, I had had four biopsies that resulted in a diagnosis of Atypical Lobular Hyperplasia, a benign condition, but one that places me at high risk for breast cancer. During this time, I began taking a low dose of Tamoxifen at the recommendation of my oncologist because it has been shown to calm abnormal cellular activity in the breasts. I get "live" scans, which means that they read them right away while I am there. This makes for an intense visit, but also one that somewhat alleviates the anxiety that comes with waiting days for the test results.

I arrived tense and emotional, still reeling from the previous day's events. The technician took me in almost immediately, for which I was grateful. My mammogram was sent to the radiologist, and then another technician took me for an ultrasound. I shook as I stood, and sensing this, the ultrasound technician said, "Your mammogram was clear. We just need to do the ultrasound due to the density of your breast tissue." She did the ultrasound and confirmed that both scans were clear. I wept right there in the ultrasound room, and for the remainder of the day, I repeatedly panicked, only to remind myself that I was okay. I later wrote about this repeated panic: "Traumatic events train our bodies to respond, to be hypervigilant, and I feel that so deeply on a cellular level. I sit here typing, and I feel it all over. And that's on top of the sadness that I have" (Journal 55, June 10, 2022).

This reflection highlighted one of the most significant challenges of embodied ways of moving through the world: it is uncomfortable, and it can hurt deeply and profoundly. As Gilligan and Snider (2018) and Bowlby (1969) noted, the avoidance of pain is a common behavior, particularly by those who have suffered loss. When we embraced embodied ways of

knowing, we prioritize a way of knowing that can be uncomfortable because it is grounded in

emotion, not rationality (Forgasz & Clemans, 2014). Rational thought can provide a means of

detachment—a distance. Emotional knowledge does not. And yet, as my June entries indicated,

sitting in the extreme emotions of grief and loss gave me more of a sense of who I am and an

ability to see the beauty in all of it.

Bolz-Weber (2021) wrote about grief and how it allows us to create connections and

"grow in wisdom" through it. She elaborated:

> So in the grief we feel about "what we have done and what we have left undone" maybe
>
> there can be a gentle leaning toward living our daily life in such a way that we have even
>
> just a few less regrets for how we spent our time, or how we held a grudge or how we
>
> withheld our love. And this, to me, is one of the ways that the memory of our beloved
>
> departed can be to us, a blessing. (Bolz-Weber, 2021, para. 9)

She concluded this entry with the following:

> Give your sorrow all the space and shelter inside of you that it deserves. And also, life is
>
> beautiful. Maybe for the memory of our dead to be a blessing, we must fully allow the
>
> sorrow to metabolize into forgiveness for ourselves and others. Because life is too
>
> beautiful not to. So, may even the memory of who we were in the past be for blessing.
>
> (Bolz-Weber, 2021, para. 10)

I read this entry at my stepmother's memorial service held at my father's church in mid-

June. Its sentiment resonated deeply with how I was experiencing my grief and how it was

informing my work with students, teachers, and families. Bolz-Weber (2021), a tattooed

Lutheran minister, has been someone whose writing has been a means of reconciling my

childhood experiences with Christianity and my spirituality. She is often quite ecumenical in her

approach, and she even has a tattoo of the Aeon tarot card on her arm. Her work also reflected

that of Pérez and Saavedra (2020) and their connections between academic research and

spirituality. They offered elucidation on the potential healing power of an embodied approach to

this work: "[W]hen we engaged in doing the outer work of academic research, we cross spiritual

boundaries to coalesce inner work with the outer in order to heal the wounds inflicted by self,

culture, patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, and linguicide" (Pérez & Saavedra, 2020, p. 130).

They asserted that in centering healing in the process of research, we allow for connection and

foment change within larger contexts.

I felt this symbiosis of internal and external change as I processed my grief and integrated

it into my work at school. The inner work informed the outer work, and when the outer work

changed, it gave credence to the importance of the inner work. This symbiosis was reflective of

Purewal and Loh (2021) because it involved movement among being, doing, and reflecting. I

was absolutely devastated by my stepmother's death, and while analyzing my June entries, I

frequently sobbed, had to pause, and walk away from the work for a period of time. Yet, its

profound beauty sat there, encouraging me to return to it. This was a kind of learning that I am

not sure I would have experienced otherwise. I felt a deeper understanding of Ulmer's (2020)

concept of "rust" in research, as my past informed my present, and the present gave nuanced

understanding to my past. She wrote, "Rust is a sign of encounter, progression, expansion,

continuation, weathered change" (p. 244), and this is exactly how I would describe my journey

through the 2021–2022 school year. I was weathered and changed.

A little past midnight on June 30th, I awoke with a sea of thoughts running through my

head. It was the last day of my study. Although the school year with students and teachers had

ended the previous week, I felt compelled to take the day to reflect. I began my June 30th entry

stating, "I couldn't not write today." Perhaps it was the need for closure or for a symbolic end to the study, but the need to write felt almost ritualistic, a rite of completion. The previous weekend, I had endured what proved to be the most difficult triathlon I had ever raced, and I connected my gratitude for my body allowing me to train and race to my gratitude for my job. I wrote:

> My body allows me to exercise and use my body in ways that make me feel good about
>
> myself, clears my head, and I recognize that not everyone in this world gets to do this. I
>
> have that privilege, and I always try to remember that, particularly when I'm having
>
> major race anxiety, and super-particularly during the moments right before race start. I.
>
> GET. TO. DO. THIS.
>
> In the darkness of the early morning insomnia today, and with a week since I saw
>
> students and teachers, I thought, "I get to do this" about work. (Journal 62, June 30,
>
> 2022)

I acknowledged the humanity in my work, and how that humanity is anything but neat, tidy, or uncomplicated. This final entry had a distinct sense of reverence for this humanity:

> Families trust me with some of their darkest moments, their secrets, their messes,
>
> their unregulated anger (not too happy with that one, but there's something to be said for
>
> the vulnerability that lies underneath it) . . . Maybe that's it—if we are to do this . . . in a
>
> way that we feel most authentic, in a way that we feel is best to do this work, we must
>
> allow for those moments in which others are behaving terribly . . . we can recognize that
>
> it is all integral to the work. (Journal 62, June 30, 2022)

The final paragraph of my final entry provided a beautiful transition into the implications of this study. In it, I played with the term "body of work" as it is commonly used to refer to all of

the work an artist has created and the term "embodiment" as we use it within feminist knowing. I

pose that an artist's body of work is a work itself—that the whole is greater than the sum of its

parts, and this study holds the same calculation:

> Perhaps that is the embodiment that we have in our work, in my work, as a feminist
>
> educational leader. The relationships, the knowledges, the compassion, the messes, the
>
> moments of frustration—they are more than the sum of their parts. They also include my
>
> own loss, my own pain and grief, my anxiety, my work with my therapist, my spirituality.
>
> This is all my "body of work"—far more than the sum of its parts, and that's even
>
> accounting for those parts that I've forgotten to mention here. (Journal 62, June 30, 2022)

This healing feminist autoethnographic journey was an unfixed "unknowing" process,

one that was ongoing in its search for deeper understanding, while recognizing that the search

will invariably yield more questions than answers (Taylor & Coia, 2019, p. 12). My cognizance

of what I perhaps missed or "forgotten" demonstrated how I had embraced both the inherent

imperfection in this work and the inherent imperfection in me. It is this imperfection that

compels me to continue getting "lost in the play of discourse," as St. Pierre (2000) encouraged us

to do (p. 477).

CHAPTER 5: **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

"Well, that is the point of the Major Arcana—that we experience all these archetypes, and they are all relevant to our lives at one point or another, often many, many times in our life. So that when we reach that culmination in The World, it begins again, as life is made up of cycles. It is a spiral path we walk, not linear." (Horton, 2023)

Despite my spirituality and belief in the spiral nature of the path I walk, I tend to have a hard time when things do not go as planned. On the morning that I was scheduled to meet with Monica to discuss this chapter, I was late. I hate being late. Yet, here I was, five minutes past our Zoom meeting time, on the phone with a parent of one of my students who was unhappy with not knowing the consequences for another student who had upset his son, concluding that I was not taking the situation seriously. I assured him that I was, but I reiterated that I could not disclose what I do with other students. This is a fairly common complaint with parents and guardians, but due to the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), I cannot disclose such information (USDOE, 2021). This means that if Andre pushes Michael off a swing, Michael's parents do not get to know what interventions and consequences Andre will receive, and that not knowing can rouse some pretty strong parental reactions.

Over the past year, I began to center the feelings of these parents rather than the logistics of the situation in such conversations. I have a reverence for the trust that parents put in us to keep their children as safe as possible, but the reality is, we are dealing with children who are gloriously imperfect. Students yell or shove or say mean things sometimes, often scaring or hurting the feelings of one of their peers. We are also living in the United States, and according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), there were a total of 93 school shootings

during the 2020–2021 school year. That is nearly two per school week. What parent would not be concerned?

After reassuring the parent that I was taking the situation seriously and addressing it holistically, I hung up and logged onto my meeting with Monica. I was ten minutes late, and as her face appeared on my computer screen, I immediately groaned, sighed, and launched into an apology, explaining the reason for my delay. The parent conversation—a mere fifteen minutes of my day—had exhausted me. "This is the emotional labor," I said. "It's important work, but damn if it doesn't wipe me out." She validated me, as she always does, and we moved on to discuss how to develop this chapter. She described the chapter as a "zoom-out," an exploration of the bigger ideas that have emerged out of this study: "It's like what you were talking about five minutes ago about the parent conversation and how exhausted you are. What does that mean in all of this work?" This time, my lateness was timely. It was the spiral path.

The World is the final tarot card in the major arcana progression and a symbol for this chapter. According to Horton (2022), this card "heralds the end of a great cycle in your life and the beginning of another . . . a new era" (p. 24). It both celebrates an ending and anticipates a beginning. It is a time to "zoom out" and reflect upon what we have done and a time to consider what is next. A new era will soon begin for me, but first, I must reflect so that I may move into this "new era" consciously grounded in the knowledge that I have gathered, the paths I have walked, and the fabrics I have woven to get here.

For this healing feminist autoethnography, I journaled about my experiences as a female elementary school principal in a suburban public school district during the 2021–2022 school year. During the summer and fall of 2022, I used a feminist, care-centered lens to analyze these journal entries and contextualize them within relevant research literature. In doing so, I found

three overarching themes: the localization of patriarchal norms, small feminist disruptions, and

grace. Within these themes, I explored the following research questions:

- How can personal accounts of sexist experiences disrupt gendered norms in

  educational leadership?

- How can I, as a feminist leader, exist authentically and truthfully in patriarchal

  institutions without placing myself in professional or academic peril?

I weaved my personal, professional, and therapeutic experiences with relevant literature

to examine my journey in disrupting patriarchy in various ways within professional contexts. I

identified specific professional dynamics in which patriarchal norms were reified by those who

had structural power over me and by those who did not. I examined the particular betrayal of

women colluding with patriarchy, and I turned that critical examination upon my own

internalized patriarchy. This self-examination compelled me to enact a caring stance with

individuals who I feel have hurt me. I then explored how being more vulnerable and open with

teachers and staff helped me to grow as a leader and allowed them the space to bring themselves

to our school community in a more authentic way. This exploration of vulnerability moved into

broader considerations of grace and how it has enriched my life and my work in absolutely

gorgeous ways.

Two or Three Things I Know for Sure

> *Aunt Dot was the one who said it. She said, "Lord, girl, there's only two or three things I*
>
> *know for sure." She put her head back, grinned, and made a small impatient noise. Her*
>
> *eyes glittered as bright as sun reflecting off the scales of a cottonmouth's back. She spat*
>
> *once and shrugged. "Only two or three things. That's right," she said. "Of course, it's*
>
> *never the same things, and I'm never as sure as I'd like it to be."* (Allison, 1995, p. 5)

To my knowledge, Dorothy Allison has not published a book in over a decade. I read her books voraciously in the 1990s, finding her writing ethereal but also remarkably gritty and real. When anyone ever asks me what I know about something, I think of Aunt Dot's words, particularly the "I'm never as sure as I'd like to be" part (Allison, 1995, p. 5). The throughline in all of my education has been "the more degrees I earn, the less I know," and I have mostly been okay with that. It is a humbling stance, and it has kept me learning for three decades of adulthood.

Yet, this study disrupted that stance a bit. My learning this time feels different, more grounded. It is far deeper, and I feel it sitting within a space between my gut and my heart.

Two or three things *I* know for sure:

I know that my friendships with strong, feminist women are immeasurably precious.

I know that having colleagues who see so much of the mess that I see, value solidarity, and are able to make me laugh, think, and grow are essential to my sanity.

I also know that if it were not for all of these things, this study would have never, ever happened.

In this final chapter, I explore these two or three things I know for sure, how they are essential to my own embodied work, and how they were instrumental to this study. Then, I revisit the themes that emerged in the data. From there, I explore how my experiences and analysis could inform others in creating alternatives to traditional leadership enactments and what needs to happen for these alternatives to exist. Lastly, I consider how this work might guide me into my "new era" as a white feminist woman in educational leadership.

Feminist Killjoy Survival Kits

Sarah Ahmed (2017) began her book's conclusion by outlining what she called "A Killjoy Survival Kit" (p. 235). Ahmed (2010) considered herself a "feminist killjoy" and provided the following description of one:

> The feminist killjoy spoils the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness. In the thick sociality of everyday spaces, feminists are thus attributed as the origin of bad feeling, as the ones who ruin the atmosphere, which is how the atmosphere might be imagined (retrospectively) as shared. (pp. 581–582)

As I reflected upon what I needed to engage in this work this past year, and what I need to continue to engage in this work, I considered Ahmed's (2017) Killjoy Survival Kit. This study detailed moments during the 2021–2022 school year in which I did or said something that spoiled the comfort of those enacting dominant norms. Challenging my supervisor in our October 14th principals' meeting and subsequently in our October 19th central office meeting was arguably the most overt example (Journal 15, October 19, 2021). These moments – in the moment - felt scary, and they were emotionally and mentally exhausting. Although in later moments, I felt that my disruptions had some effect, their emotional, mental, and energetic toll were significant.

Ahmed (2017) examined the complicated concept of "self-care" and its role in feminist work by looking to Lorde (1988). Rather than viewing self-care as indulgent, Ahmed (2017) framed it as an act of self-preservation necessary to continue disruptive political work. This conceptualization of "self-care" is both individual and collective, noting the need for both. Ahmed (2017) wrote, "It is about finding a way to exist in a world that makes it difficult to exist" (p. 239) and further asserted that as we protest dominant norms, "[w]e reassemble ourselves

through the ordinary, everyday, and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other" (p. 240).

This act of continually "reassembling" ourselves through the work, and how looking after ourselves and our people was integral in doing so, resonated deeply with me. Ahmed (2017) offered eleven "items" that comprised her "Killjoy Survival Kit" for living a feminist life and being a feminist killjoy (p. 235). These eleven things were books, things, time, tools, life, permission notes, other killjoys, humor, feelings, bodies, and the killjoy survival kit itself (pp. 240–249). Although I agree wholeheartedly with Ahmed's (2017) eleven Feminist Killjoy Survival Kit items, there were some that were particularly important for me during this study, or rather ones that I employed more readily than others. These items were books, things, time, feelings, bodies, other killjoys, and humor. Although they varied in importance as I moved through the study, and although some were more prominently noted in my journal entries, they were instrumental in my ability to move through the work.

Ahmed (2017) noted that books that inspire us and things that remind us about our feminist lives are essential to infuse our living spaces and lives with feminism. The texts that I read for this dissertation not only contextualized my study but also made me feel seen, understood, and less alone. The accounts of gendered experiences by Franklin (2015) and Edwards (2017) felt validating, helping me to disrupt my internalized patriarchy. The work of Agosto and Roland (2018), Blackmore (2013), Brunner (2000), Grogan (2000), Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001), and Watson and Baxley (2021) gave me hope that others were challenging patriarchal leadership norms in education. Books cover our end tables, our floor, my desk, and my nightstand. I now need an additional bookshelf for all of the texts I have purchased over the

past year, and I find that their contents, as well as their presence as "things" around me as I write and think and live, are essential to my feminist work. Their proximity is a comfort.

Ahmed's (2017) killjoy survival kit item of "time" resonated with me as well. She framed "time" in terms of the importance of giving ourselves time to pause and not immediately react to things that upset us (p. 243). Her tool of time was best seen in my situation with Lanie regarding the intervention program launched in the winter of 2022. Instead of addressing our tension immediately, I waited, ultimately realizing that Lanie's behavior, or rather my reaction to it, was more about my internalized patriarchy than anything else (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022). The act of "pausing" emerged in my journal entries throughout the year, and also was reflected in my connections to The Hanged Man tarot card in considering the stagnation that fomented the feminist work at the core of this study (Horton, 2022; Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022; Journal 34, March 7, 2022).

Ahmed's (2017) item of "feelings" reflects the feminist valuing of emotions as important knowledge. She characterized feelings as a potential "site of rebellion" and encouraged feminists to sit in uncomfortable emotions, "stirring things up and living in the stew" (p. 246). She also noted the importance of considering our bodies in this work—how we nourish them, care for them, and allow them to move, as well as how we must listen to what they tell us, reflective of other feminist embodied orientations (Ahmed, 2017; Forgasz & Clemans, 2014). Given that this study was grounded in embodied epistemology, "feelings" and "bodies" were central to this study, as explored in the work of Jaggar (1989) and Taylor and Coia (2019). I allowed my feelings the space to be present and began to trust them in a way that I had not prior to this study.

My body served as both a source of knowledge and a source of energetic release. As I detailed in my last journal entry, I had competed in a difficult 70.3-mile triathlon in June, and the

training for that race began in January of 2022. Over the course of six months, I logged countless

hours of swimming, cycling, running, and strength training. Exercise was essential to calming

my mind and fostering a sense of mental and physical strength. I also ate well, embracing

delicious meals and enjoying food and drink with beloved friends and family. As I began to

listen to my body's knowledge, I also began to treat it better than ever before.

Other Feminist Killjoys: My Cauldron Sisters

Other killjoys were arguably the most important "items" for me throughout this study.

Ahmed (2017) stressed the importance of having other killjoys around us in solidarity, but also

noted that they can keep us aware of our own blind spots, and that it is "not about being on the

same side" but about remaining vigilant, allowing ourselves to "get things wrong" (p. 245).

Returning to Aunt Dot, *I know that my friendships with strong, feminist women are*

immeasurably precious (Allison, 1995).

During a podcast with Glennon Doyle (2023), Tracee Ellis Ross shared her theory about

souls being made in cauldrons in batches, and those souls are distributed throughout time. Ross

used the term "cauldron sisters" to refer to those people in life whom you meet and instantly

connect. "Oh, we're from the same soup . . . Somehow we come from the same ingredients"

(Doyle, 2023, p. 5). I was fortunate to have found many of my cauldron sisters early in life. I

worked with a group of women at a Girl Scout camp during the summers of 1992, 1993, and

1996, and we have remained a tight group ever since, referring to ourselves as "our Tribe." I was

seventeen when I met most of them, and they were the first people to show me the beauty of

being strong, opinionated, complicated women. Soon after I met my Tribe, I met my two college

roommates. They are brilliant, resilient, and hilarious women who have fielded countless texts,

tears, and conversations for decades. All of these cauldron sisters see me and love me for who I

am now and how I have grown through the years. Our shared history, care, and solidarity are immeasurably precious to me.

Two newer cauldron sisters are Alice and Iris. In Chapter Four, I frequently referred to my friendship with Alice and our journaling interactions throughout the 2021–2022 school year. She and I started our doctoral journey together, and over the past seven years, she has become a close and dear friend and fellow feminist killjoy. Throughout our countless exchanges, texts, and calls, during the 2021–2022 school year, Alice was unwavering in her support of me, my work, my grief, and everything in between. She constantly reminded me of my humanity, encouraging me to give myself some grace when I spiraled into a round of self-doubt and criticism. She empathized with the emotional impact my work experiences had upon me, and she held space for me to grieve my stepmother's death, encouraging me to feel all of it. As a woman who also values embodied knowledges and explores similar research realms, we are able to blur boundaries between our academic, personal, and professional lives, similar to the work of Taylor and Coia (2006).

Several of my 2021–2022 journal entries detailed conversations with Iris, another relatively new cauldron sister, whose solidarity and support were instrumental to my work and well-being throughout the year. Unlike Alice, Iris is not in education. She runs a successful company in the film industry and is highly regarded in her field. She and I met six years ago through a running group, and our friendship blossomed through triathlon and marathon training cycles, a mutual desire to process how we experience things, and countless moments of raucous laughter and love. We have gone through moments of tension, but we have always come back together to hash it out, trusting our connection and care for one another. Our knowledge of each

other's histories and how they impact our emotional responses to things has served as a beautiful

foundation for our friendship.

There is also a mind-body connection that comes from running, cycling, and swimming

many, many miles together, and I always feel stronger and more understood after talking to her. I

detailed such discussions in several of my journal entries, and rereading them reminds me how

essential these talks were to my emotional grounding during the 2021–2022 school year. Her

sharing of how she was disrupting her own leadership practice in a caring manner, her solidarity

when my husband tried to give me advice on this dissertation, and her helping me process a

frustrating friend dynamic all gave me a sense of being seen and understood (Journal 21,

December 15, 2021; Journal 30, February 15, 2022; Journal 46, May 14, 2022).

Iris also helped me to disrupt some of unhealthy expectations that I had placed upon

myself throughout the year. When I had to attend a wedding that would be stressful in Florida a

week before my proposal defense, she reminded me to "be kind and gentle with myself—not do

too many things" because I had "a lot on my plate emotionally and responsibility-wise" (Journal

39, March 31, 2022). I had not even considered the emotional toll the wedding would have upon

me, and her foreseeing that toll helped me to preserve my energy during a very difficult trip,

allowing me to re-center my own needs. In one of my final journal entries, I included a Facebook

post that I wrote following my June triathlon, which turned out to be one of the hardest races I

have ever endured. In this post, I thanked everyone who supported me, and my post reflected her

importance in my life: "To Iris, who understands how my brain works and has listened to

countless diatribes about this past year, and always reminds me that I'm stronger than I think I

am" (Journal 60, June 27, 2022). Iris always struck a balance between reminding me of my

strength and encouraging me to set healthy boundaries.

Alice also helped me disrupt unhelpful internalized dynamics. She challenged me when I doubted my own experiences of gender bias, pushing back on my need for "proof" (Journal 41, April 20–21, 2022), and she helped me to examine some ableist assumptions I made regarding a colleague (Journal 46, May 14, 2022). Her friendship reflected Ahmed's (2017) assertion that other killjoys are essential to feeling less alone, as she helped me to process all of my experiences as I shared them with her throughout the 2021-2022 school year. Yet, as Ahmed (2017) also noted, "other killjoys can and should 'become killjoys to killjoys'," as we need them to point out "how we too can be the problem" (p. 244). Alice was my own killjoy during the school year studied, and she balanced support with disruption every time that she stepped into this role.

My deep, rich friendships with all of these women, new friends and old, provided me great comfort in my moments of self-doubt, frustration, and anger throughout these past few years, and in particular, during this study. They represent the first thing I know for sure: my women are everything to me. Ahmed (2017) characterized the experience of surrounding ourselves with dear ones as "the experience of having others who recognize the dynamics because they too have been there, in that place, that difficult place" (p. 244). However, this place of solidarity also involves high levels of trust, as trust is essential to the inevitable times in which our "other killjoys" must be killjoys to us (Ahmed, 2017, p. 245). Without my women, I would never have had the courage to engage in this study. New and old, they have given me sacred, trusted spaces to doubt myself, cry, rage, think, analyze, and grow without judgment.

Other Killjoys: My Colleagues

My women friends are not the only members of my killjoy crew. Returning again to Aunt Dot, *I know that having colleagues who see so much of the mess that I see, value solidarity, and*

are able to make me laugh and think and grow are essential to my sanity. I referenced several of these colleagues throughout my journal entries, and although I know them through work, they have become dear friends. Yet, their proximity to my lived work experiences makes their support different than those of my camp friends, my college roommates, Alice, and Iris. Most of us have been working together for nearly a decade, and together, we have endured countless initiatives, frustrations, and of course, a global pandemic. Many of them are fellow principals, but they also include individuals in other district roles. All of these individuals offered what Ahmed (2017) referred to as "a handle" to grab "when we lose it . . . when things seem to fly out of hand" (p. 240).

My closest principal colleagues have been an invaluable source of solidarity, and this solidarity manifests in three ways that often weave in and out of one another. They provide validation of how I experience and perceive situations, safe relationships in which to process these experiences, and a continual reminder of my own humanity and that I am deserving of extending grace to myself. We have several text threads going at any given moment, all reflecting this solidarity. Although we do not always agree—in fact, I feel our relationships are stronger because we are able to navigate conflict compassionately—we are there for one another.

Given my tendency to doubt my perception of situations akin to Edwards's (2017) "sense of unreality—*this can't be happening*," my collegial killjoys' validation of my experiences has been critical as I moved through this work (p. 628). Atticus, a principal colleague, is one of my most important collegial killjoys in this respect. He and I frequently talk on the phone, often multiple times per day, about our frustrations and how to navigate them. He encouraged me to express how I felt positioned by the district last October, and he served as my representative in the October 19th meeting with central office administrators. Throughout my journal entries, I

wrote about his validation of my experiences and his reminders of how speaking my truth was beneficial to me. He shared with me how in the past, he had responded in similar dynamics more stridently than I have, and yet he has never been told that his tone was problematic, validating my gendered feelings of being tone policed (Journal 29, February 11–13, 2022).

Enzo, another principal colleague, provided moments of validation and recognition. He acknowledged my perception of several of my gendered experiences throughout the year. Moreover, because of his knowledge of how I felt positioned and what I was studying within that positioning, he recognized the nuances of the professional interactions that we shared (Journal 12, August 16, 2021; Journal 18, November 16, 2021). Yet, Enzo's validation extended beyond merely acknowledging my perceptions. He also confronted me when my positioning or perception was problematic. Recently, he shared how something I did hurt him, and although I felt terrible about making him feel this way, I was extremely grateful that he felt that he could come to me with his feelings. His trust in me to navigate conflict with him provided me with a deeper and stronger sense of validation because he not only validated my experiences, he also validated my ability to engage in conflict in a trusting manner.

Mike, another colleague also provided several moments of validation throughout the 2021–2022 school year. He confirmed multiple times that my perceptions of my positioning was accurate (Journal 8, August 3, 2021; Journal 19, November 2021). Following an earlier discussion in which he expressed some optimism on changing district dynamics, he called my cell phone on the way home to share some exchanges that he had that afternoon. When I answered the phone, he immediately said, "So, I had some conversations today, and it is clear that I owe you a huge apology." He then shared that he had, through a series of conversations, confirmed how I was positioned in a given situation and that it was based upon incorrect

information. He concluded our conversation "I was 1000% wrong, and I'm sorry" (Journal 35, March 8, 2022). Mike had no obligation to share these things, and yet, he did because he knew it would be meaningful to me that he did so. His validation not only acknowledged what I experienced but also that I was important enough to take the time to acknowledge that he was wrong about what I had shared earlier in the day.

Another way in which my collegial killjoys have demonstrated their solidarity with me is in their providing space to process my experiences. Enzo and I frequently processed and disrupted our professional experiences together (Journal 3, July 16, 2021; Journal 25, January 14, 2022; Journal 36, March 13, 2022; Journal 56, June 11, 2022; Journal 43, April 29, 2022). This processing and disruption often manifested in one of us calling the other to vent or to get the other's take on an experience one of us had. Our collegial processing also extended beyond work. Throughout the year, Enzo and I engaged with each other's research, which helped us develop more nuanced "conceptions of self," made particularly rich by both our similarities in education and experience, and our differences within the realms of gender and race. These differences provided our conversations added nuance and resonance because we were coming at this same issue from different identity locations. As Tillman-Healy (2003) noted, "[w]hen friendships do develop across social groups, the bonds take on political dimensions," allowing us to become "*just* friends, interpersonal and political allies who seek personal growth, meaningful relationships, and social justice" (p. 731).

Atticus also engaged in processing my experiences. Whenever I shared my anxiety about what might happen in response to me sharing my feelings of being othered in the district in my October 19th meeting at the central office, he reminded me of how it might have impacted the way in which certain central office administrators adjusted their interactions with all of us at the

building level. In a November entry, I wrote about how he shared recent positive experiences

with these administrators. He had noticed that ever since our meeting in October, they had "been

more communicative and gentler in their interactions" and that he had received unexpected

recognition for some things previously unnoticed (Journal 18, November 16, 2021). His support

continually reminded me that what I had done in October was important to my growth and

potentially equally important to our colleagues (Journal 18, November 16, 2021).

My collegial killjoys continue to allow me to process my experiences today. A few nights

ago, I called Farah, another principal, on my way home. As I put it to her, I was "in a panic

spiral" about something and needed some grounding. She provided it without any judgment, only

understanding and validation. We allow each other a space to put all of the things that we wish

we could say at work but cannot, and these exchanges provide relief from the frustrations of our

jobs.

I was able to provide a processing space for her as well. In May of 2022, some

challenging dynamics arose in one of our professional spheres, and she was deeply disturbed by

them (Journal 46, May 14, 2022). I reached out to check on her, and our text exchange carried

into another text exchange the following Saturday. Farah was anxious that she was being

positioned in a negative way within the dynamics and noted as such via text. I responded, and

noted it in my May 14th journal entry:

> I will tell you this . . .
>
> My experience, specific to this district and elsewhere in my life, when I stick my neck
>
> out and say the thing, it's really uncomfortable. REALLY uncomfortable. But I do it
>
> most of the time because the possible result means more to me and I'm compelled to do
>
> it. It's in my nature. I think that everyone has different comfort levels with discomfort.

You're in the same phase I would be—you said the thing, you did the thing, and now,

you're worried about what the other people are doing or thinking or saying. As a Grade A

anxious person, I can tell you that this is all . . . normal. Sticking your neck out is not

comfortable at all. It feels awful at times and brings on the worst emotions. Otherwise,

more people would do it. You did nothing wrong, and you need to know that. I'm not

sure what I can do logistically because I'm easy to dismiss as the difficult loud woman…

[but] I CAN be here for you while you sit in the discomfort. That's what we're here for

each other for. I hope that makes sense. At least a little bit. (Journal 48, May 23, 2022)

Farah responded, "This is so perfectly said and so comforting to hear. I refuse to sit back

and let this go but, as you said, it's very uncomfortable. I feel better already. Thank you!"

(Journal 48, May 23, 2022). This exchange is illustrative of the power of allowing ourselves to

be honest with each other in our vulnerability and the importance of processing our experiences

together. It also foreshadowed an implication of this study that I elucidate later in this chapter:

how telling our stories can allow other women educational leaders to feel less alone and perhaps

compelled them to be feminist killjoys themselves, disrupting patriarchal norms in their own

work (Ahmed, 2017).

The final way in which my collegial killjoys expressed their solidarity was through their

recentering my humanity and reminding me to give myself the grace to set boundaries, feel, and

grieve. Enzo gave me a space to process what personal dynamics and history played into my

reactions to professional dynamics, and a source of empathy and support when I needed it most.

In a text exchange in mid-May, during a particularly emotional point in my stepmother's illness,

I expressed exhaustion and the guilt I felt about not attending an evening function. I asked him

why it was so hard to take care of myself. He responded, "Because we grew up feeling guilty if

we prioritized ourselves—health and well-being—and don't know the freedom that comes with saying 'no.' It will take a lot more practice until we experience that sort of freedom" (Journal 56, June 11, 2022).

Similarly, Farah offered moments of "letting me off the hook" when I expressed guilt in putting myself ahead of my professional work. In a text exchange in June, I asked her why it was so hard to extend grace to myself and not attend every school-related function. She responded, "Because your expectations of yourself are too high…you would be the first to tell someone to take care of themselves and you need to take care of you…we should only be expected to do so much and then take care of ourselves and family" (Journal 56, June 11, 2022). She extended her grace further in noting that given my stepmother's recent passing, "that you are functioning at all is remarkable. Please be kind to yourself and allow yourself time to heal (Journal 56, June 11, 2022). Not only does our relationship reflect a "power with/to" dynamic, but we also share genuine care for each other (Brunner, 2000, p. 86).

Mike offered me similar solace and understanding during this time. He reached out to me repeatedly as my stepmother's health continued to decline, checking on me and reminding me of what was most important. A few days before her death, he texted me:

Hey, unsolicited kudos. I think you're doing great still caring and pushing

forward with all you have going on. Prioritize you. You matter and don't

minimize that because there is a lot going on.

He then shared his experience of losing loved ones:

I don't remember [anything] about what my work asked of me or whether I was missing

anything. I remember I took time to be with family and thought a lot about the good times

that made me because of them. (Text Exchange, June 1, 2022; Journal 51, June 1, 2022)

Mike never needed to text me as he did on June 1ˢᵗ, and yet, I often found texts such as this one on my phone when I needed them most. I still do, and they each serve as a reminder that I am not alone in my work. Our relationship provides me a sense of solidarity in navigating the intricacies of work and personal spheres, reflecting the integration of the personal into the professional. Taylor and Coia (2019) noted this integration is essential to embodied feminist work. The kindness that Enzo, Farah, Lisbeth, and Mike extended to me during this time is also reflective of Ahmed's (2017) "permission notes," which she characterized as allowances we can give ourselves "when it is too much" (p. 244). They all reminded me that I, too, was entitled to being "let off the hook" during trying times.

Despite so much of my work during the 2021–2022 school year being mired in frustration, anger, and in the latter months, grief, humor pervaded so many of my experiences and exchanges. In the face of so many challenges, I am immeasurably grateful for those who provided me with moments of laughter. Humor is one of the most important "items" in my killjoy survival kit. This feminist work is laborious and intense, and accordingly, Ahmed (2017) stressed the importance of laughter as a means of "lightening our loads" and providing needed relief from the frustrations of our work (p. 245). My friends and colleagues, new and old, are hilarious. My camp friends and college roommates are able to make me double-over with laughter at the mere reference to something that happened thirty years ago, and the sensation of that is glorious. Iris has a similar effect upon me. I have a picture of us taken by my husband after a sprint triathlon that is the perfect picture of our friendship. We are in our triathlon suits, hosing ourselves off under a boardwalk shower in the sunshine. Her back is to the camera, and she is leaning toward me. I am facing the camera and clearly laughing my head off. I have no recollection of what she was saying to me in that moment; I just know the joy on my face and the

belly laugh that I routinely have when I am in her presence. While I was editing this chapter, I texted her about this picture and re-sent it to her. She immediately responded, "We were up to no good." Her razor wit has propelled me out of many an anxiety spiral, providing me a physical release for so much internalized energy.

My collegial killjoys are also hilarious humans. On any given day, one of us might send a meme or GIF that aptly represents a given work dynamic, or we might text a sarcastic response to a ridiculous work email that we should and would never send. In an administrative meeting in August of 2022, we were asked what qualities we felt were most important to our jobs as principals. I responded, "an appreciation for the truly absurd," which, unbeknownst to me at the time, mirrored Ahmed's (2017) emphasis upon humor as a means of experiencing "the shared absurdity of this world" (p. 245). We all have an irreverent sense of humor that allows us to laugh at the daily ridiculousness that comes with our jobs as principals. Our read-aloud of the *I Need a New Butt* book during a principals' meeting is one example of these moments of laughter (Journal 36, March 13, 2022). We laugh about any and all experiences that occur during a given school day, often exclaiming, "You absolutely cannot make this stuff up!" We collectively champion "willful and rebellious noise" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 204). With all of the things that happen at work, we could either choose to become frustrated, or we could choose to laugh at it all and move on from it. With my colleagues' help, I am mostly able to do the latter. Although their understanding and collective experiences were instrumental in me feeling less alone during the 2021–2022 school year, their humor is what allowed me to move forward.

Rosie is another collegial killjoy who is an endless source of laughter. She comes to my office several times each day, raiding my candy stash and invariably making a comment that will send us in to belly laughs. Although I greatly value our ability and willingness to prevent issues

within our building before they emerge, our shared sense of humor is what I cherish most. We are irreverent and silly together, and she routinely ribs me about my neuroses, making me laugh at what makes me most anxious. My relationship with her, and most importantly, how we can laugh together so hard that we cry, is essential to my feminist work (Journal 42, April 27, 2022).

Returning again to Aunt Dot, *I also know that if it were not for all of these things, this study would have never, ever happened.* If it were not for my friendships with strong, feminist women, I would not have had as many supportive and safe spaces to process my experiences, reactions, and emotions. I would not have felt seen in moments of internalized gaslighting, and I would not have had the encouragement to give myself grace when I needed it. If it were not for my colleagues, I would not have felt the solidarity necessary to keep moving forward and engaging in the work, and I certainly would not have laughed enough. I needed all of them to be present, engaged, and available—physically, mentally, and emotionally—not just for this study, but for my survival, and they were time and time again. They are my "other killjoys" and they are irreplaceable (Ahmed, 2017, p. 244). Yet, as my aforementioned text to Farah revealed to me, I not only needed them to be present for me in this study; I needed to be present *for them* as well. I must be one of their "other killjoys," bearing witness to their own work.

Thematic Revisitation: Further Internal and External Connections

This study revealed the gendered dynamics that I encountered during the 2021–2022 school year, how I learned to disrupt and navigate them, and what I learned in doing so. I arrived at Gilbert's (2016) place of "NOT THIS," in October of 2021, which compelled me to meet with central office administrators. This meeting ultimately changed the way in which I viewed my position as an elementary principal, moved through my work, and discovered locations of personal and professional agency. This agency and awareness allowed me to negotiate ways of

balancing a sense of professional safety with ways of engaging with my colleagues, supervisors,

and staff that felt more authentically "me" (Jaggar, 1989; Journal 13, August 17, 2021; Journal

44, May 6, 2022)

The October 19th meeting also revealed greater complexities with which I needed to

grapple in this work, both externally and internally. The patriarchal collusion of other women

was clear to me, and I could have stopped my analysis there—looked at *their* collusion and left it

at that. Yet, Gilbert's (2016) "NOT THIS" connoted the necessity for both an external shift and

an internal shift, and this study would have felt incomplete without me examining how I have

internalized patriarchy and how, more pointedly, I have enacted it toward other women (Journal

15, October 19, 2021).

There is so much discomfort in seeing yourself in those who infuriate you. I have no

doubt that I have made decisions that have come from a place of collusion, or at the very least,

acquiescence, to patriarchal norms. The situation with Linda, a nontenured teacher who was

struggling, elucidated that for me. What was most difficult about this situation was not the

logistics of providing her mentoring and support. Rather, it was my realization of how

problematic some of my assumptions about teaching might be. I had to confront my fixed,

limited, and limiting belief that a teachers' success is somehow reliant upon an "it" factor that

one either has or does not have (Brill, 2018). Lisbeth, a gifted and intuitive teacher and trusted

colleague, helped me to disrupt that assumption by sharing that she "would have never survived"

her first year of teaching had it not been for "caring admins who believed in her" (Journal 37,

March 20, 2022). It is difficult to picture Lisbeth as anything less than the stellar educator whom

she is now, and yet, she, too needed coaching and support to grow. Whereas I viewed the central

office administrators' collusion with patriarchy as extremely problematic, the truth was, I had

invariably enacted the same collusion in the past with teachers. I had been too quick to dismiss the struggles of some teachers as an indication that they "just did not have what it takes" for teaching. The discomfort that this realization evoked also served as a compelling force in creating deliberate feminist disruptions in my everyday interactions at work (Blackmore, 2013).

Gilbert (2016) is also useful in framing my desire not to "be like them" (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022). As I began to consider how I enacted my internalized patriarchy and how other women's enacted internalized patriarchy affected me, I heard Gilbert (2016) in my head: "NOT THIS." Accordingly, I began sharing more and more of myself in a vulnerable way with my staff, which created a safe space for all of us to share more of ourselves and center our own care more, challenging the tired narrative of educators as "sacrificial saints" (Journal 12, August 16, 2021). Seeing the positive effect of these small feminist disruptions led to other feminist disruptions in finding more ways to engage staff with a "power with/to" approach, such as my work with Linda and Lisbeth (Brunner, 2000, p. 86; Journal 28, January 31, 2022; Journal 37, March 20, 2022).

My feminist, unfixed, caring stance (Noddings, 1984; St. Pierre, 2000) also forced me to turn these feminist disruptions back upon myself again. In order to enact a true ethic of care in my work, I felt compelled to enact it with those who had hurt me. I had to acknowledge the insidiousness of others' internalizations, particularly those of women, as I related to those the most. As Einhorn (2021) noted and I previously cited, "women often feel freer to express their own aggression and even violence, painful as it is, but safer when directed to sisters, children and friends. Thus, women also fear each other" (p. 490). I had to hold both my fear of what they might do with their power over me with an understanding of how difficult it is for all of us to live within the confines of a patriarchal system. Honoring a true feminist ethic of care, I had to offer

grace to those who had done things harmful to me (Journal 50, May 27, 2022). This work was indeed laborious and "sweaty" as Ahmed (2017) described it (p. 13).

I turned these disruptions upon themselves again in offering grace toward myself, as I grappled with my stepmother's death. This iterative process of the work turning back upon itself again and again harkened Ahmed's (2017) feminist killjoy survival kit items "life" (p. 243), "feelings" (p. 246), and "permission notes" (p. 244). It required me to engage fully in a manner that was cognizant of its complexity and messiness, allowing life to happen, feelings to emerge, and considering moments in which I needed to retreat and pause. As Ahmed (2017) sagely expressed, "We need to be thrown by how others are thrown. We need to be unsettled by what is unsettling. We need to let life in, in all of its contingencies" (p. 243). We also need to let out our feelings into this mix, as "a survival kit is all about stirring things up and living in the stew" (p. 246), which also includes permission to take a moment, a pause, and "[b]e willful in your not willingness" (p. 244). I continue to struggle in giving myself "permission notes," but my other collegial killjoys often come to my aid in this respect, encouraging me to take a day off when I need it, rest, and release as much of the stress of our jobs that I can.

Repair: Implications

Our natural response to loss is protest. Providing resonance for this protesting voice, hearing the voice of angry hope as the voice of healthy resistance—a human voice, neither unfeminine in its anger nor unmanly in its expression of vulnerability and care— is a key to repairing the ruptures in relationship on which patriarchy and all forms of injustice rely. (Gilligan & Snider, 2018, p. 119)

Gilligan and Snider (2018) connected Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory to human response to patriarchy. They posed that patriarchal constructions of what an ideal man and an

ideal woman should be "correspond" to what Bowlby (1969) identified as "pathological response

to loss," specifically "emotional detachment" in men and "compulsive caregiving" in women

(Gilligan & Snider, 2018, p. 13). The process of this loss response moves from protest to despair

to detachment. When a person feels an attachment break, the person protests in hopes of

reattaching. When this protest proves futile, they move into despair, and if the attachment wound

is not healed, they emotionally detach, and this detachment tends to be enacted in gendered ways

(Gilligan & Snider, 2018, p. 14).

Although Gilligan and Snider's (2018) analysis of attachment theory and patriarchy

illuminated the insidiousness emotional impact of patriarchy, they centered the second half of

their text by offering hope in the form of what Bowlby (1969) called "repair" (Gilligan & Snider,

2018, p. 120). Repair is the process of healing ruptures in relationships so that people can re-

form attachment bonds. As Gilligan and Snider (2018) posed, repairing bonds is the path out of

patriarchy, too (p. 136). They broadened the call for repair, posing that the "solutions" to

patriarchy are creating a collective resistance and explicitly naming and challenging "the cultural

and political forces" that subvert our "capacity to repair" so that we can forge a "healthy

resistance" (pp. 120–121). I pose that my feminist disruptions, both internal and external, were

contributions to such a resistance.

My enactment of a feminist ethic of care with my supervisor was an example of a move

toward attachment repair and out of patriarchy. Despite my reservations in emotionally

connecting with her during her time of need, doing so felt good and right. Initially, I wondered if

I were just placing myself in a position to be disappointed again, but that concern did not

supersede my internal knowing that what I was doing moved me toward a place of repair. It also

did not supersede the hope that my ethic of care stance might yield a disruption of its own within

her (Journal 44, May 6, 2022). Gilligan and Snider (2018) described exactly what I felt in this instance:

> [t]he pleasures of engaging responsively with others–we open ourselves once again to hope for relationship and to despair should that hope be dashed. This can set in motion a defensive psychology that leads back to despair and detachment, but it also can take us on a path leading out of patriarchy. (p. 139)

My interaction with Lanie was also an example of "repairing ruptures" (Gilligan & Snider, 2018, p. 119). Lanie and I shared "relational desires and capacities," that allow the "potential for love and democracy" (p. 120). Additionally, Lanie and I enacted "radical listening," which Gilligan and Snider (2018) defined as "a form of listening that goes to the root of what is being said and holds a potential for transformation," the goal of which is "to understand, not to condone or excuse" and is "driven by curiosity" (p. 131). Lanie and I listened to each other empathetically. Our conversation about the intervention program was centered upon our desire to understand each other, and we both sought to "get to the root" of what we were really saying in our actions and words: we were both upset (Journal 27, January 24–25, 2022).

Because I paused and reflected prior to engaging with Lanie about the intervention program, I was able to resist defaulting to behaviors that reify the hierarchies of our field. I also encouraged her to join me in this resistance. Yet, our resistance was not just a disruption of the system externally; it was also a moment of internal disruption for me, and perhaps one for her as well. As Gilligan and Snider (2018) noted, patriarchy persists because it manifests both externally and internally. They wrote, it "is tied not only to a struggle for power and a contest between different frameworks for living or systems of belief, but also to the tension between our

desire for love and our desire to avoid the pain of loss" (p. 135). Lanie and I engaged in a

difficult conversation about our emotional responses to a situation. We resisted the temptation to

avoid conflict, instead deciding to ground ourselves in our relationship's strength and mutual

trust. In having the conversation that we had, we grew closer. We repaired (Journal 27, January

24–25, 2022).

        Humanity and Community. An implied, yet significant, factor of repairing ruptures is

the inherent humanity in it. As Gilligan and Snider (2018) noted, the voice of hope is "a

human" one (p. 119). This entire study is grounded in the reverence I have for humanity. I

would not have been able to do this work internally and externally without an unwavering

belief that we are all connected, and that because of this connectivity, our growth is largely

interdependent. hooks (2015) intimated this interdependence, noting that we are all required

to change, "not just those we label our enemies or oppressors" (p. 166). Yet, this connection

has deeper meaning for me, which compelled me to return to the spiritual aspects of my

research.

        Pérez and Saavedra (2020) honored the spirituality of Womanist and Chicana feminisms,

noting that these feminisms focus upon "the relationship between self and world," citing the

ancient Mayan law of "In Lak'ech (I am you and you are me)" (p. 127), explicitly linking inner

healing work to the work of building community. Citing Anzaldúa (1987), Pérez and Saavedra

(2020) asserted that much of our generation of knowledge is contingent upon "the healing that

takes place as we work on ourselves and our communities" (p. 127). The healing of the self and

of community cannot be extricated from one another.

        I characterized this study's process as iterative; one internal shift—my initial "NOT

THIS" moment—generated an external shift, compelling me to speak my truth to central office

administrators. This external shift caused me to reflect upon my own internalized patriarchy.

This cycle began again as I continued to move through the work—acting disruptively in my

professional role, reflecting upon the relevant assumptions I carried internally, and then applying

what I learned from that process of reflection to adjust my external work. Pérez and Saavedra

(2020) also characterize "spiritual activism" as "a cyclical, iterative practice" (p. 130). As I

learned and developed more nuanced perspectives on my gendered experiences, I found different

ways of seeing my work and locating where I could possibly disrupt patriarchal norms further,

cycling through the external, the internal, and back again.

The World: The Spiral Path, New Fabric to Weave

The World/Universe is the final tarot card in the major arcana. According to Horton

(2022):

> This card represents the integrating and making into a whole all that which is thought to
>
> be opposites: conscious and unconscious, male and female, inner and outer life, material
>
> and spiritual, shadow and light, all embodied by the Beautiful Dancer—the Dance of
>
> Life. (p. 24)

This card indicates an end and a beginning, symbolic of the current phase of this study. I

have collected and analyzed the data. I have shared my findings, and I have woven them with the

literature in hopes of sharing a more textured and nuanced understanding of my experiences as a

woman in the field of educational leadership. I am approaching the conclusion of this

dissertation process—this doctoral journey—and as the World/Universe card indicates, I am

approaching a "new era" (Horton, 2022, p. 24). Yet, this new era must be informed by the old

one, and accordingly, I again engage in its "cyclical and iterative process" in considering how

this study might inform the broader context of educational leadership and promote more grace

and care-centered orientations and practices in the field. There are always new paths to walk, new fabric to be woven (Pérez & Saavedra, 2020, p. 130).

Little Earthquakes

Oh these little earthquakes

Here we go again

These little earthquakes

Doesn't take much to rip us into pieces

Give me life

Give me pain

Give me myself again (Amos, 1992)

Tori Amos's debut album, *Little Earthquakes*, was released in the United States in February of 1992, but I did not discover it until I reached college that fall. Music has always been a chronological marker for me, and although Amos's second and third albums were also released during my college years, there was a rawness to *Little Earthquakes* that resonated so deeply with me (Mossman, 2022). I cannot help but think of it as a symbol of my first steps on the long and windy academic path that started at age 17 as a first year at the University of Virginia and will conclude its next phase at age 48 as a doctoral candidate at Montclair State University.

The refrain of "Little Earthquakes," was an earworm throughout the writing of this dissertation. It captures both the action of small feminist disruptions ("Oh, these little earthquakes"), the iterative process inherent to them ("Here we go again"), the emotional impact they have ("Doesn't take much to rip us into pieces"), and how through this difficult process, it gave me a far deeper, more complicated sense of my work and myself:

Give me life

Give me pain

Give me myself again (Tori Amos, 1992)

The final step in this dissertation process is, once again, to turn the inward outward. I first explore the importance of women sharing their stories as a foundation for solidarity and unity. I then attempt to elucidate how my experiences may inform other educational leaders in creating their own feminist disruptions, their own little earthquakes. I also connect this consideration to the broader plane of educational leadership. Lastly, it serves as a means for me to plot the path of my "new era" and apply what I learned through this feminist healing autoethnography to disrupt other facets of marginalization to which I am not subjected yet are insidiously ingrained in our education systems (Horton, 2022, p. 24).

Voicing The High Priestess and Empress

I return to The High Priestess and Empress tarot cards as symbols of intuitive feminine knowledges and feminine wisdom, power, and love. Whereas the High Priestess represents our inner knowing, the Empress represents how we manifest our creative, divine feminine power in the world. These two archetypes embody the complexities of women and honor their beauty and strength, and a critical implication of this study lies in the importance of sharing these complexities openly and explicitly with each other (Horton, 2022, p. 5).

While writing Chapter Four of this dissertation, I was asked by an education professor to be part of a group of administrators who would conduct mock interviews with her students as part of their final class for the Fall 2022 semester. I agreed to participate, and I arrived at a third-grade classroom on a dark December afternoon to a room full of young women sitting at student desks, resumes at the ready. To the side, the principal of the hosting school, her

colleague who was the curriculum director for their district, and a principal from a

neighboring district, all sat together. I sat down and introduced myself, and we all chatted

before the session began. In our conversation, I mentioned that I was writing my dissertation,

and the women immediately asked me what my topic was. I shared with them that it was a

feminist autoethnography of my gendered experiences as a woman principal, and they

immediately and collectively responded with a groan, a sigh, and various iterations of

"Ooof…I will need to read that. Will you send it to me when you're done?"

This response is typical with women in leadership positions, regardless of the field. I

have shared my dissertation topic in conversations with a nurse practitioner supervisor, two

attorneys, a chief information officer of a global bank, an executive in the arts, and a Pulitzer

Prize-winning newspaper columnist, and each one has responded similarly. Their bodies

contracted and moved, as if they were trying to ease a nagging cramp. The pattern is almost

always the same: groan, sigh, "I need to read that." We know these stories all too well. When

I read Franklin's (2015) account of "Professor P's" sexist evisceration of her paper on

Durkheim, I writhed, experiencing it in every cell of my body. We *feel* these stories all too

well (Journal 10, August 7, 2021).

Klein and Taylor (2023) explicitly honored embodied knowledge in "hold[ing]

courageous, intentional spaces for those feelings that come up in our bodies, whether old or

new" (p. 21). Although these embodied reactions are rarely pleasant, they reveal deeper truths

that are critical to our solidarity. We must therefore sit within two truths simultaneously: these

stories are uncomfortable, and we need many more of them. Klein and Taylor (2023)

expressed this sentiment well: "Our hope is that experiencing the stories in this book through

a variety of ways of knowing will offer others multiple entry points into their own narratives

by evoking emotions, embodied memories, and their own stories" (p. 21). I hope that this dissertation contributes to the growing body of these stories and encourages others to share their own.

Embodying the High Priestess and Empress

Marshall and Edwards (2020) noted how the education field uses "simplistic accounting methods" such as the number of women in principalships to gauge progress toward gender parity, which, "misses the hostile social and political contexts within which feminist thought, and females' voices, potentials, and empowered selves, are muted" (p. 1). They pushed this dynamic further in noting that the education field "prettifies the subtle sexism that plays out in micropolitical moves" (pp. 1–2). My journal entries narrated such "micropolitical moves" as I endured them during the 2021–2022 school year. I experienced women supervisors colluding with patriarchal norms to strengthen their proximity to power, as detailed in my October 19th meeting with central office (Journal 15, October 19, 2021). I experienced aggression from a male substitute teacher who felt entitled to critique my school when I provided feedback regarding his demeaning treatment of a student (Journal 28, March 31, 2022). Sexism came from above me and below me, hierarchically speaking.

Yet, I found "micro-disruptions" to be an effective way of addressing these sexist "micropolitical moves" that balanced my need for professional safety with my desire for change (Marshall & Edwards, 2020, p. 2). The work of Hallett (2010) is useful in illustrating the potential of micro-disruptions as a means for macro-level change. Hallett (2010) examined how classroom practices in an urban elementary school changed the school's concept of "accountability" through the process of recoupling (p. 59). He defined recoupling as the "processes through which institutional myths and organizational practices that were once

loosely connected become tightly linked" (p. 52). Hallett (2010) posited that where changes

occur on a micro level (in his study, the classroom), they have the potential to influence

changes on a macro level (the school's overall performance on standardized assessments),

creating the potential for norm disruption.

My exchanges with Atticus following our October 19th meeting were illustrative of a

potentially micro-macro link. Atticus's shared observations regarding improvements in

communication from central office was illustrative of this potential effect. Additionally, he noted

that central office administrators had created a means for parents and community members to

publicly express their appreciation for district employees in an effort to boost morale. Although I

expressed my uncertainty to Atticus "if what I did had that effect," he asserted his belief that this

shift in central office administrator behaviors had occurred because of what I did (Journal 18,

November 16, 2021).

Locating one's professional agency is essential to disrupting oppressive professional

norms. Telling central office administrators how I felt positioned, as I have noted numerous

times in this study, was daunting, unnerving, and one of the bravest things that I have ever done

professionally. Yet, I am cognizant that on a practical level, I had agency within that dynamic. I

am a tenured principal, and although the district has positioned me in ways that feel perilous,

from a logistical standpoint, tenure offers protection from termination without due process and

substantiated cause. Had I been nontenured, I would have never spoken out as I did, instead

acquiescing to the criticism and self-policing my interactions to ensure that I could never be

perceived as having a problematic tone again (Journal 15, October 19, 2021).

I also found this agency in my work with teachers, students, and parents. When I was

asked at the end of our October 19th meeting if I wanted "to go home for the day," I found the

question to be odd because my school building is the place where I feel most safe, most valued,

and most understood (Journal 15, October 19, 2021). My school building was also the location

for the majority of my small feminist disruptions. I told staff prior to the start of the school year

that I wanted them to prioritize their humanity, even if it meant that I would need to manage

difficult coverage dynamics as a result. I shared more of my vulnerability with staff, students,

and parents, and I allowed them the space to share more with me as well. I deliberately engaged

in a "power with/to" stance with teachers to foster a more supportive environment for all. All of

these school-based disruptions demonstrated the change agency I had within my school

community and showed how the school can be a relatively safe starting point for disrupting

patriarchal education norms and promoting more feminist, care-centered leadership models

(Brunner, 2000, p. 86; Journal 12, August 16. 2021; Journal 30, February 15, 2022; Journal 43,

April 29, 2022).

Kropiewnicki and Shapiro's (2001) work supported the school as a location for agency in

creating communities of care. They studied three female principals to consider what care-

centered leadership stance looked like, and the traits that they identified within this stance were

similar to those I noticed throughout my 2021–2022 journal entries. They all gave ample time to

their teachers, students, and students' families. They valued listening and working

collaboratively to foster relationships and support students holistically. Yet, the most important

facet of Kropiewnicki and Shapiro's (2001) findings is how the valuing of care that they

demonstrated seemingly permeated their school communities. It was as if by enacting an ethic of

care in narrower school contexts, they created a broader sense of care throughout their schools.

As Noddings (1984) emphasized, care is relational and contingent upon "responsiveness" among

individuals (p. 2). When we enact care toward others, we encourage others to enact such care as

well, spreading in a collective manner (Noddings, 1984; Gilligan, 1982).

Expanding Disruptions

The area of implications with which I grappled most was that of how this study might

inform broader feminist, care-centered systemic changes in schools. One would think that in a

field predominantly populated by women, an ardent feminist educator like me would have faith

that such changes can be made in our field. Yet, I am with Aunt Dot on this one: *I am not as sure*

as I would like to be. Returning to Blount (2000), schools and school systems have long been

places where gender roles were reified, and current statistics indicate that little has changed. As

previously noted, in 2022, the proportion of male administrators to male teachers was three times

that of women administrators to female teachers in New Jersey (New Jersey Department of

Education, 2023). Educational leadership remains a male-dominant space.

Community Engagement. Grogan (2000) noted the important facet of context in this

regard: the engagement of community in creating more equitable educational structures. She

built upon her earlier work to assert that "lead[ing] reciprocally engaging relationship

development with stakeholders and sectors" has the potential to foster stronger community

connections and build coalitions to support equitable educational communities (p. 39). I believe

that there is merit to this approach, but it is not an easy task. The consideration of the broader

community reveals another complexity in the field of education today: the increasing presence of

a strongly conservative, well-funded agenda putting pressure upon school districts. As Neuman

(2022) detailed in his account of heightened political pressures to limit what schools teach in the

realms of race, gender, sexuality, and gender identity, community engagement can be

complicated, if not adversarial, in this regard. Educators are losing their jobs for discussing these

topics, or for even allowing students to discuss them in classes. Books are being banned from

school libraries, and teachers are not even allowed to "say gay" in Florida schools (Neuman,

2022, para. 14). School board meetings are contentious, and there are conservative organizations

funding school board elections to install board members who support their agendas, even in

"liberal strongholds" (Binkley & Smyth, 2022, para. 7). These organizations have millions of

dollars at their disposal, resulting in significant wins for their candidates across the country.

Although there is some community resistance to such measures, it seems that this rhetoric

is prevailing, and it may be contributing to a dearth in certificated educators across the country.

Nguyen et al. (2022) estimated that there are over 36,000 vacant teaching positions in the United

States, with an additional 163,000 positions staffed by "underqualified teachers," which they

defined as those educators who are not certified in the subject area they teach (p. 22). Neuman

(2022) also noted "more than a third of teachers and 60% of principals reported being harassed

during the 2021–2022 school year" (para. 11). Fortunately, I have been able to staff my school,

but the statistics on harassment do not surprise me at all. With educators leaving the field and

communities seemingly becoming more instructionally restrictive, promoting a more feminist

approach to systemic school leadership is a daunting prospect.

Despite my admitted exhaustion within our field, I cannot acquiesce to the current

climate. I care so much about education, and as my grandfather Nicholas said to my father forty

years ago, "She's a fighter." Despite this inevitably uphill struggle to create more care-centered,

equitable approaches to school systems, Nash and Grogan (2022) offered the superintendency as

a location for more feminist-oriented systemic changes. She analyzed the role of the

superintendency from a feminist perspective, and she advocated for similar approaches to change

as those that emerged in this study. She identified five ways that superintendents could move

toward a more care-centered leadership orientation that would support more equitable schooling

dynamics at all levels of the K–12 spectrum:

- be comfortable with contradiction

- work through others

- appreciate dissent

- develop a critical awareness of how children are being served, and

- adopt an ethic of care (Grogan, 2000, p. 132)

Grogan's (2000) work is two decades old, but it reflected much of what I discovered in

this study. My feminist unfixed stance allowed me to sit in discomfort and in the contradictions

of being negatively impacted by women's collusion with patriarchy and having colluded myself

(Einhorn, 2021; Taylor & Coia, 2019). I engaged colleagues to create better learning dynamics

for teachers and students alike, accepted moments of disruption in my own practice and thought,

and considered how to balance the support of teachers while maintaining students at the core of

these considerations. Throughout all of this work, I centered care for all individuals, even those

with whom this caring was difficult (Grogan, 2000).

As previously noted, all of these efforts, and their documentation in this study, have the

potential to aide in further disruptions. By sharing my account of gendered experiences in

educational leadership, I provide a means for other women with similar experiences to feel less

alone, reflecting the hope of Klein and Taylor (2023) that reading our stories might provide

"entry points" to their own (p. 12). My account might also compel other women leaders to seek

locations for disruption in their own professional lives and explicitly state the complexities in

doing so, as my text to Farah did regarding the discomfort in "stick[ing] my neck out and saying

the thing" (Journal 48, May 23, 2022).

Essentially, we need more women doing this work in educational leadership, openly and explicitly, and we need to highlight what happens when we do. We need to build upon the relationships that we have developed using a care-centered orientation and ask these individuals for their help in building community support for these orientations. I detailed several parental interactions in my spring 2022 journal entries in which I had nuanced conversations with parents that allowed us to connect in deeper ways than I had in the past. Perhaps a further disruption with parents such as these might be to ask them to become more engaged in school politics, speak up, and provide accounts of how care-centered conversations have helped their children and their families. Their voices can serve as counternarratives to the rhetoric that is creating such challenging dynamics in education today (Journal 50, May 27, 2022; Journal 60, June 27, 2022; Neuman, 2022).

In a recent exchange with Monica about this chapter, we discussed my struggle in assessing where I go from here with this work. At the point of this exchange, I was in a particularly dark place, and I expressed a sense of futility and I felt frustrated. I thought, "Isn't this work enough? Can't I put this study out there as a contribution to the growing body of narratives as an 'entry point'?" (Klein & Taylor, 2023, p. 12). I wanted an Ahmed (2017) permission note, but she was not giving it to me on this one. "You need to find the cracks," she said. "That's where the potential for activism is."

On an early morning walk, I considered her words. Although it is implied throughout this entire study, it is worth explicitly noting that whereas she is my doctoral adviser in the official sense, she is also an exceedingly influential feminist killjoy in my life. The exchange referenced above, as well as the aforementioned meeting with her to which I was late, are evidence of how significant she has become in my life. She is both gentle and bold with me, and I know with

certainty that when she challenges me, she does it from a place of care. It is therefore no surprise

that the final chapter of her book with Emily Klein helped me to navigate out of my feelings of

futility and toward a renewed sense of agency (Klein & Taylor, 2023).

Klein and Taylor (2023) explored how their activism emerged and continues to manifest

in their lives. Whereas Taylor found various ways of engaging her feminist activism in more

overt and public ways, Klein grappled with doing so, instead feeling that her work as an

educator, writer, and researcher in creating change was "not nearly enough" (p. 247). Klein and

Taylor (2023) explored how these "quieter" actions are contributive, but Klein also noted that

she felt that she needed to continue to seek opportunities for more overt activism. I deeply relate

to this sentiment, and reading it compelled me to reconsider where these "cracks" might be for

me. I re-read my draft of this chapter, and I stopped at my description of women's responses

when I shared the topic of this study with them: trying to ease a nagging cramp.

Perhaps I need to look for "cramps" rather than "cracks" to find my feminist leadership

activism, which is somewhat fitting. Menstrual cramps are a part of so many women's lives,

ranging from a monthly annoyance to a debilitating condition. They can be difficult to describe

and difficult to manage. Although I could argue that cramps are yet another facet of women's

labor that is unshared by men, they also are evidence of how strong we are. So are our stories,

and if we can use them as catalysts for creating community, they have tremendous activist

potential. Not only do I need to share this study with those women whom I previously

referenced, I also need to use our shared cramp to attempt to foster a community among them.

Accordingly, I will not only share this study with those women, but I can also invite them to

engage in discussions about our practice as educational leaders and how we might build

solidarity and engage in collective disruption on a broader plane.

Spiraling Disruptions. Turning inward yet again, I must use what I have learned about my own internalized patriarchy to disrupt my internalizations of other facets of marginalization. Ahmed's (2017) concept of "passing" and "doors" resonated for me in this realm:

> Depending upon who encounters whom; passing comes up when you do not pass through. When we are talking about passing, we are talking about doors. For some to pass through the door, to enter a room, requires being given permission by those who are holding that door. A door is not just a physical thing that swings on hinges, but a mechanism that enables an opening and a closing. (p. 120)

Whereas being a woman has prevented me from passing through certain doors, my whiteness has allowed me to pass through many. What I have learned in this study about disrupting gendered norms, I must now use as a tool to disrupt norms from which I benefit as a white, able-bodied cisgendered woman. I had moments of acting as an ally during the 2021–2022 school year. I advocated for LGBTQIA+ books to remain in our school libraries, and I supported of the district's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work on local and a systemic level. Yet, the most instructive understandings from this study lie in how I apply what I learned about disrupting gendered dynamics to disrupt other facets of marginalization in a more conscious and concerted manner. My whiteness is certainly such a location.

Traister (2018) provided insight into how the anger of white women can often allow us to forget how sexism and racism intersect and work together in insidious ways. She cited a sign from the Women's March of 2017 that reflected this blindness. It read "I'll see you nice white ladies at the next #BlackLivesMatter march, right?" (p. 129). Whiteness is something we white women need to own, address, and use to advocate for others. Traister (2018) cited Ashley Judd's reference to intersectionality at the 2018 Oscars, increased numbers of white women protesting

xenophobic immigration policies, and white women writing an open letter to Speaker Nancy

Pelosi for her criticism of Maxine Waters speaking out against Donald Trump under the guise of

"civility" as evidence that some white women are using their agency to shed light on the

marginalization of others. However, more of us need to do this work, including me (Traister,

2018, pp. 129–130).

I continue to consider my whiteness and what it affords me, engaging with intersectional

social media content, reading books, and watching movies that disrupt my internalized racism.

Recently, I watched *Deconstructing Karen*, a documentary on Regina Jackson and Saira Rao

through their Race2Dinner work (Specht, 2022). Jackson and Rao facilitate dinner parties with

white women to provide a forum for them to discuss their racism and the harm it inflicts. The

documentary was uncomfortable to watch, but I felt it was absolutely necessary to my own

feminist work. I then began Jackson and Rao's (2022) book examining the same topic, which has

broadened my awareness of my complicity with racism and how I can take a more proactively

antiracist stance. Blackmore (2013) connected this antiracist work to the work of individuals in

educational leadership, noting that educational leaders needed to "experience a pedagogy of

discomfort" in reflecting upon their own positionality and how they may intentionally or

unintentionally "other" school community members in their positions as educational leaders (p.

147).

Purewal and Loh's (2021) critique of the coloniality of feminist studies can also be

helpful in this respect. They expanded on Lorde's (1984) assertion that "the masters tools will

never dismantle the master's house" (p. 105) to pose that "feminist tools developed within the

coloniality of power will never be able to bring about epistemic change" (p. 1). Ahmed (2017)

also offered insight to this facet of my work, highlighting the importance of an intersectional

feminist stance. She (2017) summarized this importance: "Intersectionality is a starting point, the

point from which we must proceed if we are to offer an account of how power works" (p. 5). It is

not enough that I used "feminist tools" to disrupt sexist dynamics; I must also decolonize my

feminist work to ensure that I am also working on disrupting white supremacy, ableism,

classism, and transphobia, among others (Purewal & Loh, 2021, p. 1).

Blackmore (2013) also expounded upon the importance of intersectional systemic

considerations in educational leadership, noting that the focus of feminist analyses within the

context of this field "should be on how privilege is gained and retained by dominant perspectives

and groups" (p. 149). These sentiments are instructive as to how I can expand the work I have

done in disrupting educational hierarchies to address other systemic acts of othering. I can be

more intentional in conversations about race, culture, and ableism within conversations with

teachers. I can reflect upon how I can create more holistic support structures for our growing

community of linguistically diverse families and advocate for them at the district level as well. I

can attempt a similar dance between internal and external disruptions in hopes of finding even

more "alternate ways of being leaders and understanding leadership from different cultural

perspectives" (Blackmore, 2013, p. 149).

Conclusions and The Fool: What is "Done"?

As I conclude this dissertation study, I am forced to reckon with the ending of a long,

arduous, enlightening, and deeply meaningful process. Although I will certainly enjoy having

more weekend time for leisure activities, and I am excited at the prospect of getting lost in novels

again without the voice of "you have other reading to do, Necole," I will miss the feeling of

academic immersion that this study has brought me. I have learned so much about myself, my

work, and my school community. I have read texts that make me feel less alone, and I have,

merely in sharing the topic of this study, found solidarity with other women in leadership. I have sat in the discomfort of speaking truth to power, just as I have sat in the complexity of my positionality as a white woman. And now, I sit in the space of The Fool tarot card—the "mystical, transcendent" space following death and before birth (Arrien, 1997, p. 24).

Yet, I am not alone: I am surrounded by my feminist killjoy friends and colleagues, snuggled with my husband, dogs, and cats. I have my books, and I have a season pass to Bethel Woods, where I will envelope myself in the divinity of live music, dancing, and singing as the sun goes down over my beloved Sullivan County. I have love and memories of my stepmother and gratitude that my father is still with us, endearing himself to every human he meets. I have my complicated but reconciling relationship with my mother. I have my running, my cycling, and my swimming. I have so much, and I have learned so much. This I know for sure (Ahmed, 2017; Allison, 1995).

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